



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

## The 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 that have independent ecclesial authority within their own country. Other members of the Anglican Communion include the Church of England, the Anglican Church of Canada, and the Anglican Church of Nigeria.

The Episcopal Church, like all Anglican Churches, affirms that scripture, tradition, and reason are the threefold source of Christian authority and that The Book of Common Prayer is the core of instructions and rites for Anglican worship. The central teachings of the church are: the full divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ; the death, resurrection, and future return of Jesus Christ, who is the way to eternal life for believers; the Trinitarian nature of God; the divine inspiration of the Bible; the two necessary sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, with additional sacramental rites of confirmation, ordination, marriage, reconciliation, and unction; and belief in heaven and hell.

**Number of members in the US and Canada:** 2.15 million

**Governing Body:** The Episcopal Church is formed of dioceses, which are presided over by diocesan bishops. Bishops select and ordain parish priests and deacons. Each priest leads his or her parish in worship and makes decisions related to the sacramental life of the parish. The Episcopal Church is governed by a Constitution, the laws of which are open for review and supplementation every three years at the General Convention. Every nine years, the Church elects a Presiding Bishop, who represents the Episcopal Church in the Anglican Communion and presides over meetings of the bishops. The Episcopal Church Center is located in New York, NY.

### Official Statements on Animals

**The General Convention sets official policy for the Episcopal Church. Since the 19th Century, the General Convention has passed a number of resolutions designed to protect domestic and wild animals. These resolutions have included calls: to outlaw the use of animals in cruel sports (1817); to treat domesticated animals humanely (1922); to exercise responsible lifestyles, including responsible family planning, energy use, and eating and consumption habits (1979); to oppose oil development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (1991); and to support the reauthorization of the Endangered Species Act (1991). In recent years, three resolutions directly related to animals have been passed by the General Convention. These resolutions are descriptively entitled: Support Ethical Care of Animals (2003); Liturgy for Loss of Companion Animal (2009); Merciful and Humane Treatment of God's Creatures (2009).**

Resolution 2003-D016 - Support Ethical Care of Animals

*"Resolved*, That the 74th General Convention recognize that responsible care of animals falls within the stewardship of creation; and be it further

*Resolved*, That The Episcopal Church encourage its members to ensure that husbandry methods for captive and domestic animals would prohibit suffering in such conditions as puppy mills, and factory-farms; and be it further

*Resolved*, That The Episcopal Church's Peace and Justice Office identify existing guidelines to educate its members to adhere to ethical standards in the care and treatment of animals; and be it further

*Resolved*, That The Episcopal Church, through its Office of Government Relations, identify and advocate for legislation protecting animals and effective enforcement measures."

--from The Archives of the Episcopal Church, The Acts of Convention 1976-2006; Resolution Number 2003-D016.

[http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts\\_resolution.pl?resolution=2003-D016](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2003-D016)

Resolution 2009-C078 - Liturgy for Loss of Companion Animal

*"Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That this 76th General Convention reaffirm that all animals are a part of All Creation, for which we are called to be stewards of God's gifts; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Episcopal Church embrace the opportunity for pastoral care for people who grieve the loss of a companion animal; and be it further

*Resolved*, that this General Convention direct the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to develop liturgical resources to observe the loss of a companion animal and that it report its work to the 77th General Convention

*Explanation*: Various groups within the Church have shown an interest in developing inclusive liturgies for events that touch people's lives, for which there currently exists no authorized rite. 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. An authorized rite in the Book of Occasional Services would give clergy and others a resource for offering a pastoral care at the death of a companion animal."

--from 76th General Convention, Resolution Number 2009-C078, Final version-Concurred  
[http://gc2009.org/ViewLegislation/view\\_leg\\_detail.aspx?id=971&type=Final](http://gc2009.org/ViewLegislation/view_leg_detail.aspx?id=971&type=Final)

### Resolution 2009-D015 - Merciful and Humane Treatment of God's Creatures

"*Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 76th General Convention support the humane and merciful treatment of all of God's Creatures; and be it further  
*Resolved*, That the General convention urge Diocesan Environmental Commissions or Committees to provide information to educate our congregations about decisions that would affect the lives and health of endangered species, farmed food animals and domesticated animals; and be it further  
*Resolved*, That each congregation be 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, farmed food animals and domesticated animals.

*Explanation:* 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.

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.

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 76th General Convention, Resolution Number 2009-D015, Final version-Concurred  
[http://gc2009.org/ViewLegislation/view\\_leg\\_detail.aspx?id=966&type=Final](http://gc2009.org/ViewLegislation/view_leg_detail.aspx?id=966&type=Final)

## Historical References on Animals

**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 General Convention, 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, later statements focused the spotlight on the damage to animals themselves--proclaiming animals 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 Connection 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.

**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, affirming the intrinsic value of animals, and denouncing humanity's role in animal suffering.**

"[H]e 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

**The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church exhorts 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.**

"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's Message for Easter 2008," March 11, 2008.

