A Service for the Blessing of the Animals

This Animal Blessing is a blueprint for an outdoor setting, such as a courtyard, pavilion, porch, garden, or other space, ideally accessible to people with disabilities, and that allows flexibility for weather, physical dynamics, and places the blessing liturgy within the care of God's creation and recognition of our interdependence with all life. Practical accommodations may also include several water bowls for pets and access to water for people, and/or refreshments for both to follow and to offer for fellowship and community. With some adaptation, planners could utilize the blessing outline for animal shelters, zoos, or veterinary clinics.

The service is usually held nearest October 4th in celebration of the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. The worship may also close the ecumenical Season of Creation, which begins September 1 and concludes October 4th, the Feast of St. Francis. The Theme for the Season of Creation for 2026 is "Living Water." If leaders are observing the whole season as a community, leaders may want to utilize a pitcher of water on the altar.

In this outdoor setting, worship planners may want to use a round table as a center altar, with one or more candles to be lit, folding or camp chairs might be placed around the table with space for animals, live music, if possible, sound enhancement if needed, and a QR code for a digital copy of lyrics for songs or hymns to be sung corporately.

Designate someone to take photographs for use on social media, with permission, or to use later for framing and display in the church to celebrate creation care. Photographs of the blessing will remind people of the consistent need to care for creation. Assign someone else to take pictures of pet families and their animal companions using participants' own phones as their reminder of the blessing. Other small gifts may be given, such as a St. Francis medallion, some treats for pets, or a token made by the congregation and other groups sponsoring the blessing: a pet prayer blanket, handmade greeting cards featuring pets or nature, or a copy of the St. Francis of Assisi prayer.

Other examples of creation visuals might include tree saplings or native species plants that could be located elsewhere later or on the church campus.

+Gathering/Prelude

If possible, include various generations in planning music and other aspects of the service. Music may be offered ahead of the start time as people gather, either instrumental, such as guitar, drums, possibly keyboard. If possible, begin this time with a song leader or soloist to guide the tone of the service throughout. This person can help with leading any hymns/songs and might offer a solo at the Gathering/Prelude.

If the community doesn't have access to live music, planners may create a playlist for the liturgy to be amplified by a digital speaker. Worship leaders should consider their unique contexts, including songs or hymns that are familiar with their community and beyond or that help enrich the experience of various generations, including non-church music.

Why choose secular music?

*With the ever-present breadth and depth of older music catalogs, young people and older people are both familiar with secular music. Since most congregations invite the community to their Blessing of the Animals, consider amplifying songs that may speak to non-christians, even secular songs in the spirit of "*Bless the Beasts and the Children," "Turn, Turn, Turn (To Everything There Is a Season)," "Here Comes the Sun," "What the World Needs Now," or "Everything Is Beautiful".

A service aimed at non-Christians might begin with "What a Wonderful World" (Louis Armstrong or solo) a*s* the *Prelude, followed by* "Here Comes the Sun" *(instrumental) as the Gathering music and the blessing time either a hymn tune and/or* "Bless the Beasts and the Children." *If there's a time for reflection and offering, an ecological song, might be* "Mercy Mercy Me" (Marvin Gaye) *and conclude with* "Count on Me" (Bruno Mars), *echoing our call to be a friend to all God's animals and creation.*

Of course, the blessing may be mostly for the congregation, and hymns may be the better choice, or hymns may be interspersed with some of the secular music, including familiar hymns such as, All Creatures of Our God and King, Morning Has Broken, All Things Bright and Beautiful, Joyful, Joyful, and God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale. *Keeping this in mind, ideas for incorporating these selections are listed in the service rubrics.*

Welcome
Leader:
"We welcome all people and companion animals in the beauty of God's creation where we share the earth and habitat with wildlife, pollinators, and livestock. "
*Incorporate local names of places, trails, state parks, lakes, to connect people with their own immediate environment. Example: "*As we gather, we affirm our nearness to sacred places where people regularly come together…" *such as [park] or [lake/river] or [Indigenous land] or [name your congregational campus or area of town].*
"We affirm that all creation belongs to God and is a manifestation of God's goodness and providential care. Human beings, nonhuman animals, plants, and other sentient and non sentient beings participate in the community of creation, and their flourishing depends on the care of all God's creation…..We affirm our sacred calling to be responsible stewards and to lovingly tend all that God has wrought. We recognize the inherent worth of God's creation, celebrate earth's abundance and diversity, and, along with the entirety of the cosmos, give praise to its Creator." *(Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church)*
Scripture [or other readings]

Genesis 1:1-2:4 is an example of a scripture that may be read while persons also offer symbols of what God is creating. Planners may use suggested symbols or use their own creativity and context. Someone will read each portion of scripture, and that person can lead the corporate response.
***Reader:** Genesis 1:1-5 A person lights all the candles on the altar/table.*
Response: And God said, "It is good."
***Reader:** Genesis 1:6:-8 Two people, possibly children, come forward with a large sheer blue fabric or banner. The sky may be symbolized by lifting the fabric up and down, and placing it on the altar after the text is read.*
Response: And God said, "It is good."

