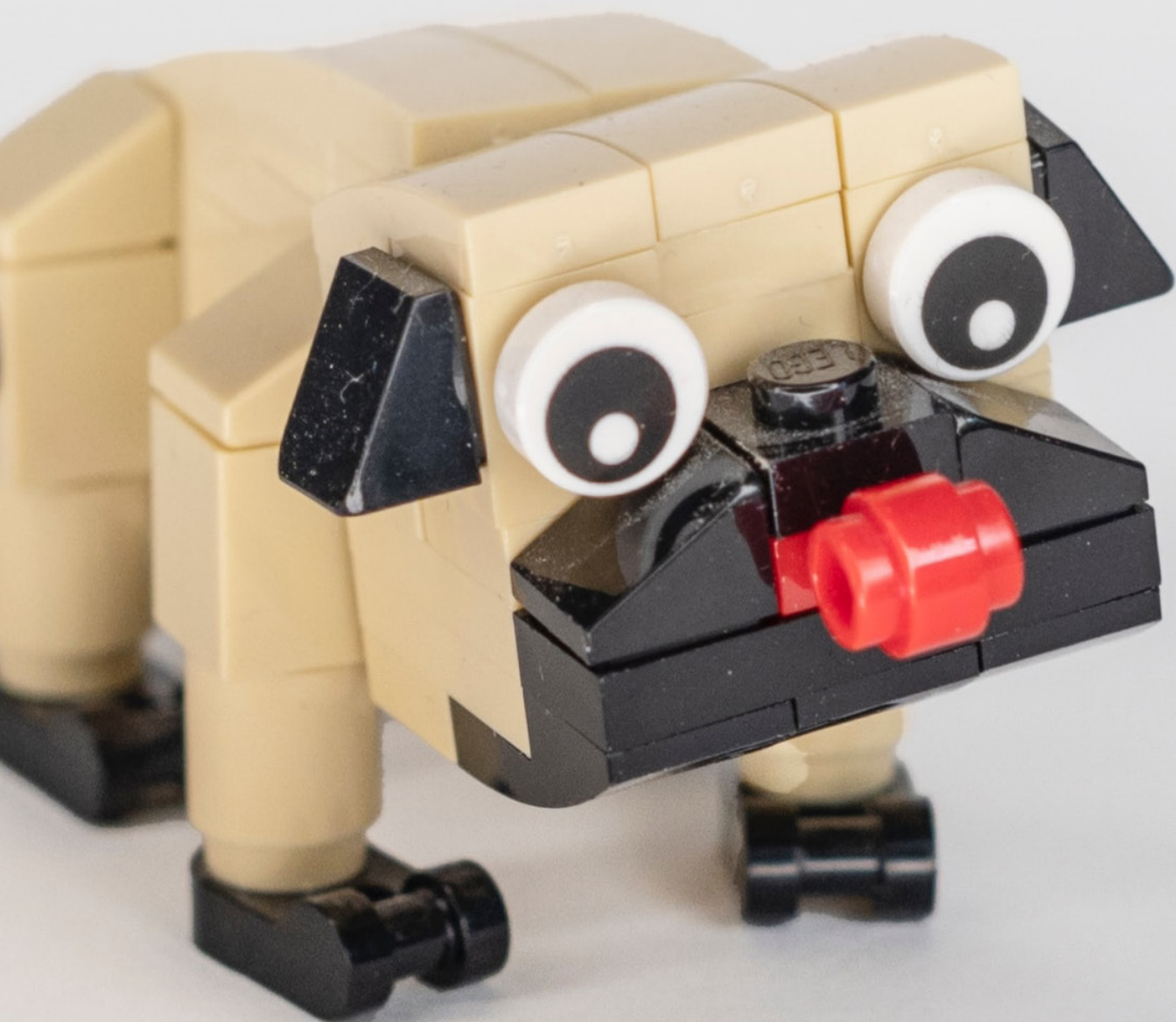


PET BLESSING



SAINT FRANCIS DAY
4 OCTOBER

With Thanks

With thanks to Reverend Sarah McMenamin, Reverend Rebecca Apperley, Reverend Canon Katie Lawrence, Silvia Purdie and the General Synod Office for their shared wisdom.

Created and designed by Diana Langdon for Strandz

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PET BLESSING



Why have a pet blessing service?

A pet blessing service is a creative opportunity to witness to God's love, care and concern for creation – a witness that the church is called to live into as well.

