

**Open Table Worship – Leader’s Sheets**  
***Blessing of the Animals Service***  
*Communion (optional)*  
*Compiled by Ana Gobledale*



*(Parts of this liturgy have been adapted from various sources including: United Church of Christ Worship Ways, <http://www.webofcreation.org/SeasonofCreation/animalblessing.html> .)*

**Set up:**

- Bowls for water for blessing
- Bowls of water for drinking (animals)
- Centre piece on each table: animal-related items, e.g. photos people have brought, soft toys, items from RSPCA, Dog Trust or Cat Protection League (if one of these charities is being highlighted in the service)
- Place a copy of the readings (Bible and quotations), or a Bible marked at the readings, or printed handouts for all, in the centre of each table.
- Bible translations: suggested are *The Inclusive Bible: the first Egalitarian Translation 2007* by Priests for Equality; *New Revised Standard Version*; or *The Message*. Ideally, have all three available. NRSV provides the scholarly translation and TM provides an interpretation in modern vernacular. *The Inclusive Bible* provides a ready-to-read inclusive language translation.
- Candles to light (one lit candle to use for lighting others)
- Communion elements: juice – or grapes - and bread to be shared (gluten free and non-alcoholic, so no one is excluded)
- A special collection might be taken for the Dog Trust, the Cats Protection League or another charity caring for animals.

**Coffee & Chat**

*If you have brought a live animal with you today, please keep it with you.  
If you have brought a photo or a representative soft toy, please place it in the centre of your table.*

Introduce your pet (live or photo) to those seated around your table.

Questions for discussion around the tables:

- What does your pet bring to your life (e.g. joy, companionship, etc)? Share examples and stories.
- What memories of animals/pets past do you have?

- What is a concern you have for the animals of the world?
- You may wish to read the quotations on the table and reflect on their meaning for you.

**Ritual of Gathering**

***Purpose:*** *to establish as a group; to each fully arrive, moving from the outside world to being fully present here; to get to know names; to affirm one another and our pets as God’s creation.*

**All: We are here. We are who we are.**

Introduce yourself and your pet using only your first name, then saying either ‘We are here,’ or ‘We are who we are,’ or both. If you have brought neither a live animal nor a photo, use the singular, saying, ‘I am here.’ or ‘I am who I am,’ or both.  
*Alternatively:* Introduce yourself using your first name (and your pet’s name) . Then say, ‘I am here.’ Or ‘We are here.’ Then everyone responds with the affirmation, ‘You are who you are, created by God.’

**Welcome**

No matter who you are or where you are in life’s journey, or how many paws or claws you have, you are created by God and welcome here at our Open Table gathering. Today, in the tradition of St Francis, we celebrate animals, wild and tame, that make our lives richer because of their presence.

**Circle of Praise – inspired by Psalm 148**

*(If no handouts use a single reader. The longer adaptation of Psalm 148 by Thandiwe Dale-Ferguson may be used here if preferred.)*

Join me reading responsively a *Circle of Praise*, inspired by Psalm 148.

All God’s family, come and praise our Creator!

**We come with eyes to see, and ears to flap and hear,**

All creatures lift your voices in singing, mewing and barking.

**We come to celebrate God’s marvelous creation!**

With dogs and cats, hamsters and snakes

**We come to thank the Giver of all life!**

All creatures that crawl, all sea serpents that swim and feathered friends that fly

**We come to praise our Creator!**

## Opening Prayer

Pray with me.

Here we are again, God, gathered to worship. But today we have some special and exciting guests, the animals we love and care for. Bless our time together in this circle of love, with tails thumping and ears flapping. Let our hearts sing like the lark and soar like the eagle, as we rejoice in your amazing creation. Amen.

