

Educating for *Laudato Si'* **Experiential Learning Session: Care for Dogs**

FSE theme: Relationship

***Laudato Si'* Action Plan Goals:** Ecological Spirituality, Ecological Education

Age Group: children about 6-10 years old

Learning Goals:

- experience and discuss reverence for animals and creation
- work together to learn how to care for dogs and respect the proper relationship between humans and animals

Materials needed: Choose, if possible, *two* dogs with docile personalities, familiar with people, one of small size and one bigger; have a space to observe the dog's behavior and walk around with him/her; dog hairbrushes; dog food and treats; first aid kit.

General Outline of Experience

1. Gathering and Prayer
 - a. Saints and Dogs: Read or tell the story of St. Francis and the wolf of Gubbio OR the story of St. Roche.
 - i. Considering reading these short accounts before the learning experience and choosing one of the stories to tell in your own words:
 1. St. Francis: <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/franciscan-spirit-blog/st-francis-and-the-taming-of-the-wolf>
 2. St. Roche: <https://www.catholiccompany.com/magazine/st-roch-patron-of-dogs-6114#>
 - ii. Discuss the story with children. Possible questions:
 1. Why was the wolf eating people? What made him stop?
 2. How did St. Francis and, later, the townspeople, show love to the wolf? How did the wolf show love to the people?
 3. God sent the dog to St. Roche to care for him in his illness. How do dogs care for people? How do people care for dogs?
 - b. Prayer expressing gratitude for the gift of animals and particularly dogs, who can become very close and affectionate with people.
2. Opening Discussion
 - a. Pair up the participants and ask them to share about their dogs with their partner. If they don't have a dog, what has been their experience with dogs belonging to other people? Would they like to have a dog? What kind?
 - b. After a few minutes come back to the whole group discussion.
 - i. Ask the children in which ways dogs can be helpful to human beings.
 - ii. Explain about the bond that can be developed between dogs and humans.
 1. In the beginning God gave Adam and Eve all kinds of creatures to show his love and care.
 2. God gave them for us to care for them but also be helped by them. Emphasize the reciprocal and un-equal nature of this relationship.

3. What does it mean that Adam named all the animals in the garden of Eden? He studied them and understood them, so he could name them and recognize the gifts they have that can help human beings.
 - iii. Offer examples of how dogs can be used for very important tasks in human life: e.g., police dogs, dogs helping the blind, watchdogs, dog therapy, etc.
 - c. *Guiding quotation to use with older children: Laudato Si* n. 11: “Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. ... His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists.”
 - i. Paraphrase: St. Francis helps us see that our relationship with creation, with animals, is more than about usefulness or analyzing animals. It is about showing love, about recognizing that each part of the universe comes from God. That is why we have affection for and care for everything around us.
3. Orientation and Performance of the Activity
- a. Introduce the dogs.
 - b. Let the children pet the dogs.
 - c. Let each child walk a dog and observe his or her behaviour. Discuss what they notice in this process: what helps the dog, what annoys him/her, what the dog likes, and what the dog seems to dislike.
 - d. Let the children play with the dog: what toys can be used, what he/she seems to like and dislike.
 - e. Let the children brush the dog.
 - f. Let the children reward the dog with a treat.
 - g. *Transition:* As we work with the dog, we learn to observe the dog and respect his/her instincts.
 - i. Discuss what instincts were observed during the time spent with the dog.
4. Discussion, focusing on how human beings should care for dogs:
- a. Refer to all creation, including our pets, as being a gift of God. God desires that we respect the gift that he gives – in this case, dogs – and that we not neglect or disregard the gift.
 - b. Emphasize the following practical guidance in caring for dogs:
 - i. Feed your dog regularly and properly, making water always available.
 - ii. Walk your dog on a leash.
 - iii. Pet your dog regularly, and give him/her regular attention.
 - iv. Wash and brush your dog regularly.
 - v. Do not leave your dog in the car.
 - vi. Prepare a proper shelter for your dog.
 - vii. Provide medical care on a regular basis and/or when necessary.
 - viii. Do not abandon your dog.
5. Wrap up

- a. Let the children clean up the space, collect the tools and toys, wash their hands well and have a snack while the dogs rest. Explain to them that they do not need to share their snacks with the dogs. Why?
 - b. Pray grace. Enjoy!
6. Integration of the Experience. Choose from these options:
- a. Ask the participants how they liked their time with the dog.
 - i. What was the most fun about the experience? The most difficult?
 - ii. What did they learn about caring for a dog?
 - iii. What did they learn from the dog's behaviour?
 - iv. Older children: What differences are there between caring for a dog and for a child?
 - b. Discuss the introductory stories of St. Francis and St. Roche with the children, and elicit their thoughts and experiences about care, or being fed, or helping others.
 - c. Guide participants to reflect on love and care shown to animals as an example of care for those who are "dependent" and more vulnerable.
 - d. Discuss how difficult it can be to lose a dog.