***Reader:** Genesis 1:9-13 Person(s) bring a pitcher of water, seeds, native plants and pollinators, or saplings to the altar.*
Response: And God said, "It is good."
***Reader:** Genesis 1:14-19 Two people, possibly a child and an older adult, bring forward a bright yellow ball and a grey ball and place on the table.*
Response: And God said, "It is good."
***Reader:** Genesis 1:20-23 Persons or a family bring symbols of different kinds of animals; these could be stuffed animals that children bring or toys that represent animals.*
Response: And God said, "It is good."
***Reader:** Genesis 1:26-29 Someone brings a pot of soil as a symbol of humans, who come from the dust/dirt of the earth.*
Response: And God said, "It is good."
***Reader:** Genesis 1:28-31 Someone brings forward bread and/or a bowl of fruit as a sign of the earth's food.*
Response: And God said, "It is good."
***Reader:** Genesis 2:1-4a Someone will ask for a minute of silence after the ringing of a bell.*
Response: And God said, "It is good."
Prayer of Preparation for *Blessing the Animals* (by Jan Richardson)
For worship services and related settings, may use Jan's blessings or other words from her blog without requesting permission. All that's needed is to acknowledge the source. If you're using them in a worship bulletin, please include this info in a credit line:
© Jan L. Richardson. janrichardson.com.

Liturgist/Leader:
You who created them
and called them good:
bless again these creatures
who come to us
as a blessing
fashioned of fur
or feather
or fin,
formed of flesh
that breathes with

your own breath,
that you have made
from sheer delight,
that you have given
in dazzling variety.

Bless them
who curl themselves
around our hearts,
who twine themselves
through our days,
who companion us
in our labor,
who call us
to come and play.

Bless them
who will never be
entirely tamed
and so remind us
that you love
what is wild,
that you rejoice
in what lives close
to the earth,
that your heart beats
in the heart of these creatures
you have entrusted
to our care.

—Jan Richardson

The Blessing (and Offering)

The Leader invites all persons with animals to come forward. The leader should also explain that after the animal is blessed, the family and pet companion may return to their seats and listen to the music and invite them to remain for fellowship and refreshments (if planners have included such a time) following the benediction. The leader should also mention any offering and instructions to giving, whether by digital means or a basket on the altar.

If a large group is expected, planners may want to include additional helpers. These persons may be part of the congregation or the wider community, especially if the focus is reaching beyond the congregation. Consider asking vet techs, groomers, rescue people, farmers, beekeepers, park rangers, or members of a creation care team or group, particularly if any of these vocations are represented in your church. Consider representing various generations and having two persons at each station: one might bless and the other might offer a gift, if gifts are to

be presented. We believe clergy and laity can do the blessings, but laity must be equipped with the rubric ahead of time.

Music During the Blessing
("Bless the Beasts and the Children" and/or hymns may be played.)
Planners may want to create their own short blessings.

Blessings for each station to say may be:

Bless, O God, your creature *(or name)*, and this family who loves and offers care for *(name)* daily.

Bless, O God, those who know your steadfast love, including this beloved pet *(name)* and this family who loves and cares for *(name)*.

Leader
Invite all to remain after the last song and/or blessing for refreshments and/or further community and welcome.

Closing Song

Select a closing song—a solo or joyful, challenging song—and/or benediction that invites persons to become active participants in caring for their animal companions, other animals, and the whole of creation. The song might be "Count on Me" (Bruno Mars) *or more challenging* "Big Yellow Taxi" (Joni Mitchell) *or sing a hymn such as* "God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale". (UMH)

Benediction

Friends, may we go in peace and gentleness and practice wisdom.
May we care for all God's creatures with feathers, paws, scales, tails, or fur
May we help God create a sustainable and vibrant future for all the earth!

Let the people say…***Amen!***