



WHAT IS HUMANE LEADERSHIP?

REV. PAULA T. WEBB

To most people, animal ministry is when their local church, temple, or community hosts a “St. Francis” day in October, where there is a blessing of the animals ~ whether the animals are present or the blessing is just done in general. And, that is a good start to help others understand the need for blessings to our partners in the animal kingdom.

However, what I am getting here goes deeper than a one-day event. Animal ministry is a small but growing field of individuals and groups that know that animal ministry is a daily job; a presence of being; a mindset. A mindset of believing that all living things are created by God and therefore require our respect and honor ~ no matter what that life form looks, feels, smells or sounds like.

For instance ~ how many times have you seen a beautiful flower or plant, and wondered at its beauty? How many times have you seen a dog wagging its tail and think how nice to see a happy dog? How many times have you seen a field of cotton or corn or some sort of grain waving in the wind, and think how pretty the plants look moving to their own symphony? How many times have you thought about becoming a vegetarian because of all the animal cruelty in factory farming?

All these thoughts and more are animal ministry. Anytime you feel any living thing is beautiful and respect and honor it ~ is a ministry. And to take this even further, to join the ranks of those practicing animal ministry would simply mean, you love all living things, believe they were created by God, and vow to do your best to honor and respect them all. Pretty simple!

There are many ways to practice animal ministry. You can simply have your own pet(s); you can volunteer at a local animal shelter; you can do animal blessings at your own church; you can donate to animal charities, and so forth. Or ~ you can take your love for all life and develop your own animal ministry through what it means to you to respect all life. And one of the ways to do that is to enroll in some sort of animal ministry program.

Most of these programs are geared toward those wanting to set up some type of animal ministry through their current ministry. However, you can be an advocate of animal ministry without being ordained. That is the beauty of animal ministry. Now, you might ask ~ if you don’t have to be a minister to be called to do it, then why call it animal ministry? Simple. The very word, “minister” means to take care of, to administer to ~ and don’t we all “minister” to others all the time? We minister to our children, our family, our friends in many ways each and every day ~ and even to total strangers through a smile or a nod. And, so to those wishing to enter in the field of animal ministry ~ it is no different. The only difference is that most of the creatures you will work with will respond with a wagging tail, or purring, or a look at you from eyes that have ancient knowledge that will tell you without a doubt, that they appreciate your being there for them.

The other side of animal ministry is when one of these beloved creatures is no longer with us. Then an animal minister must be educated in the ways of grief, consolation, healing and renewal. So, animal ministry is not just about our partners in the animal kingdom, it is also ministering to their human counterparts when their beloved is ill or has passed over.

Keep in mind ~ a love for animals is just the beginning of animal ministry. If we are to help create a society that no longer accepts cruelty to any life form, it must begin by education and example. What I mean by example is this ~ providing counseling for those with ill or dying pets; offering ceremony for a deceased pet; consoling those whose own minister/priest/rabbi will not when their beloved pet has died ~ letting them know without a doubt that they will see their pet again in Heaven. And it also entails making informed choices about your eating and lifestyle habits. You might ask yourself if you would you buy free-range eggs that cost a bit more from humane farms, and inform others if they ask, that by purchasing these types of free-range animal products, or by becoming a vegetarian, you know you are helping sustain a normal life for our partners in the animal kingdom. But most importantly, it is living what you believe. The time has come when animal ministry must make its presence known within society; in a way that cannot be sloughed off. And this is done through a professional and educated approach ~ not an emotional one.

Animal ministry is a state of being. One way to find out if this path is one you should consider following is simple: Make a list of everything you WOULD do for a pet or any other animal. Then make a list of everything you would NOT do for a pet or any other animal. If the “woulds” outweigh the “nots” then I would suggest you consider an animal ministry program. Because animal ministry entails the belief and lifestyle that NOTHING is too much for our partners in the animal kingdom. Your animal ministry can entail all aspects of animal ministry ~ or what you choose to incorporate into it. Meaning, if you just want to provide grief counseling, then do so. If you also want to include how to make informed choices with regard to lifestyle, then add that as well.

In closing, I will give you a good example. Our society thinks nothing of spending thousands of dollars for human funerals, right? The more money that is spent equals how much that person was loved, right? And yet ~ society ridicules and calls crazy, anyone who even considers having a funeral for their beloved pet. A part of their family. A family member that is just as, if not more, loved than their human counterparts. Why is that? Because society still maintains that animals are “less-than,” and therefore do not require the same amount of respect.

I am, by example, changing that. Through my animal ministry and my animal ministry programs for others, I will be that shining example that every living thing is created by God and therefore will be respected as such. Do people think I’m crazy? Maybe, but that’s ok! Why? Because I know I am living my animal ministry the way God intended for me to do.

For more information on Humane Leadership programs:

www.globalpublishinghouse.com & www.paulatwebb.com