[http://www.dfms.org/78703\\_95591\\_ENG\\_HTML.htm](http://www.dfms.org/78703_95591_ENG_HTML.htm)

**Efforts to help Church members "consider how [their] daily living can be an act of greater life for other creatures" has resulted in the issuance of practical suggestions for lifestyle changes, including changes in our food choices, shopping decisions, and pet selection.**

"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, "Introducing Animal Welfare Sunday," <http://www.aswa.org.uk/Resources/ASWA%20Welfare%20Sunday.pdf>

**In addition to encouraging members to "demonstrate their compassion for other living creatures" through changes in their daily practices, the Church has demonstrated its compassion through changes in ritual practices. 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.**

"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 Procession of Animals' presided over by the bishop of New York. Barks echoing in the massive Gothic cathedral suggest that this is not the typical twenty-first-century Sunday morning Christian worship service...Powerful ancient Christian ritual elements intermingled with modern liturgical pieces. For example, the choir sang the 'Kyrie' (Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy) accompanied by instrumentals interspersed with timber wolf howls and some real dog barking responses... 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.... At this point, 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. Amen '

"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.

**Other Episcopal and Anglican churches have followed the example of the New York diocese by holding annual animal blessing ceremonies. The Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals (a UK affiliate of the US Episcopal Network for Animal Welfare) has put together a series of resources for churches interested in participating in these ceremonies, including an Information Booklet that describes the plight of animals in modern factory farms, a Service Guide with a sample Sunday service, and Sermon Notes with theological arguments and biblical passages supporting compassionate treatment of animals.**

#### **Sermon Notes:**

"Some of us still make little or no concrete link between care for animals and Christian faith and this can lead to a view that animals matter little, if at all. The Bible shows in Genesis 9:2 that our attitude to animals is not what God intended, because of human rebellion against God (as explained in Genesis 3). As a result of this the intended communal harmony has been broken and animals live in fear of humans instead of in the happy relationship between them desired by God and expressed in Genesis 1...

"God is not satisfied with the world as it is; and human rebellion against God, as portrayed in Genesis 3 and traditionally known as 'The Fall', has so corrupted our attitude to animals that our species has added beyond measure to their suffering...

"In many places in Scripture animals are grouped with humans and distinct from the inanimate creation. In Psalm 150:6 'everything that has breath' is enjoined to praise the Lord...

"In fact, it is interesting how many of the things which we Christians see as making humans special in God's eyes also apply to animals... God actually sees the animals he has created as wonderfully marvelous. If anyone doubts this, read Job, chapters 38-41, where God rejoices in and enjoys his creation generally and his living creatures in particular in the most unrestrained of terms. These chapters are the filling out of the 'And God saw that it was good' in Genesis 1....

The animals who share our world are part of God's community. As such they are our neighbours. 'Love thy neighbour.'

--from The Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals, Animal Welfare Sunday sermon notes:  
"Putting Animals on the Agenda of the Christian Church," written by Barry Miles 2-4, 7, 23.  
<http://www.aswa.org.uk/Resources/ASWA%20Not%20Forgotten%20Booklet.pdf>

### **A Service for Animal Welfare Sunday:**

Introduction:

"...We have come to praise our Maker and Redeemer,  
to hear and respond to his holy word,  
to pray for the welfare of all of his creatures,  
and to seek forgiveness for the cruelty and suffering we have caused,  
so that by his grace and power we may be enabled to further his universal reign of peace...

Confession:

"...Lord of all,  
we confess to you our pride and selfishness.  
You have called us to share in your dominion,  
to rule over the animals, the birds and the fish.  
But we have abused your power.  
We have blinded ourselves to their beauty and goodness.  
We have caused them needless suffering  
through our ignorance, callousness and failure to act.  
We have behaved like tyrants  
and we have betrayed your Son, the Servant-King.  
We are truly sorry.  
Forgive us for what is past  
and transform our hearts and minds,  
so that we may become what you would have us be.  
Renew us in the image of your Son  
and make us worthy to reign with him.  
For he died to reconcile all things in heaven and on earth.  
He is our Saviour and our Lord.

"May the Father of all mercies  
cleanse you from your sins,  
and restore you in his image  
to the praise and glory of his name,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord...

Intercession:

"...We bring before you the millions of animals,



who are abused for sport and entertainment,  
or who suffer in our laboratories, in our abattoirs and  
on intensive farms...

In their suffering ease their pain and fear  
by making them aware that you are with them,  
and show us how we may alter our lifestyles  
the food we buy and the products we use--  
to lessen the pain and the cruelty that they endure..."

—from The Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals, "A Service for Animal Welfare Sunday," written and compiled by Revd. H. Broadbent.

-END-

For more information, visit The Humane Society of the United States Faith Outreach program at [www.humanesociety.org/faith](http://www.humanesociety.org/faith).