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Blessing of the Animals: A Celebration in Two Parts

Allyson Sawtell, 2022

Notes to Pastors and Worship Leaders

Be sure to read this before putting your service together

For both liturgies

These services are meant to be done separately and not together in one service of worship. The Blessing of our Animal Companions will probably include the bringing of pets into the sanctuary; to do both liturgies at that time would make for an awfully long service for the animals to sit through (and some people, too!).

You can do the liturgies sequentially, one week after the other, and it doesn't matter which one you do first. Or, you can schedule the services at different times of the year. Some folks schedule the "pet blessing" for over the summer so you can meet outside. There are also special days of the year designated for celebrating creatures both wild and domesticated. Here is a list of just a few, from the <http://www.holidays-and-observances.com/animal-holidays.html> website:

- National Wildlife Day – February 22 and September 4 (nationalwildlifeday.com)
- National Justice for Animals Week – fourth week in February (Animal Legal Defense Fund; aldf.org)
- World Wildlife Day – March 3 (a program of the UN; wildlifeday.org)
- Endangered Species Day – third Friday in May
- Responsible Animal Guardian Month (May) – reminding pet owners to be responsible owners.
- Feast of St. Francis of Assisi – October 4

(I haven't included Termite Awareness Week, Feral Hog Month, Take a Monkey to Lunch Day, or Kiss a Shark Week. But they exist and actually highlight some very important issues!)

For "[Blessing of the Wild Creatures](#)"

Some food for thought as you prepare for this service

The nature of the wild things is just to be – not to be just for us, but just to be.

And simply by being

- irrespective of us
- indifferent to us

– wary of us – or maybe curious
 – just simply by being
 Here is blessing.

The nature of the wild things is to be in relationship, in give and take, predator and prey. The nature of wild things is to embody the web of life, knowing instinctively that one cannot survive alone.

Service notes

The liturgy is meant to be part of a regular Sunday service, and not a service in and of itself. Place it wherever you see fit within your service. It could be at the beginning, or in place of the sermon later on, for example.

The song I've suggested is "Pray for the Wilderness" (New Century Hymnal, p 557, vss 1,2,4). However, if you know of something you would rather use, go for it.

Set up your worship space to include a display table of sorts – it can be a separate table, or your regular Communion Table or altar. You can put a colorful (or white) cloth on the table if you like.

On one-third of the table, place pictures of wild animals. You can also include stuffed toy animals (wild), figurines/statues of wild animals, and things like that.

Another third of the table is to remain completely and obviously empty. This will represent those animals lost to extinction who will be remembered during the liturgy.

And on one-third of the table, place a large candle. It can be of any color, just as long as it is large and noticeable for the congregation. This candle will represent both endangered species, and the hope we find with species brought back from the brink of extinction.

The readings can be done by one or several worship leaders. Some of them are a little long to be read by just one person, and certainly too long for the congregation to read in unison and get anything out of.

The blessing prayer ("The Pledge") may be done in a couple of ways. If your congregation can safely and easily fit around the display table, have them stand around the table as the prayer is read. Or, if they remain in the pews, they could hold out their hands for blessing (or hold them to their hearts) while the prayer is read by the worship leader(s).

For "[Blessing of our Animal Companions](#)"

The liturgy is meant to be part of a regular Sunday service, and not a service in and of itself. Place it wherever you see fit within your service. It could be at the beginning, or in place of the sermon later on, for example.

Set up of the space

As with the *Blessing of the Wild Creatures*, there is to be a special "display space" set up in your worship space – either a table, or your Communion Table/altar will do. It will be divided into three areas:

- A space for pictures of pets, service animals, domesticated animals; or stuffed animals and figurines.

- An empty space to remember those beloved pets/service animals who have died. Pictures of these animals may be put up there during the service.
- A large candle (any color) that will be lit in the service will celebrate those animal companions yet to come into our lives.

Service notes

Many churches have an annual Blessing of the Pets service – this is what Blessing of our Animal Companions is meant to be, so feel free to ask your congregation to bring their (well-behaved) pets to church! If they are unable to bring their pets/companions, ask them to bring a picture to be blessed. And, to bring pictures of their beloved pets who have died, if they wish.

Also note, however, that this service will include other domesticated animals that are, in a very real sense, our companions as well. So, in this service, we give thanks for service animals/therapy animals, and animals domesticated (or wild-caught) for our food and clothing needs, as well as pets. Mention this as part of your introduction to the blessing liturgy.

The first reading (“An Enormous Blessing”) can be done by one reader.

The “Prayer of Gratitude and Celebration” is a responsive reading. Since this one is a bit long, the leader parts can be divided up for two leaders. The congregation’s response is in italics.

During the actual blessing part

During this part of the service, you can bless each pet individually. If space and time allow, have each animal come forward with their person. Say words something to the effect of: *You are blessed, and a blessing. You are loved and loving. You are a gift of God to our world! Amen!*

At this time, people can also come forward with pictures of any deceased pets they want to remember, and you or they can place them in the empty space on the display table.

After the pets are blessed or memorialized, light the large candle in celebration of those animals yet to come into our lives.

If you have more pets than you have time to bless individually, call out names, and do the spoken blessing to all, holding out your hands to all the animals there.

End with the hymn included here: “Song for our Animal Companions” (a light-hearted short song to the tune of “God of Grace and God of Glory”). Some of you might note that the line “songs of gratitude” has a rushed meter; as always, I opt for words over meter!



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