



A service for  
animal welfare





## Introduction

This order of service for animal welfare, which now appears in its sixth edition, was first published by the RSPCA in 1975. Since then 'animal services' – as they are known – have become a regular feature in many churches of all denominations both in Britain and overseas. They are welcome evidence of a growing Christian concern for the welfare of other species, and provide churches with an opportunity to champion care for animals, and to preach about Christian responsibility for creation.

Animal services are usually held on World Day for Animals, October 4 (the birthday of St Francis of Assisi) or on the nearest Sunday which is now designated 'Animal Welfare Sunday' in many churches. Services usually focus on four themes:

- **repentance for our abuse of, and cruelty to, animals**
- **thanksgiving for animal companionship**
- **celebration of God's creatures**
- **compassion for individual animals.**

All four elements are present in the order that follows, and can be adapted as necessary. Prayers are also included for the blessing of individual animals. At the end of this booklet, there is a selection of alternative readings, which can also be used by individuals and groups.

It is not always appreciated that the RSPCA – the first national animal welfare society in the world – came into existence as the result of Christian vision. The Society was founded by an Anglican priest, the Reverend Arthur Broome, who called together the first meeting, which led to the Society's foundation in June 1824. Broome's work was immensely sacrificial. He gave up his London church to work full-time (unpaid) for the Society as its first Secretary and ended up in prison because of the Society's debts. The first minute book records the declaration that: "*the proceedings of this Society are entirely based on the Christian Faith and on Christian Principles*".

Moreover, the first prospectus of the Society, penned by Broome himself, makes clear its Christian inspiration:

*"Our country is distinguished by the number and variety of its benevolent institutions ... all breathing the pure spirit of Christian charity ... But shall we*



*stop here? Is the moral circle perfect so long as any power of doing good remains? Or can the infliction of cruelty on any being which the Almighty has endued with feelings of pain and pleasure consist with genuine and true benevolence?"*

Broome, together with other luminaries, such as William Wilberforce, Richard Martin and Lord Shaftesbury, directly changed the moral conscience of a nation, and consequently and indirectly the consciences of other nations – by the establishment of sister SPCAs throughout the world. It is known that Queen Victoria, who established the SPCA as a Royal Society in 1840, took every opportunity to write on the Society's behalf, strongly supporting the cause of animal protection as a matter of Christian principle throughout her lifetime.

Church support for the work of the Society has continued until the present day. In 1977, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Donald Coggan, on accepting the presidency of the Society issued this statement: *"There have always been and still are many churchmen, both lay and ordained, who have seen it as part of their Christian profession to work for animal welfare. I want to offer my support to the RSPCA because without its constant vigilance and the devoted work of its officers and inspectors the level of unnecessary animal suffering in this country would be so much higher."* He concluded: *"Animals, as part of God's creation, have rights which must be respected. It behoves us always to be sensitive to their needs and to the reality of their pain."*

Archbishop Robert Runcie also became president of the Society in 1981, followed by Archbishop George Carey who became the Society's first vice-patron in 1992. On his appointment, Dr Carey said: *"I am very concerned that human beings, who have unique ability and power, should treat the rest of God's creation with respect and sensitivity. The RSPCA stands for responsibility, love and kindness, and challenges human arrogance and cruelty. I am delighted to associate myself with this splendid cause."* The present archbishop, Dr Rowan Williams, also became Vice-Patron in 2003.

Some precautions are essential if animals are to be brought into church. Great care must be taken to avoid any distress to the animals themselves. Children who bring companion animals to church should always be accompanied by an adult. Animals should be transported and handled appropriately in accordance with RSPCA advice on pet care. Fresh drinking





water should always be available, and animals should not be placed alongside other species with whom they have a natural antipathy. If the animals are to be blessed, they should be brought individually to the front of the church.

Despite some organisational difficulties (usually very minor), the bringing of animals into church has a deep symbolic importance – one that is seldom lost on the human participants. It symbolises both God's providential care for all creatures, and also the need to include care for animals within the arena of Christian moral concern. It also provides a practical glimpse of the biblical vision of creation in praise.

Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon once recounted the view of Rowland Hill that a person "*was not a true Christian if his dog or cat were not the better off for it*". And commented: "*That witness is true*".



## An order of service for animal welfare

*One or more of the following may be said*

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

*Genesis 1.1*

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good.

*Genesis 1.31*

I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.

*Genesis 9.15*

O Lord, you save both humans and animals.

*Psalms 36.6*

The righteous care for their animals, but the wicked are cruel.

*Proverbs 12.10*

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

*Isaiah 11.9*

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God.

*Luke 12.6*

The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

*Romans 8.21*



## Theme I: Repentance

*One*      Holy Creator  
we come together  
to thank you  
for the fellowship of other creatures,  
to celebrate their God-given lives,  
and to pray for compassionate hearts  
so we may care for them  
and for all your creation.

But, first of all, we pray for your forgiveness  
because of our part in sins of thoughtlessness  
and cruelty towards animal life.

*A pause for reflection may follow*

*All*      Almighty God  
you have given us  
temporary lordship  
of your beautiful creation.  
But we have misused our power,  
turned away from responsibility  
and marred your image in us.

Forgive us, true Lord,  
especially for our callousness  
and cruelty to animals.

Help us to follow the way  
of your Son, Jesus Christ,  
who expressed power in humility  
and lordship in loving service.  
Enable us, by your Spirit,  
to walk in newness of life,  
healing injury, avoiding wrong  
and making peace with all your creatures.



*One*      God of everlasting love  
who is eternally forgiving;  
pardon and restore us,  
and make us one with you  
in your new creation.  
Amen.

*The following may be said or sung*

*All*      All praise be yours thru Brother Wolf,  
All praise be yours thru Sister Whale.  
By Nature's son, my Lord be praised,  
By Brother Eagle, Sister Loon.  
Thru Sister Flower, Brother Tree.  
Let Creatures all give thanks to Thee.  
All praise to those who live in peace.  
(*Scott Winter*)





## Theme II: Thanksgiving

*One* Let us rejoice with the Creator  
at the wonderful creation around us.  
O God, you love all things that exist: and despise none of the things which you have made, for you would have made nothing you didn't love. You spare all things, for they are yours – O Lord who loves the living. For your immortal Spirit is in all things. (*Wisdom 11.24ff*)

*All* Let us sing to the Lord  
a new song:  
a song for all the creatures  
of the earth.

*One* Let us rejoice  
in the goodness of God  
shown in the beauty  
of little things.

*All* Let us marvel  
at the little creatures  
who are innocent  
in God's sight.

*One* Let us extol  
God's handiwork  
in the complexity  
of their lives.

*All* Let us not be haughty or proud,  
too full of ourselves  
to praise the Lord  
of little things.

*One* Let us rejoice  
in the other worlds  
sublime and mysterious  
that God has made.

*All* The world of earthworms  
burrowing in the ground;

*One* the world of skylarks  
soaring above us;

*All* the world of foxes  
playing around their dens.



*One* Let us hear  
the divine rejoicing  
throughout the whole earth:  
'the earth is mine  
and the fullness thereof'.  
(Psalm 21.)

*First Reading either (a)*

O Lord, how manifold are your works!  
In wisdom you have made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.  
When you open your hand  
they are filled with good things.  
When you hide your face  
they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath  
they die and return to their dust.  
When you send forth your Spirit  
they are created;  
and you renew the face of the ground.  
(Psalm 104.24, 28b-30, RSV)

*or (b)*

[St Francis] rejoiced in all the works of the hand of the Lord, and saw behind all things pleasant to behold their life-giving reason and cause. In beautiful things he saw Beauty itself, all things were to him good. "He who made us is the best," they cried out to him.

He embraced all things with a rapture of unheard of devotion, speaking to them of the Lord and admonishing them to [offer] praise. He forbade the brothers to cut down the whole tree when they cut wood, so it might have the hope of sprouting again. He commanded the gardener to leave the border around the garden undug, so that in their proper times the greenness of the grass and the beauty of the flowers might announce the beauty of the Father of all things.