All of creation is interdependent and inter-connected, and we share a common responsibility to care for the world that God has made.

Every year, the church calendar celebrates the Season of Creation, which marks a time of prayer and action to protect creation. It has been gaining traction around the world as something to focus on during September - a particularly good month for the Southern Hemisphere as the days get warmer and new growth gets underway.

The Season of Creation starts on 1 September, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, and ends on 4 October, the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Who was Saint Francis?

Known as Patron Saint of ecology, Saint Francis was an Italian mystic and catholic friar, who founded the Franciscans. Born in 1181, his ministry took place at the start of the 13th, and he was passionate about justice, the environment and animals. He believed that nature itself was the mirror of God, and even preached to the birds. We have included a page of his quotes, which are well known across the world.

Love for animals

So many families in our communities share their lives with animals, and you only need to have a conversation with a pet owner to get a glimpse into why they are special. The companionship of animals can be an important part of our wellbeing, and research shows that there are many positive health benefits of owning a pet: they give us opportunities to exercise, get us outside, socialise; and spending time with animals has also shown to decrease blood pressure, cholesterol levels and positively impact our mental health.

So why a blessing?

In a world where the power of words can be used for good or harm, we recognize that our words have power. The act of blessing is to have the opportunity to speak out words of life over someone, something, a situation, or a place. We speak out these words of affirmation, love, appreciation over our furry friends, as we give thanks to God for the role they have in our lives.

And it's also really fun, and is a great way to connect with families in our local communities who have a shared love for the animals in their lives.

St Francis of Assisi quotes

“Lord, help me to live this day, quietly, easily. To lean upon Thy great strength, trustfully, restfully. To wait for the unfolding of Thy will, patiently, serenely. To meet others, peacefully, joyously. To face tomorrow, confidently, courageously.”

“Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.”

“The world is a great stage on which God displays his many wonders.”

“If you have men who will exclude any of God’s creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will deal likewise with their fellow men.”

“God requires that we assist the animals, when they need our help. Each being (human or creature) has the same right of protection.”

“Do few things but do them well, simple joys are holy.”



Creative ideas

Creative station

For children and families who are unfamiliar with the church, having a creative station set up for children to make some creative crafts could be a good focus point.

Wacky Animals

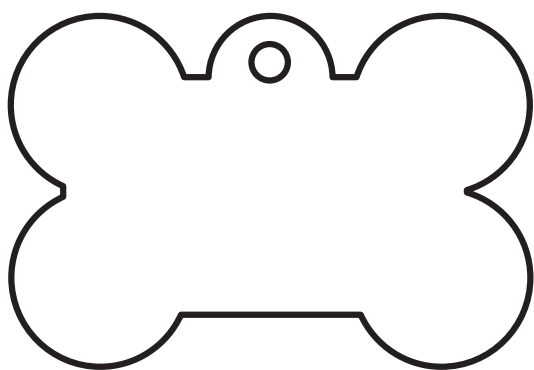
Have some general craft supplies available and encourage people (all ages can do this!) to make a new, wacky animal. They can choose the colours, textures, eyes, and why it is special and unique. They can name it and take it home.

Rock Pets

Have paint pens and rocks available for people to draw a picture of their animal or write “God loves (name of pet).”

Pet tags

We have included a template for pet tags that could be used as a take home memento or a corporate prayer activity.



Decorations

An simple and fun way of decorating the space would be sticking paw prints around the walls and on the backs of chairs. A template is available at the end of this document.



Worship songs

- God of Wonders - Chris Tomlin
- Lovely Jubbly - Doug Horley
- A thousand Hallelujahs - Brooke Ligertwood
- So will I - Hillsong United
- Resound Worship - Doxecology album

Hymns

- All Creatures of our God and King
- All Things Bright and Beautiful
- For the Beauty of the Earth
- Morning Has Broken
- I the Lord of Sea and Sky

Sound effects

If you are meeting inside, you may like to think about bringing some sounds of nature into the building! There are plenty of playlists on Spotify or YouTube, and here are some clips you could start with:

- Zealand bird song: <https://tinyurl.com/4crxjkzf>
- Sunny mornings with birdsong: <https://tinyurl.com/wkzcpb9a>
- Bird song: <https://tinyurl.com/y4fjc93d>

Health and Safety

As with other events, it is important it go through a risk management process to assess any possible risks in a Pet Service. Your diocesan or regional guidelines will be helpful in this process, but some things to consider may include:

