



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

Episcopal Church

General Information

The Episcopal Church arrived in the American colonies in 1607. Originally an extension of the Church of England, it became an autonomous institution after the American Revolution. Today, the Episcopal Church is a member of the Anglican Communion—a world-wide fellowship of churches that acknowledge the Archbishop of Canterbury as their spiritual head but have independent ecclesial authority.

More information about the Episcopal Church, including the Church's beliefs, structure, and history, can be found by going to <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/>

Number of members in the United States and Canada: 2.15 million

Official Statements on Animals

Animals are gifts from God. We must exercise responsible care of them

- **The Episcopal Church has long called for the “responsible care” of wild and domestic animals (see “Historical Statements on Animals,” below). In recent years, the Church has repeated this call, reminding members that animals are gifts from God and that “we are held accountable for *their+ right stewardship...”**

“*T+his 76th General Convention reaffirm[s] that all animals are a part of All Creation, for which we are called to be stewards of God’s gifts...”

—from the Episcopal Church, 76th General Convention, Resolution Number 2009-C078; [Liturgy for Loss of Companion Animals](#), Final Version-Concurred.

“*T+he 74th General Convention recognize[s] that responsible care of animals falls within the stewardship of creation...”

—from the Episcopal Church, The Acts of Convention 1976-2006; Resolution Number 2003-D016: [Support Ethical Care of Animals](#).

“The Christian Tradition holds that God has created the earth and all that lives herein. It teaches that all God created is ‘good’, and further, that we are held accountable for the right stewardship of God’s creation.”

—from the Episcopal Church, 76th General Convention, Resolution Number 2009-D015: [Merciful and Humane Treatment of God’s Creatures](#), Final Version-Concurred.

Puppy mills and factory-farms cause animal suffering and should be prohibited

- **Responsible care of God’s animals means that husbandry methods that cause animal suffering—such as puppy mills and factory-farms—should be prohibited. The Episcopal Church calls upon its members to “identify and advocate for legislation” that protects animals from these and other cruel practices.**

“The Episcopal Church encourage*s+ its members to ensure that husbandry methods for captive and domestic animals would prohibit suffering in such conditions as puppy mills, and factory-farms;...

“The Episcopal Church’s Peace and Justice Office *is instructed to+ identify existing guidelines to educate its members to adhere to ethical standards in the care and treatment of animals...

“The Episcopal Church, through its Office of Government Relations, *is instructed to+ identify and advocate for legislation protecting animals and effective enforcement measures.”

—from the Episcopal Church, [Support Ethical Care of Animals](#).

“Food animals continue to be cruelly and mercilessly treated: pregnant sows are totally confined in gestation crates, veal calves are penned in veal crates and are barely able to move around or even stand up, chickens are crammed together for life into battery cages in a space no larger than this page; geese are brutally force fed to make foie gras; grazing animals are fed antibiotics to increase size, that are then contained within their meat, passing these antibiotics on to consuming humans who become more and more vulnerable to resistant bacterial strains. Huge factory farms house animals in deplorable and unsanitary conditions resulting in foul run off, polluted ground water, and contamination linked to human diseases. Stressed food animals produce stress hormones.

“...By education we can make a real difference in the level of awareness of these problems and practices. Congregations can become aware of the most vulnerable of God’s creation and respect the dignity of ‘all things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all’ (Cecil Frances Alexander, Hymn 405 in Hymnal 1982).”

—from the Episcopal Church, [Merciful and Humane Treatment of God’s Creatures](#).

“Whenever...species go extinct, another part o f God’s body suffers...crucifixion”

- **The Episcopal Church warns that species extinction is a real and growing problem. It urges congregations and their members to learn all they can about this issue and to “remember that whenever Earth is degraded or species go extinct, another part of God’s body suffers a different kind of crucifixion.”**

“A number of endangered species are rapidly becoming extinct...And overdevelopment of United States’ virgin lands has put a large variety of indigenous species’ existence in imminent jeopardy...