He removed from the road little worms, lest they be crushed under foot; and he ordered that honey and the best wines be set out for the bees, lest they perish from want in the cold winter. He called all animals by the name of "brother", though among all kinds of animals he preferred the gentle. For that original goodness that will one day be all things, and in all, was already shown forth in this saint as all things in all.

*(St Bonaventure)*



## Theme III: Celebration

*All* Help us to wonder, Lord  
to stand in awe;  
to stand and stare;  
and so to praise you  
for the richness of the world  
you have laid before us.

*One* God of the universe  
all creatures praise you;  
the sun setting on the lake,  
the birds flying upward toward the heavens;  
  
the growl of the bear;  
the darting of the stickleback;  
  
the purring of the cat,  
the wide eyes of the tiger;  
  
the swift legs of the cheetah,  
the dance of the hare;  
  
the lapping of the dog,  
the descent of the dove.  
  
God of a thousand ears  
the music of your creatures  
resounds throughout creation  
and in heaven a symphony is made.

*All* Help us to wonder, Lord  
to stand in awe;  
to stand and stare;  
and so to praise you  
for the richness of the world  
you have laid before us.

### *Second Reading either (a)*

[The Logos] produces a single melody ... holding the universe like a lyre, draws together the things in the air with those on earth, and those in the heaven with those in the air, and combines the whole with the parts, linking them with his command and will, and thus producing in beauty and



harmony a single world and a single order within it. He extends his power everywhere, illuminating all things visible and invisible, containing and enclosing them in himself, [giving] life and everything, everywhere, to each individually and to all together creating an exquisite single euphonious harmony.  
(*St Athanasius*)

*or (b)*

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
and the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall feed;  
their young shall lie down together,  
and the lion shall eat straw like an ox.

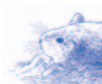
The suckling child shall play  
over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child  
shall put his hand on the adder's den.

They shall not hurt or destroy  
in all my holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be full  
of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.  
(Isaiah 11.6-9, RSV)

*All*      Christ in all things  
restore our senses  
and give us again  
that experience of joy  
in all created things.

*One*      Christ in all things:  
in the waves breaking on the shore;  
in the beauty of the sunset;  
in the fragrant blossom of Spring;  
in the music that makes our hearts dance;  
in the kisses of embracing love;  
in the cries of the innocent.





*All* Christ in all things  
restore our senses  
and give us again  
that experience of joy  
in all created things.

*One* Large and immense God  
help us to know the littleness  
of our lives without you;  
the littleness of our thoughts  
without your inspiration;  
and the littleness of our hearts  
without your love;

you are God beyond our littleness  
yet in one tiny space and time  
you became one with us  
and all those specks of dust  
you love for all eternity;

enlarge our hearts and minds  
to reverence all living things  
and in our care for them  
to become big with your grace  
and signs of your kingdom.  
Amen.

*There now follows an address or sermon on Christian responsibility for  
God's other creatures.*



## Theme IV: Compassion

*One* Our prayer is that the God of the new covenant written into our hearts will enlarge our sense of kinship and fellowship with all living beings.

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. (*Ezekiel 36.26, RSV*)

Put on, then, garments that suit God's chosen and beloved people: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. (*Colossians 3.12, REB*)

*There follows a pause for reflection*

*One* For animals neglected and ill-treated

*All* Give us new hearts, O God.

*One* For animals hunted to death

*All* Give us new hearts, O God.

*One* For animals exhibited for entertainment

*All* Give us new hearts, O God.

*One* For animals killed for convenience

*All* Give us new hearts, O God.

*One* For animals suffering in laboratories

*All* Give us new hearts O God.

*One* For animals suffering in captivity

*All* Give us new hearts, O God.

*One* For animals brought and sold in markets

*All* Give us new hearts, O God.

*One* For animals slaughtered for food

*All* Give us new hearts, O God.