- Clear health and safety instructions at the start of the service, recognising that people and animals are in the shared space.
- Safe evacuation points that are suitable for animals
- Welcome and instructions on caring for animals in the space (dogs leashed, are separate spaces needed to provide a calm environment)
- No naked flames
- Outdoor or public spaces guidelines
- Use of electrical instruments (volume, position)

Animals in Scripture

Throughout the Bible, we hear stories of how God uses animals to tell his redemptive story of love, grace and forgiveness. From the first few chapters in Genesis, where we hear the story of God making the animals and birds of the sea, to the paschal lamb in Exodus that reminds us of God delivering his people from slavery. Jonah was saved by a big fish, ravens brought bread to Elijah, and animals were even mentioned in the story of Jesus' birth! (ever met a shepherd without a sheep?)

Below are a selection of Bible readings that you may like to include in your Pet Blessing service, each one speaking of how animals and creation declare the glory of God.

Genesis 1:20-31

(Abridged, NLT)

Then God said, "Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind." ²¹ So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and swarms in the water, and every sort of bird—each producing offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² Then God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth."

²⁴ Then God said, "Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals." And that is what happened. ²⁵ God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image... ^{28b} Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

³¹ Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

Psalms 148:10-13 (NIRV)

¹⁰ Praise him, all you wild animals and cattle. Praise him, you small creatures and flying birds.

¹¹ Praise him, you kings of the earth and all nations. Praise him, all you princes and rulers on earth.

¹² Praise him, young men and women. Praise him, old men and children.

¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD. His name alone is honoured. His glory is higher than the earth and the heavens.

Psalms 104:10-18 (NLT)

¹⁰ You make springs pour water into the ravines, so streams gush down from the mountains.

¹¹ They provide water for all the animals, and the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

¹² The birds nest beside the streams and sing among the branches of the trees.

¹³ You send rain on the mountains from your heavenly home, and you fill the earth with the fruit of your labour.

¹⁴ You cause grass to grow for the livestock and plants for people to use. You allow them to produce food from the earth— ¹⁵ wine to make them glad, olive oil to soothe their skin, and bread to give them strength.

¹⁶ The trees of the Lord are well cared for— the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

¹⁷ There the birds make their nests, and the storks make their homes in the fir trees.

¹⁸ High in the mountains live the wild goats, and the rocks form a refuge for the rock badgers.

Matthew 6:25-33

²⁵ I tell you not to worry about your life. Don't worry about having something to eat, drink, or wear. Isn't life more than food or clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds in the sky! They don't plant or harvest. They don't even store grain in barns. Yet your Father in heaven takes care of them. Aren't you worth much more than birds?

²⁷ Can worry make you live longer?

²⁸ Why worry about clothes? Look how the wild flowers grow. They don't work hard to make their clothes. ²⁹ But I tell you that Solomon with all his wealth wasn't as well clothed as one of them.

³⁰ God gives such beauty to everything that grows in the fields, even though it is here today and thrown into a fire tomorrow. God will surely do even more for you! Why do you have such little faith?

³¹ Don't worry and ask yourselves, "Will we have anything to eat? Will we have anything to drink? Will we have any clothes to wear?" ³² Only people who don't know God are always worrying about such things. Your Father in heaven knows you need all of these. ³³ But more than anything else, put God's work first and do what he wants. Then the other things will be yours as well.

Psalm 104: A Psalm for Aotearoa

By Silvia Purdie

Bless the Lord, my soul.

Kororia ki te Atua!

You are wrapped in light,
in a *korowai* of glory.

You made *Rangi*, Father Sky,
infinite space stretched out above us.

You made *Papatuanuku*,
Mother Earth,
resting strong beneath us.

At you command *Tangaroa* rose and fell;
the seas once covered the mountains of this land
but now tides swirl around us,
drawn by *Marama*, the moon, in her monthly dance.
Each day the sun, *Ra*, walks his path through the sky.
Rain falls, springs gush up out of the earth,
nga awa, rivers flow through our islands,
water for bush and bird and cattle.