“*T+he General Convention urge[s] Diocesan Environmental Commissions or Committees to provide information to educate our congregations about decisions that would affect the lives and health of endangered species,...; and...

“*E+ach congregation...*is+ encouraged to refer this resolution to their outreach committee or other such venue in order to ensure the education and dissemination of information to their members about endangered species...”

—from the Episcopal Church, [Merci fu l a n d H u m a n e T r e a t m e n t o f G o d ’ s C r e a t u r e s .](#)

“This year (2011), Earth Day falls on Good Friday—a profound coincidence. On the day we mark the crucifixion of Christ, let us remember that whenever Earth is degraded or species go extinct, another part of God’s body suffers a different kind of crucifixion.”

—from the Episcopal Church, Environmental Ministries, [“C a r i n g f o r G o d ’ s C r e a t i o n : E a r t h D a y 2011.”](#)

Liturgical rites and prayers “provide pastorally for people caring for animals”

- **The Episcopal Church recognizes that the bond between humans and animals is strong and that our relationship with animals falls within “the interest” of the Church. It also recognizes that animals “provide a unique connection to creation and expand our sense of God’s diverse gifts in creation.” For these reasons, the Church has developed *Rites and Prayers for the Care of Beloved Animals* that “provide pastorally for people caring for” companion, farm, and wild animals.**

“The bond between humans and their animal companions can be strong, causing a deep sense of loss, grief (or even guilt) over the animal’s death, especially when dealing with the loss alone, without the presence of their community of faith, or having the preconception that such an event falls outside the interest of their church. Our animal companions provide a unique connection to creation and expand our sense of God’s diverse gifts in creation. In many cases they also join us as partners in ministry, in such capacities as assistance animals, i.e., seeing eye dogs, etc. as well as therapy dogs and cats used in health care facilities and for pastoral care...”

“*The Episcopal Church embraces the opportunity for pastoral care for people who grieve the loss of a companion animal...”

—from Episcopal Church, [Liturgy for Loss of Companion Animal.](#)

“*Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, that the 77th General Convention make available the following liturgical materials, for use in a variety of settings to provide pastorally for people caring for animals.

“Service at the loss of a Beloved Animal...(Service at) the adoption of an animal...For a lost or missing animal...For a sick animal...For one whose beloved animal has died...At the euthanizing of an animal...For the suffering of animals during warfare...For the loss of a farm animal...At the death of a wild animal.”

—from Episcopal Church, 77th General Convention, Resolution Number 2012-A054; [Authorize Rites and Prayers for the Care of Beloved Animals.](#)

Historical References on Animals

God “careth for all things.” It is our duty to “prevent from all abuse the creatures he has made”

- **The Episcopal Church was the first Christian denomination in the United States to issue an official condemnation of animal cruelty. This statement, released in 1817 by the House of Bishops, called upon members to avoid “amusements” that involve “cruelty to the brute**

creation.” Although the 1817 statement spoke only of the damage to human souls caused by cruel behavior, additional statements released in 1874 and 1922 refocused the spotlight directly on animals: proclaiming them to be loved by God and deserving to be protected by us.

“The House of Bishops, solicitous for the preservation of the purity of the Church, and the piety of its members, are induced to impress upon the Clergy the important duty, with a discreet but earnest zeal, of warning the people of their respective cures, of the danger of an indulgence in those worldly pleasures, which may tend to withdraw the affections from spiritual things. And especially on the subject of gambling, of amusements involving cruelty to the brute creation, and of theatrical representations, to which some peculiar circumstances have called their attention. They do not hesitate to express their unanimous opinion that these amusements, as well from their licentious tendency as from the strong temptation to vice which they afford, ought not to be frequented.”

—from “House of Bishops, May 27, 1817,” in *Journal of the Proceedings of the Bishops, Clergy and Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (New York: Daniel Dana, Jr., 1847), 229.