*One* Compassionate God  
awaken within us  
a sense of feeling  
for all living creatures



you have placed among us;  
give us a compassionate heart  
for all who suffer  
and make us visible signs  
of your peaceable kingdom  
for which all creation longs.  
Amen.

Holy God  
you alone  
can make all things new;  
send your Holy Spirit  
upon us;  
give us new hearts to feel,  
new ears to hear,  
new eyes to see  
the unity of  
all creatures  
in Christ;  
and to proclaim  
all living beings  
as fellow creatures  
with us in your  
wonderful creation.  
Amen.

*Animals are now brought to the front of the church and they are blessed  
individually using one of the following prayers:*

May God Almighty  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
bless *(name)*  
protect *him/her* from cruelty  
and grant *him/her*  
a share in the redemption  
of the world.  
Amen.



Fellow creature,  
friend and companion;  
may God  
your Creator and preserver,  
bless, defend, and keep you  
this day and for ever.  
Amen.

*These concluding prayers may be said:*

*One* Heavenly Father,  
your Holy Spirit  
gives breath to all living beings;  
renew us by the same Spirit  
that we may learn to respect  
what you have given  
and care for what you have made,  
through Jesus Christ  
your Son, our Lord.  
Amen.

Almighty God  
your Son, Jesus Christ  
taught us to love  
even the least among us,  
give us the courage to care  
for all living creatures  
and the strength to defend  
even the weakest of all.  
Amen.

Holy Father  
your Son, Jesus Christ  
is the reconciler of all things  
in heaven and on earth;  
send us your Spirit  
that we may be made one  
with all your creatures,  
and know that all things  
come from you,  
and belong to you,  
now and forever.  
Amen.







*The general blessing may be given:*

*One*      **Blessing God**  
who gives strength  
to those who struggle  
and to those who endure;  
bless us with a compassionate heart  
that feels with you  
the injustice of the world,  
and help us to strive  
towards that peaceable kingdom  
in which all your creatures  
shall be free from pain  
and live with you  
for all eternity.

*All*      **Amen.**



## Alternative readings

Hear, O my people, and I will speak,  
O Israel, I will testify against you.  
I am God, your God.  
I do not reprove you for your sacrifices;  
your burnt offerings are continually before me.  
I will accept no bull from your house,  
nor he-goat from your folds.  
For every beast of the forest is mine,  
the cattle on a thousand hills.  
I know all the birds of the air,  
and all that moves in the field is mine.

*Psalm 50.7-11, RSV*

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And I will make for you a covenant on that day  
with the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air,  
and the creeping things of the ground;  
and I will abolish the bow, the sword,  
and war from the land,  
and I will make you lie down in safety.

*Hosea 2.18, RSV*

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I consider that the sufferings  
of this present time  
are not worth comparing  
with the glory  
that is to be revealed to us.  
For the creation waits with eager longing  
for the revealing of the sons of God;  
for the creation was subject to futility,  
not of its own will  
but by the one who  
subjected in hope;  
because the creation itself will be set free  
from its bondage to decay,  
and obtain the glorious liberty  
of the children of God.  
We know that the whole creation



has been groaning in travail  
together until now.

*Romans 8. 18-23, RSV*

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You alone are unutterable,  
from the time you created all things  
that can be spoken of.  
You alone are unknowable,  
from the time you created all things  
that can be known.  
All things cry out about you;  
those which speak,  
and those which cannot speak.  
All things honour you;  
those which think,  
and those which cannot think.  
For there is one longing, one groaning,  
that all things have for you ...

All things pray to you that comprehend your plan  
and offer you a silent hymn.  
In you, the One, all things abide,  
and all things endlessly run to you  
who are the end of all.

*St Gregory Nazianzen*

The creatures of the sense world signify the invisible attributes of God, partly because God is the origin, exemplar, and end of every creature, and every effect is a sign of its cause, the exemplification of its exemplar, and the path to the end, to which it leads ... For every creature is by its nature a kind of effigy and likeness of the eternal Wisdom.