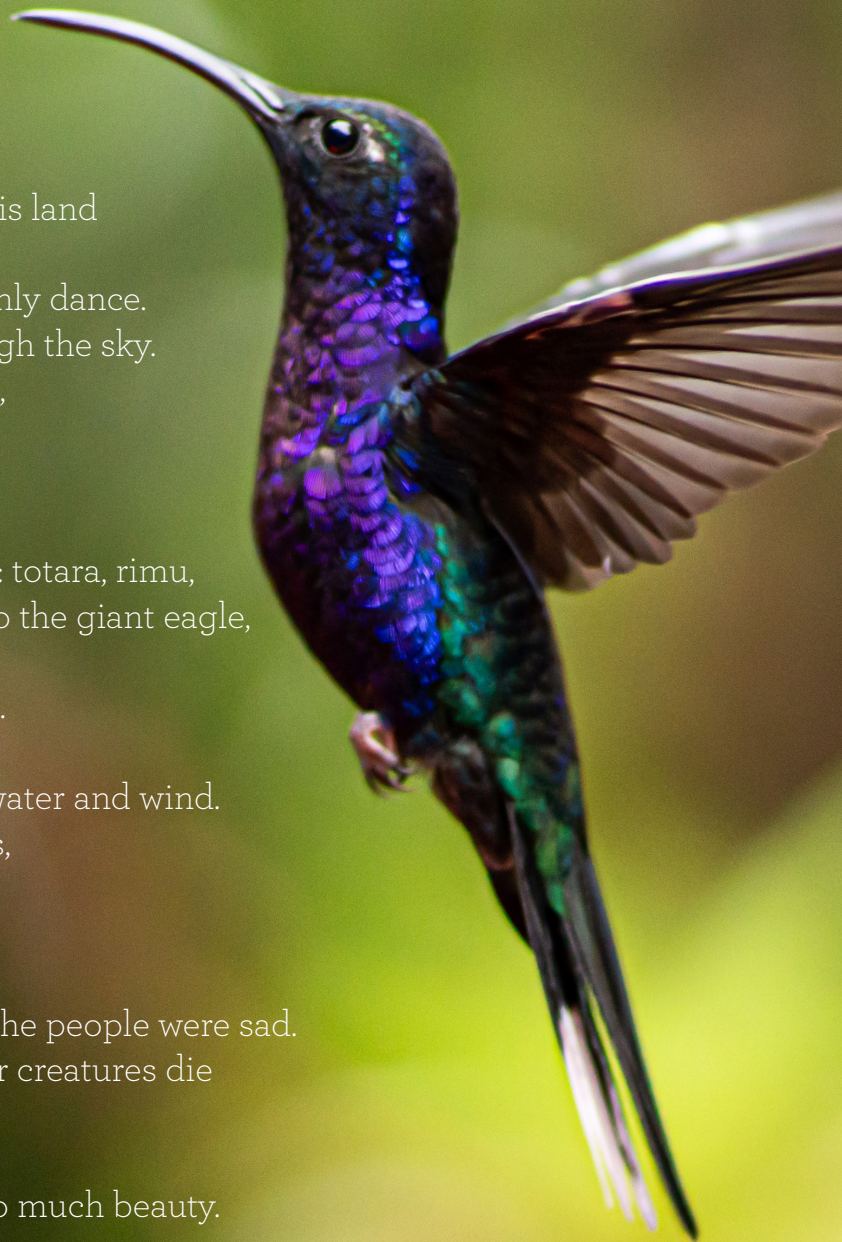
I nga ra o mua, before Maori and Pakeha,
great forests ruled this land, *Tane Mahuta*: totara, rimu,
filled with birds from the smallest fantail to the giant eagle,
from the shy kiwi to the long-legged moa.
The sea was filled with life: whale, kahawai.

Aotearoa, cloaked with cloud, shaped by water and wind.
Nga hau e wha, winds from four directions,
brought people to these islands
and you made them a home here,
fed them from your abundance;
though sometimes you hid your face and the people were sad.
When you take away the breath of life your creatures die
and return to the dust. *Aue, aue!*

Haere, haere, haere ...

we mourn the loss of so many creatures, so much beauty.

Send forth your Spirit again on Aotearoa,
Haere mai, Wairua Tapu, renew the face of this *whenua*,
care for this land,
re-make us who call this our home, *nga iwi o te motu*.
May the glory of the Lord shine forever!
Kororia ki te Atua!



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Source: conversations.net.nz

Prayers

We'd encourage you to pick and choose a few of these prayer ideas, and add your own. It is not intended that you would use them all like a service outline, as you know the worship style of your own congregation. So be creative!

Prayers of thanks

Creator God,
You have made a beautiful world filled with wonder and surprises!