**Sing** Choose a familiar song/hymn on the theme of animals or creation.

*Hymns/songs to consider: (Note: some of these hymns/songs do not employ inclusive language.)*

- *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*
- *If I were a butterfly*
- *All things bright and beautiful*
- *Let all creation dance*
- *I sing the almighty power of God, verses 1-4*
- *Lord make me an instrument of Your peace (St Francis prayer)*

## Looking into the Bible

- *Psalm 50: 1, 10-11 & Luke 12:6 (medley)*
- *Genesis 1: 26 – 31a*

*Use Bibles on tables or printout inclusive versions; use multiple readers, reading 1-3 verses each, or as suggested.*

**Reflection--A dramatic reading:** *In Our Hands*

*A drama about caring for creation (on separate document)*

**Conversations:** Questions and responses might be shared in pairs or threes.

Inform everyone that there will not be any plenary or feedback time.

- How does this drama make you feel?
- What do you think is ‘in our hands’?
- What do you think it means to ‘have dominion’ over the creatures of the world?
- Where might God be inviting you/us to take action in relationship to animals?

## Reflective Reading

*Choose a quote/poem about animals. Consider these quotations by Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Alice Walker*

*Love all God's creation,  
the whole and every grain of sand of it.  
Love every leaf, every ray of God's light.  
Love the animals, love the plants,  
love everything.  
If you love everything,  
You will perceive the divine mystery in things.  
Once you perceive it,  
you will begin to comprehend it  
Better every day.  
And you will come at last  
to love the whole world  
With an all-embracing love.*

~Fyodor Dostoyevsky

\* \* \*

*The animals of the world  
exist for their own reasons.  
They were not made for humans  
any more than  
black people were made for whites,  
or women created for men.*

---Alice Walker

## Blessing of the Animals

### What is a Blessing?

In a few minutes, we will have a Blessing of the Animals.

But first, let's think about ‘blessing.’ We don't bring our companion animals to a service like this so much because we think they need a special blessing from God – We bring them because we have been blessed by them and we want to say a thanks to them and to God.

We know the blessing of a tail wagging when we return home, the blessing of whiskers twitching and ears turning to our voice. We know the blessing of bird song in the morning and

hamster wheels spinning at night.

We know the blessing of a nose nudging our hand for a treat, a mane brushing our face. We know the blessing of company, of trust, of playfulness, and of the responsibility to care and feed and love something that cannot speak words but speaks daily to our hearts.

So we come to say thanks today. But we also come today because we know that we have blessing work to do. We come because we want to be a blessing.

We want to bring safe harbor to creatures losing their homes to our overdevelopment of the land and resources. We want to protect the fragile ecosystems and gentle beaches that are home to rich bio-diversity. We want to ensure that no more creatures pass to extinction because we made it impossible for them to adapt.

So we come today to be a blessing. Let us share in the words of thanksgiving, reading responsively. I invite you to place your hand on the animal you love, or its photo or soft toy, as we express our thanks.

### **Words of Thanksgiving**

For all the animals in creation,

***We give thanks!***

For all the fun and friendship we have with animals,

***We give thanks!***

For these animals we love,

***We give thanks!***

### **Blessings (logistics)**

*One or two people might be designated to move from animal to animal offering the blessing, placing their hands on the animal, the cage/carrier, or photo. Or one person at each table might be designated either before the service or by the people at the table. Or it might be suggested that each person extend the words of blessing to the animal on their left (or right) around the table.*

*Consider distributing bookmarks, doggy treats, or another symbol of love and blessing.*

Blessing words for the animals:

*You are one of God's family.*

*May you be blessed with safety and love.*

### **Prayer for Peace**

Even as we celebrate our animal friends, our world suffers and groans. As we pray this prayer for peace, may our minds be reminded of peace by the animals of this world. Join me in the prayer for peace.