Therefore, open your eyes, alert the ears of your spirit, open your lips, and apply your heart so that in all creatures you may see, hear, praise, love and worship, glorify and honour your God lest the whole world rise up against you.

*St Bonaventure*



The reason why God's servants love (God's) creatures so deeply is that they realize how deeply Christ loves them. And it is the very character of love to love what is loved by those we love.

St Catherine of Siena

I was early convinced in my mind that true religion consisted in an inward life, wherein the heart doth love and reverence God the Creator, and learn to exercise true justice and goodness not only toward all men but also toward the brute creatures; that as the mind was moved on an inward principle to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible being, on the same principle it was moved to love him in all his manifestations in the visible world; and as by his breath the flame of life was kindled in all animals and sensitive creatures, to say we love God as unseen and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature moving by his life, or by life derived from him, was a contradiction in itself.

*John Woolman*

The whole brute creation will then, undoubtedly, be restored ... Thus, in that day, all the vanity to which they are now hopelessly subject, will be abolished; they will suffer no more, either from within or without, the days of their groaning are ended. At the same time, there can be no reasonable doubt, but all the horridness of their appearance, and all the deformities of their aspect, will vanish away, and be changed for their primeval beauty. And with their beauty, their happiness will return; to which there can be no obstruction ... In the new earth, as well as the new heavens, there will be nothing to give pain, but everything that the wisdom and goodness of God can create to give happiness. As a recompense for what they once suffered, while under 'bondage of corruption', when God has 'renewed the face of the earth', and their corruptible body has put on incorruption, they shall enjoy happiness suited to their state, without alloy, without interruption, and without end.

*John Wesley*

Now what is it that moves our very hearts, and sickens us so much about cruelty shown to the brutes? I suppose this first, that they have done no harm; next, that they have no power of resistance; it is the cowardice and tyranny of which they are the victims that makes their suffering so especially touching ... there is something so dreadful, so satanic in tormenting those who have never harmed us, and who cannot defend themselves, who are utterly in our power, who have weapons neither of offence or defence, that none but very hardened persons can endure the





thought of it. Think then, my brethren, of cruelty practiced on brute animals, and you will gain one sort of feeling, which the history of Christ's Cross and Passion ought to excite within you.

*John Henry Newman*

Love all God's creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. 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. And once you have perceived it, you will begin to comprehend it ceaselessly, more and more every day. And you will at last come to love the whole world with an abiding, universal love. Love the animals: God has given them the rudiments of thought and untroubled joy. Do not, therefore trouble [them], do not deprive them of their joy, do not go against God's intent.

*Fyodor Mikhail Dostoyevsky*

St Francis is before us also as an example of unalterable meekness and sincere love with regard to irrational beings who make up part of creation. In him re-echoes that harmony that is illustrated with striking words in the first pages of the Bible: 'God placed man in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and care for it' (Gen. 2.15), and then God 'brought the animals to man to see what he would name them' (Gen. 2.19). In St Francis, we glimpse almost an anticipation of that great peace proposed by Sacred Scripture, when 'the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion shall graze together, and a child shall lead them' (Isa. 11.6). He looked upon creation with the eyes of one who could recognize in it the marvellous work of the hand of God. His voice, his glance, his solicitous care, not only towards men, but also towards animals and nature in general, are a faithful echo of the love with which God in the beginning ... had brought them into existence.

We too are called to a similar attitude. Created in the image of God, we must make him present among creatures 'as intelligent and noble masters and guardians of nature and not as heedless exploiters and destroyers' (Encyclical Letter, *Redemptor Hominis*, 15)

*Pope John Paul II*



This order of service has been written by the Revd Professor Andrew Linzey, Senior Research Fellow in Ethics, Theology and Animal Welfare, Blackfriars Hall, University of Oxford, and Honorary Professor of Theology, University of Birmingham.

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RSPCA, Wilberforce Way, Southwater, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 9RS  
Tel: 0870 010 1181 [www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk)

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