We praise you

Creator God who has gifted us with the blessing of animals, those in the wild, those on farms, those in our own homes

We thank you

Creator God, from the smallest of life we can only see with microscopes, to animals as tall as giraffes

We adore you

We thank you for the tuis we hear in the kowhai trees,
For the bees collecting pollen,
For the insects and wildlife in our land

We give you thanks.

For the joy of our own pets and animals,
For the unconditional love they show us,
For the way they support and care for us too,
For the benefits they are to our health and our spirit.

We give you thanks.

Animal Alphabet

As a fun, collective prayer, go through the alphabet and ask people for animals beginning with a different letter in the alphabet. You could begin by explaining that we're going to build a prayer together, and everyone can help out by thinking about their favourite animal. We're going to make a list of animals from A-Z, and if we're creative enough, we may find one for each letter.

Begin by saying:

Creator God, you're amazing! We thank you for all the amazing animals you have made.

We thank you for:

A - aardvarks, anteaters, ants... etc.

B - bee

C - crocodiles

D - ducks

E - elephants

F - flamingos

G - Giraffe

H - horse

I - iguana

J - jelly fish

K - koala

P - pig

Q - quail

R - rabbit

S - snail

T - turtle

U - urchin

V - vulture

W - whale

X - x-ray tetra (a fish!), xanthippe's shrew, xantus hummingbird, xerus (ground squirrel)... in case you were stuck!

Y - yak

Z - zebra



Confession

God we are a part of your creation
and you have given humankind the special task
of caring for the creatures of the earth, the sky and
the sea.

**Yet the way we live our lives
has led to climate change and destruction
of the environment and has endangered the
habitats of the creatures of the earth.**

Forgive us for making material possessions our
priority
and for obsessing about having the latest models;
forgive us for letting consumerism consume us;
for forgetting the difference between wants and
needs.

**Forgive us for thinking that the creatures
of the earth
are not as important as us;
for knowing that our world is in trouble,
that animals are becoming extinct,
the air is polluted and seas are rising
yet we are doing so little about it;
forgive us for all the times we have said:
“It’s too big, it’s too hard, I can’t make a
difference”**

Forgive our complacency in New Zealand,
our actions which disregard the future,
for complaining about others when we ourselves
are not faultless.

**Forgive our individual acts, our communal
failure, our global apathy.**

Prayers of forgiveness

And yet, we know that we have not always been
faithful caretakers for our animals and pets. Forgive
us when we have not cared for our world, polluted
the waterways and land, impacted the food chain, or
not tended to the animals in our own community.

*You may like to bring forward a selection of symbols
that represent these things, such as water, animal
food, soil.*

Forgive us when we have made excuses and have
not cared for our own animals, when we’ve been
too busy or other things got in the way of caring for
them, or spending time with them.

*You could bring forward a play toy, or a ball, a
walking lead, a dog bed*

**Forgive us when we have not loved them as they
have loved us.**

Forgive us for not caring for animals in the wild,
or when humans have damaged ecosystems in the
name of sport, progress, or production. Forgive us
for having favourites, for not caring for all of your
diverse species. We pray for those animals that
have become extinct or have been added to the
endangered species list.

**Forgive us when we neglect to see all animals
as part of your creation, forgive us when we
neglect to acknowledge that your love beats in
all hearts, and that you give life to all creation**

We also pray for those who work for the protection
of our creation. We pray for those who work as vets,
in the zoo, as conservationists, as policy makers and
those tending to the natural environment. We pray
for farmers, as they care for the animals and land.

**Help us to love and care for those animals
in need**

Leader: God is love. Through Jesus we are free.
May you walk in step with the Spirit, as you learn to
love and care for the world.

Amen.

Benedicte Aotearoa

○ give thanks to our God who is good:

whose love endures forever.

You sun and moon, you stars of the southern sky:

give to our God your thanks and praise.

Sunrise and sunset, night and day:

give to our God your thanks and praise.

All mountains and valleys, grassland and scree,
glacier, avalanche, mist and snow:

give to our God your thanks and praise.

You kauri and pine, rata and kowhai, mosses and ferns:

give to our God your thanks and praise.

Dolphins and kahawai, sealion and crab,
coral, anemone, pipi and shrimp:

give to our God your thanks and praise.

Rabbits and cattle, moths and dogs
kiwi and sparrow and tui and hawk:

give to our God your thanks and praise.

You Maori and Pakeha, women and men,
all who inhabit the long white cloud:

give to our God your thanks and praise.