May the work of peace be ever on our minds,  
For even where there is hatred,

**cubs and kittens still play.**

Even where there is injury,

**the eagles still soar.**

Even where there is despair,

**the morning is greeted with song.**

Even where there is darkness,

**burrows, dens and nests bring safe sleep.**

Even where there is sadness,

**the whales and dolphins leap up to the sky.**

May we seek not so much to dominate as to

**live in peace with all God's creatures. Amen**

*If live animals are present, they may be fidgety at this point requiring the service move to the final hymn and sending forth. If all are calm, continue with 'Sharing & caring' and/or the communion service.*

### **Sharing & Caring – Bringing light into our world**

*If you would like to include prepared prayers of intercession, read 'Prayers for our world' (on next page) before lighting candles.*

As we meditate upon God's world, if you would like to light a candle, to either celebrate an event or situation, or to express concern about an aspect of our world or how people are treating it, please do so at this time.

If you would like to share your joy or your concern, feel free to share with the group, or you may light a candle in silence.

## Prayers for our world and all God's creatures

Led by: \_\_\_\_\_

Join me in a prayer for our world.

Creator God, for your creation, we give you thanks. We hear the hum of tiny insect wings, the skitter of insect legs and even the slither of the snake or the slug – we admit that sometimes these things scare us, repulse us and just plain freak us out. But we know they are part of our planet's delicate balance and we give thanks for creation's diversity and richness.

All things bright and beautiful,

**God, made them one and all!**

We hear the chirps and trills of the song birds; the predatory cry of the kite and falcon and the sometimes annoying caw of the jackdaw and the crow. We may find some creature habits annoying, but we marvel at their ability to fly freely.

All things bright and beautiful,

**God, made them one and all!**

We hear the soft rustle of rabbits, badgers and squirrels in the bushes and leaves. We find them all cute from a distance but they often annoy us as they encroach on our lawns, gardens and chimneys. But we know they are part of your plan for creation.

All things bright and beautiful,

**God, made them one and all!**

We hear the thundering hoofs, howls and screams of animals being hunted for sport. We remain ignorant of animals being warehoused for meat. We know that even the most wild and threatening and the most docile farmed beasts are part of our planet's delicate balance.

All things bright and beautiful,

**God, made them one and all!**

We listen for the animal sounds that have vanished, and ask for your forgiveness for our role in their demise. For all the times we have hurt or neglected animals, or used poisons that have harmed them, or destroyed their homes in the forests, oceans, and fields. We are sorry.

All things bright and beautiful,

**God, made them one and all!**

God, our Creator, we listen and hear your voice in the crow's cry and the cat's purr, in the elephant's bellow and the donkey's bray. Help us to love all creatures as our kin, all animals as our partners on Earth, all birds as messengers of praise, all frogs as voices of hope, and all small beings as expressions of your mysterious design. Amen.

## Words of Assurance

Whether dog lovers, cat lovers, horse lovers, hamster lovers, or not lovers of animals, we surely belong to one another in the peace and unity of God. In that peace and through that world-wide unity we are made whole, healed, and forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen!

## Communion Service

### A song to lead into communion

*Choose a familiar reflective song/hymn on the theme of communion.*

### Time for quiet reflection and preparation

#### The Lord's Prayer

#### Invitation to Communion:

The table is set for our special meal. The bread, the juice, prepared and presented, is ready to be served and shared.

We remember Jesus sharing a meal like this with his disciples, his friends. He included everyone, those he could trust and those he could not trust. Today we are his disciples, his friends. Each one of us is welcome. How amazing it is to be loved and wanted even when we have not been perfect. How wonderful it is to be included as we are. The bread is gluten free and the juice is non-alcoholic so that all may partake freely. No one is excluded from this meal.

#### Prayer of confession (optional)

As we approach this meal of mystery in the hope and promise of reconciliation, we confess our sins. Pray with me.

Creator of all creatures, great and small, we confess that we fall short as your beloved sons and daughters. None of us can get everything right or never make a mistake. We look to you, Jesus, knowing that you have suffered, been abused and wounded.

Sometimes we find being part of your family demanding, and feel put upon as your beloved children. When we forget our connectedness

and resort to self-centredness, forgive us. When we lack trust and refuse your loving guidance and instruction, forgive us.

When we feel stuck and unable to change, prod us gently, emboldening us to see that all things can be made new by you.