“The Christian soul is sensitive to the love of God, and loves all things in Him, and for His sake. It loves even the dumb creatures He has made, because He condescends to be the God of the sparrow, and considered the very cattle that were in Nineveh. Gentleness to the animals which serve us, protection to the dependent flock which typifies the chosen people of God, pity for the callow brood in the fragile nest, are lessons which men of love are not ashamed to impress upon themselves and upon their children.”

—from “The Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of the American Church, November 3, 1874,” quoted in *Plea for Mercy to Animals* by James Macaulay (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1875), 95.

“Whereas, we are taught by our Lord that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without our heavenly father’s knowledge, and in other ways he careth for all things; we proclaim in consequence that it is our duty to be kind and considerate and to prevent from all abuse all the creatures he has made. Therefore be it resolved, the house of Bishops concurring, that this Convention acknowledges man’s responsibilities for the humane care and treatment of his faithful friends and servants, the domestic animals...Resolved, that this Convention express its sympathetic interest with the work of all societies whose aim is the protection of the friendless and the wronged; and while wishing all such societies God’s blessing, also pledges itself to interest and assistance in their work.”

—from *Journal of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America*, September 6-23, 1922, 116-117.

Anyone who “will not be merciful to his beast, is a beast himself” and “the Devil in human form”

- **Prominent clergy within the Anglican Convention have followed, and sometimes anticipated, Church statements on animals: recognizing the damage caused to the human soul by cruelty to animals, affirming the intrinsic value of animals, and denouncing humanity’s role in animal suffering. Anyone who is unmerciful to animals, say these clergy, “is a beast himself” and would be depicted as “the Devil in human form” if animals “were able to formulate a religion.”**

“*He that will not be merciful to his beast, is a beast himself.”

—from Rev. Thomas Fuller, *The Holy State and the Profane State*, (London: William Pickering, 1840), 18.

“It is also an unproved assumption that the domination of the planet by our own species is a desirable thing, which must give satisfaction to its Creator. We have devastated the loveliness of the world; we have exterminated several species more beautiful and less vicious than ourselves; we have enslaved the rest of the animal creation, and have treated our distant cousins in fur and feathers so badly that beyond doubt, if they were able to formulate a religion, they would depict the Devil in human form.”

—from Rev. William Ralph Inge, *The Idea of Progress* (first published 1920), (BiblioLife, LLC, 2009), 13-14.

Contemporary References on Animals

We have a “Christian commitment” to make choices that provide “greater life for other creatures”

- **The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church encourages Christians to live their daily lives in a manner that respects “the dignity of our fellow creatures.” From the garbage we create, to the methods of travel we use, to the food we eat, our day-to-day decisions impact the well-being of our human and nonhuman neighbors. Our Christian commitment should be to live in a manner that brings “greater life for other creatures” and a “more abundant life...for the whole world.”**

“As the Easter season continues, consider how your daily living can be an act of greater life for other creatures...We are beginning to be aware of the ways in which our lack of concern for the rest of creation results in death and destruction for our neighbors. We cannot love our neighbors unless we care for the creation that supports all our earthly lives. We are not respecting the dignity of our fellow creatures if our sewage or garbage fouls their living space. When atmospheric warming, due in part to the methane output of the millions of cows we raise each year to produce hamburger, begins to slowly drown the island homes of our neighbors in the South Pacific, are we truly sharing good news? The food we eat, the energy we use, the goods and foods we buy, the ways in which we travel, are all opportunities—choices and decisions—to be for others, both human and other. Our Christian commitment is for this—that we might live that more abundant life, and that we might do it in a way that is for the whole world.”

—from The Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, [“Presiding Bishop’s Message for Easter 2008,”](#) March 11, 2008.

Choices that demonstrate compassion for animals include humane food, product, and pet purchases

- **Efforts to help Church members “consider how *their+ daily living can be an act of greater life for other creatures” have resulted in the issuance of practical suggestions for lifestyle changes. Some of these changes include choosing food with “organic,” “free-range,” or “vegetarian” labels, choosing beauty products that have not been tested on animals, and selecting companion animals from animal rescue centers rather than from puppy mills.**

“These are some of the many practical and effective ways in which Christians can demonstrate their compassion for other living creatures:

“Food shopping choices: Christians should give attentive consideration to how animals were reared in making their food purchases. The labels ‘organic’ and ‘free-range’ indicate more humane rearing systems...Alternatively, an increasing number of people are choosing the vegetarian option. Vegetarian diets have been found to be healthier and less expensive.