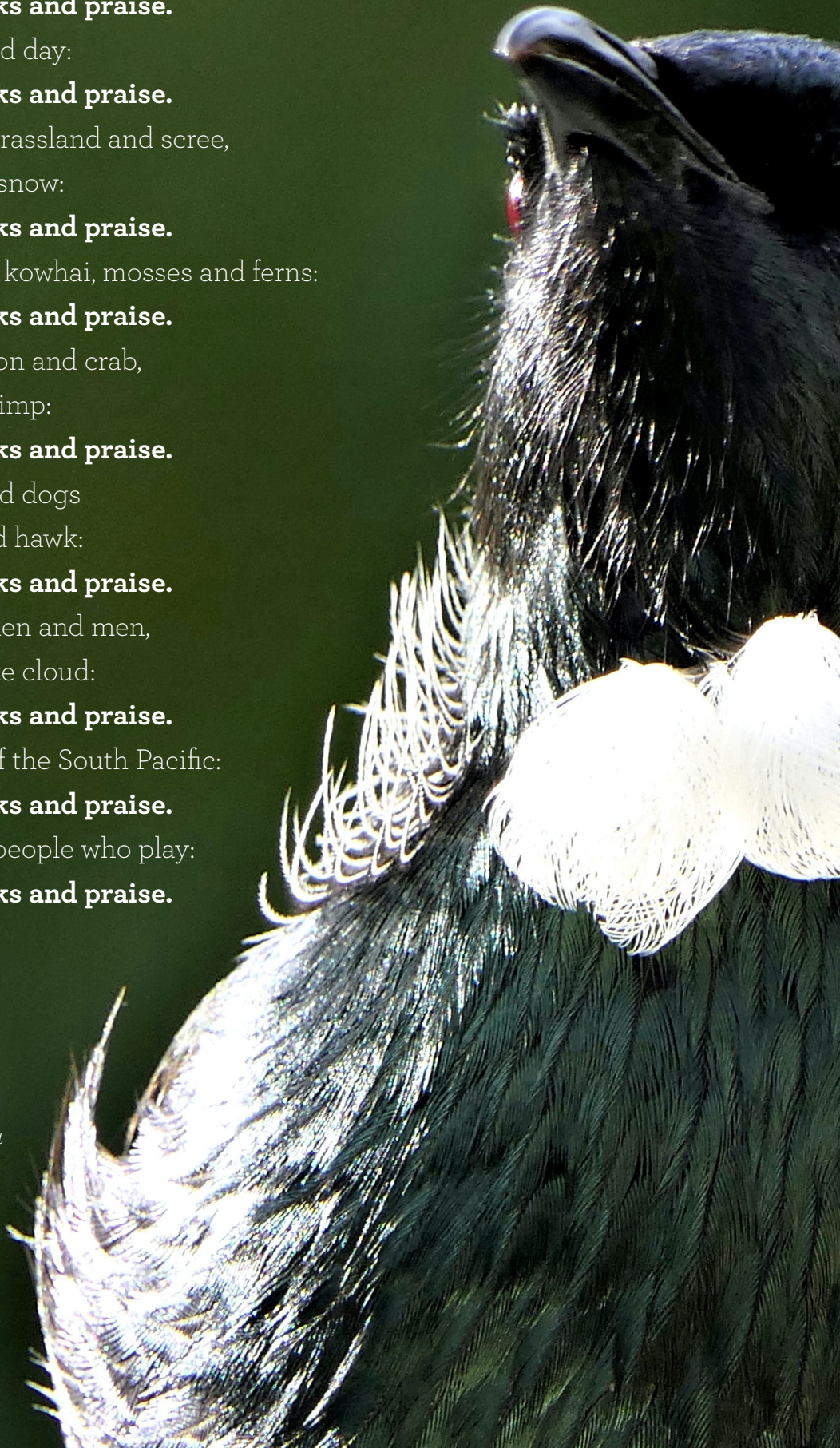
All you saints and martyrs of the South Pacific:

give to our God your thanks and praise.

All children and infants, all people who play:

give to our God your thanks and praise.

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He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa



Blessings

As you come to a time of blessing the animals, consider how this would be done easily in your church or space. Some churches prefer for people to line up and come forward to the front, but it may be more appropriate for you to circulate and bless the animals where they are.

The minister or leader circulates around the church, asks the name of the animal and places a hand on it (if appropriate) and blesses it.