Help us be good family, true brothers and sisters, in the best sense of that word, to one another and to others and friends to the animals. May we see the good in everyone, and every creature, and share love as freely as you have given love to us.

You are our example. Help us to follow in your steps. Amen.

### **Words of Assurance** (optional)

Be assured that God, watches over us all, rejoicing when we are found and restored to wholeness, generously forgiving a repentant heart. Receive God's healing mercy.

### **Words of Remembrance: the communion story**

When Jesus shared the bread with his friends, he explained that he is the Bread of Life. Like bread, Jesus nourishes and strengthens us so that we can know right and wrong and not be confused. When we eat the bread together, we are strengthened as a community to remember Jesus and to do the things Jesus would do in our world.

Jesus also used a cup of the fruit of grapes to teach his disciples. He compared the red juice to blood, to help us remember the suffering and bloodshed in the world. Drinking the juice together helps us remember that we are all part of a special agreement, a covenant, with God.

God loves us so much that when we make mistakes, or when we make bad choices, God has agreed to forgive us and grants us a second chance, every time.

This is ordinary bread and ordinary juice. But when we eat the bread together and drink the juice together, something extraordinary happens which brings us closer to Jesus and to one another. We become the 'Body of Christ.' which means that our eyes and ears see and hear what Jesus would see in our world. And our arms and hands do Jesus's work to help others. May this shared meal of mystery and awe manifest for us the very essence of the risen Christ in our midst.

### **Prayer of Thanks**

Creator of us all, for this time together around this table, we give thanks.

For the power of this meal, this simple bread and juice, to unite us as the Body of Christ, we give thanks. Amen.

### **Breaking of the Bread** *Break bread as words are spoken:*

Although the bread is broken like Jesus' body, by sharing it, we are made one.

### **Pouring of the cup** *Pour our juice as words are spoken:*

Although the cup represents blood spilled, by sharing it, we are healed with God and one another.

### **Blessing of the Bread and Juice**

Pray with me. Come Holy Spirit, come. Fill this bread and these cups with your spirit that we might feel your nourishment, making us one spiritual body, one family, united with one another and all peoples of all nations, that we may worthily serve the world, bringing peace and justice to all, in your name. Amen.

Ministering to you in Christ's name, all things are ready.

### **Sharing the bread**

When you take a piece of bread, please hold it until everyone has a piece. Then we will all eat together. [or: Please eat the bread as you receive it.]

*Consider sharing treats with the animals present, and distributing them to be taken home to those not present.*

*When everyone has bread:*

Although the bread is broken like Jesus's body, we are made one. Eat of the Bread of Life.

### **Sharing the juice**

When you take a cup of juice, please hold it until everyone has been served. Then we will all drink together.

*When everyone has a cup:*

Although the cup represents blood spilled, we are healed, reconciled with God and one another. Drink of the Cup of Forgiveness.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Pray with me. Creator God, even in the diversity of creation, you know each of us. Thank you for uniting us through this meal. Thank you for your presence in our lives, today and each day. Amen.

### **Words of closing**

Be inspired by these words of Fyodor Dostoyevsky:

*(if not read earlier in the service)*

*Love all God's creation,*

*the whole and every grain of sand of it.*

*Love every leaf, every ray of God's light.*

*Love the animals, love the plants, love everything.*

*If you love everything,*

*You will perceive the divine mystery in things.*

*Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it*

*Better every day.*

*And you will come at last to love the whole world*

*With an all-embracing love.*

*~Fyodor Dostoyevsky*

Friends, go in the peace and gentle wisdom of God, to care for all God's creatures, with feathers, paws, tails or fur, with a grateful heart and loving hands. Let the people say....***Amen!***

**Sing**    *a familiar uplifting song/hymn*  
*--on the theme of animals or creation.*

### **Closing act**

*Have another cuppa?*

*Shake hands?*

*Greet the animals present?*

*Slip away quietly?*

*Whatever is comfortable for the group and for the individuals.*