“Other shopping choices: an increasing number of beauty and other products now carry the label ‘Not tested on animals’. Again, concerned Christians can seek out and choose such products.

“Pet choices: It has been suggested that for every puppy bred, one dog which cannot be homed will have to be destroyed. Christians seeking pets might choose to follow the increasingly popular trend of choosing a dog or cat from an animal rescue centre.”

—from The Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals, (an affiliate of the Episcopal Network for Animal Welfare), [Introducing Animal Welfare Sunday](#), “Christian Action,” 8.

Animal-blessing ceremonies remind us to be grateful for the “good gift” of animals

- **Every year on the Sunday closest to the Feast of St. Francis (October 4), the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City holds a ritual blessing of the animals. This ceremony reminds participants that we are members of an “abundant creation” that includes human and nonhuman alike. It also calls upon congregants to safeguard all of God’s creatures and to be grateful for the “good gift” of God’s animals.**

“The liturgical event *at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine+ is officially titled the ‘Feast of St. Francis,’ and includes the ‘Holy Eucharist and Processing of Animals’ presided over by the bishop of New York...

“A camel, adorned with a wreath on her hump, an eagle, a beehive, two llamas, and many more animals moved into the sanctuary through the bronze doors and gathered at the altar...*The bishop called on the entire congregation to pray together: ‘We give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty of the earth and sky and sea; for the richness of mountains, plains, and rivers; for the songs of birds and the loveliness of flowers, and for the wonder of your animal kingdom. We praise you for these good gifts, and pray that we may safeguard them for our posterity. Grant that we may continue to grow in our grateful enjoyment of your abundant creation, to the honor and glory of your Name, now and for ever...

“Following this prayer, the bishop blessed all of the animals using words attributed to St. Clare: ‘Live without fear: your Creator loves you, made you holy, and has always protected you. Go in peace to follow the good road and may God’s blessing be with you always. Amen.’”

—from Laura Hobgood-Oster, *Holy Dogs and Asses: Animals in the Christian Tradition* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 113-116.

Liturgies for animals “strengthen our confidence in [God’s] love for all ...creatures”

- **In 2012, the Episcopal Church approved liturgies that celebrate the adoption of a new companion animal, offer hope when an animal is lost or missing, and provide comfort when an animal becomes sick or dies. These liturgies praise God for the blessing of animals and pray for God to give us the “wisdom to care for all the creatures of the earth.” They also express gratitude for the blessing of animals and strengthen our confidence in God’s love for all creatures.**

Service at the Loss of a Beloved Animal

“...God, your blessed Son, Jesus, told us that not even one, tiny sparrow is forgotten in your sight. Strengthen our confidence in your love for all your creatures; in your goodness....
Blessed Creator, hear our prayer.

“Loving God, you brought this beloved animal into the life of N. *and N.+ to share kindness, joy, and faithful companionship: Receive our thanks and praise for the community between your animals and your people, and all the ways in which we bless each other’s lives; in your goodness, Blessed Creator, hear our prayer.

“Gracious God, you have given us the blessing and responsibility of caring for animals: If in any way we have failed in that responsibility, we ask for your pardon and trust in your mercy; in your goodness,
Blessed Creator, hear our prayer...

“Holy God, we pray for N., for the loss of her companion, and for all pets and animal companions. Help us to care for their needs, to tend their injuries, to heal their illnesses, and to relieve their suffering. Grant us wisdom to care for all the creatures of the earth and to respect their place in Creation; in your goodness,
Blessed Creator, hear our prayer.”
—from Episcopal Church, [Authorize Rites and Prayers for the Care of Beloved Animals](#).

For more information and resources, visit www.humanesociety.org/faith.

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