Blessing 1

(name) you were created by God, and you are loved by God. May you and your human family experience joy and companionship together, and continue to be a blessing to each other.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.'

Blessing 2

(name) may you be blessed in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

May you and your owner enjoy life together and find joy with the God who created you.

Blessing 3

(name) may you be blessed in the name of a loving, creator God
May you and your family enjoy life together and find joy with the God who created you.

If a person has brought a photograph of their animal or a cuddly toy rather than the animal itself, then bless the owner, and have them pass on this blessing when they return home.

*Other questions you could ask:
what is special about your pet?
Do you have any special prayer requests?*



And a final blessing

Creator God,
who made an abundance of amazing creatures
Bless the furry and feathered
Bless the fins and flippers,
Bless the paws and scales of all creatures great and small.

Bless the animals who curl themselves around our hearts, the friends and companions who welcome, love and comfort us.

Remind us to care for your wild earth, and all you have entrusted into our care.

Amen

Dismissal

Go now to care for creation.
Go to nurture the rivers the land and the sea.
Go to bring life to the world.
Go now to love and serve the Lord.
Go in peace.

Amen! We go in the name of Christ.

Location, location, location

The creativity of this service means that you can gather in a variety of creative spaces. Perhaps your church is a great space for this pet service, or you maybe it would be better to gather outside in your church grounds. An outdoor setting may be more comfortable for some animals than a building they have never been in, so you may like to consider what type of space would be best suited for your community. Perhaps a shared public space might be an option too, such as a local park, dell, or field.

Taking an offering

Taking up an offering for a local animal shelter or charity may be a way of giving back to those who care for animals in your community. Check in with your local HUHA, SPCA or Cat's protection league to see if donations of money, cans, pet food or other items are needed. Advertise this offering in advance, so people know what to bring.

Take away

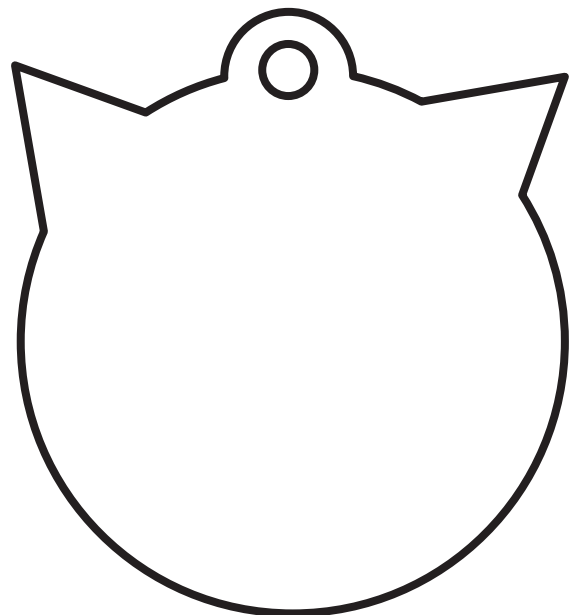
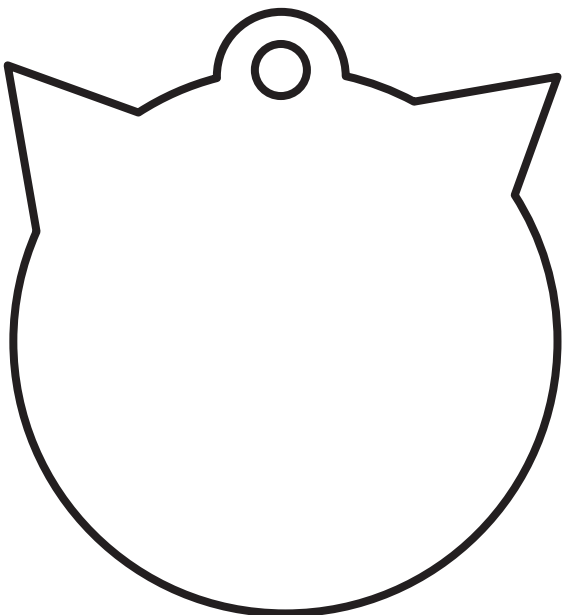
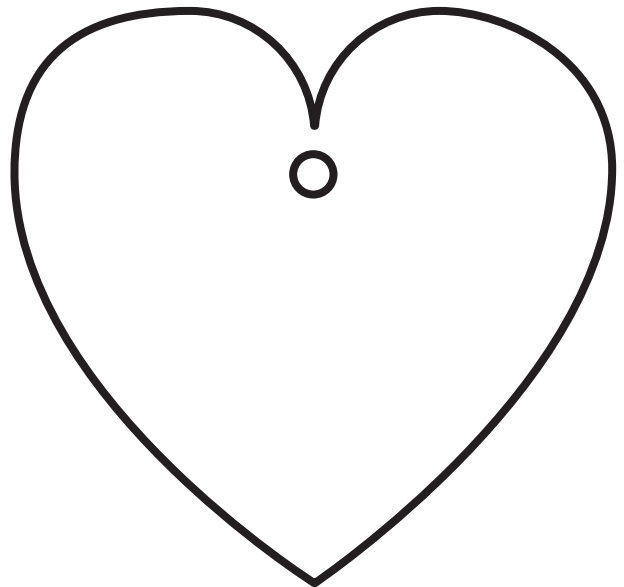
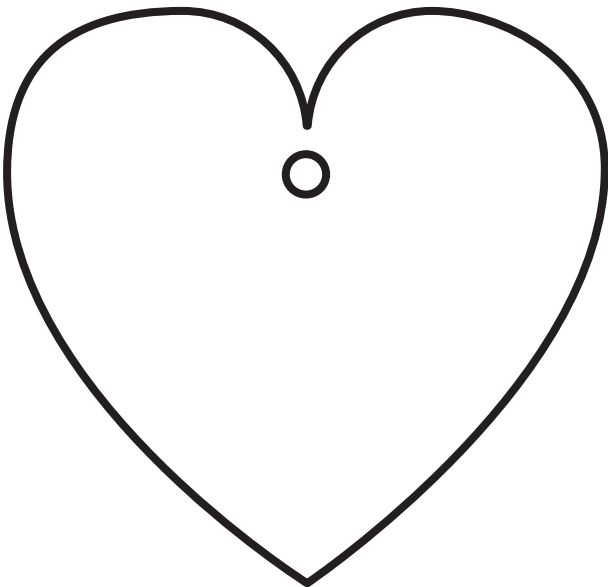
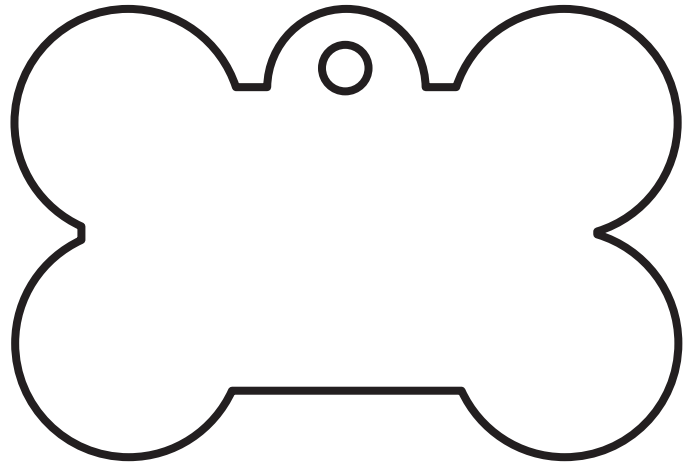
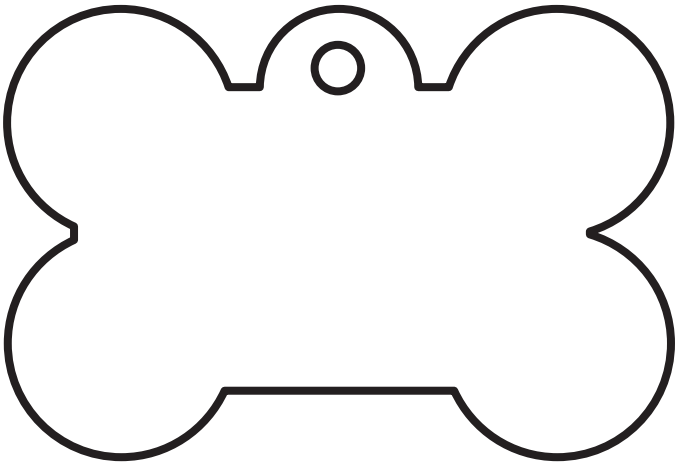
Consider having a little memento for families to take home with them – a magnet, pet tag, book mark, or treat for their pet.

Let us know how you get on!

**Please send any feedback and ideas
to hello@strandz.org.nz**



Pet Tag Template



Paw Print Template

