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**Noah, Guardian of Creation**

Our faith inspires us to protect all of Creation

**General Objective**: Learn to value and to safeguard God’s gift of biodiversity.

**Specific Objectives**:

* Become aware of the interdependence of each creature in our environment
* Consider action plans for the conservation of biodiversity
* Explore resources from Christian tradition that inspire us to take care of God’s Creation

**Equipment**

* Projector and screen or white wall
* Laptop, extension cord, power bar
* Computer loudspeakers
* Videos
* Printed pictures of Canadian animals to colour (Annex 3)
* Crayons or coloured pencils or felt tip pens
* Large white banner for a mural depicting a countryside with hills and lake
* Coloured strips to form a rainbow
* Glue or tape
* Two large panels or paper sheets
* Printed pledge forms (Annex 3)

**Programme**

1. Start: Each creature plays an important role (30 min.) ( All)
2. Bible Study (35 min. Groups)
3. Our Role in Creation (30 min. All)
4. Appropriate the Message (20 min. All)
5. Thanksgiving & Dismissal (5 min. All)

**Intergenerational Reflection**

Just as helping the poor and visiting the sick are basic to the Christian agenda, protecting the environment and sustaining animal species are important elements of the Christian response to God’s call for the earth. In following 900 species of wildlife in Canada from 1970-2014, the 2017 Living Canada Report found that half of them have seen their populations decline. For species with diminishing numbers, the average loss was 83% of their population. A list of Canadian plants and animals ‘at risk’ or of ‘special concern’ can be found at: <http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/sar/index/default_e.cfm>

A similar note about putting Creation at risk is struck by Pope Francis: “Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see ...The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right*.” Laudato Sí, 2015, Par. 33*

The story of Noah reveals a man of God who answers the call to protect the multiplicity of animal life on earth (biodiversity). And us, what do we feel? Faced with this reality, what do we do? Christian tradition puts various references at our disposition such as passages from the First and the New Testaments, a wealth of Eucharistic and other prayers, the encyclical of Pope Francis and statements from other church leaders as well as the witness of the lives of ecological Christians like St. Francis of Assisi. What do we find in our faith that moves us to take action in favour of our earth?

**1. START: Each creature plays an important role (30 min.) (All)**

As people enter, the Canticle of Daniel video/videos could be playing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lYbDUR4pMs0> and/or:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWzqPov0k3E>

Welcome and Introduction (5 min.)

I want to ask a question with implications for the current situation of our world: In Creation, are living creatures, human beings and the environment interconnected? What kinds of connections do you see?

This interconnection is illustrated in a video about the reintroduction of wolves into Yellowstone National Park after an absence of over 70 years. The reintegration of the wolves impacted the entire ecosystem. Changes in the terrain created viable conditions for new species to set up residence and even the river changed its course.

Show the video: How Wolves Change Rivers (4:34 min.) <https://www.wimp.com/how-wolves-change-rivers/>

Discussion: reactions, heightened awareness (10 min.)

What surprises you in the video?

What did you learn from it?

Presentation of the Story of Noah

The video we just saw helps us realize that each creature counts in Creation and that the disappearance of one species has an impact on other creatures. Does God, the creator of heaven and earth, want a world filled with a multiplicity of life? Of course! This is why he entrusted to a man of faith, Noah, the responsibility of preserving animal life. Let’s listen to Noah’s story. (Read the story of Noah in chapters 6-9 of Genesis and/or watch a video on Noah’s Ark.)

<https://vimeo.com/56055146> Noah’s Ark, 5:09 min. or

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAsfOcGjgoM>, Noah’s Ark, 9:43 min.

With the new covenant between God, humanity and all creatures which God seals with a rainbow, it’s as if we are all together in one huge boat!

Jesus recalls this covenant at his last meal when he says: “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” (Lk 22:20) Jesus also promises: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”. (Mat 28: 20)

**2. Biblical Reflection**

Invite the participants to separate into age groups of *younger* *than* *12 years* or *12 years and older*.

**- 12 Years Group (30 min.)**

Discussion: You can stimulate the exchange of ideas with questions such as:

* Why did God bring 2 animals of each species into the Ark?
* Why did God want all the animals saved and none left behind?
* Why did God place a rainbow in the sky at the end of the story?
* What do we learn about God from this story?

(Material helpful to the discussion can be found in Annex 1)

Pass out copies of Psalm 148: 7, 9-10 and read these verses out loud together.

*Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps!*

*Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!*

*Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!*

*Let all that breathes praise the Lord!*

Ask the youngsters how they can praise God. You can expect a variety of answers like: by singing, dancing, praying.

**Mural Animals**

Have on hand: crayons, scissors, drawings of Canadian animals which you have selected and printed out from: <http://www.northbynature.com/coloring_pages.htm>

God loves all his Creation. We will praise him by making a mural of a landscape. You may each choose 2 animals from the collection of animal drawings and colour them. Then, some of the older children can cut them out. Please help each other out.

**+ 12 Years Group (30 min.)**

Discussion Questions (see Annex 1)

* What seemed odd to you in the story?
* Is it even possible to build such a big boat? Why?
* Is this account historically valid? Why?
* Its truth applies on a different level. How does this story respond to today’s existential questions?
* In your opinion, why were animals “of every species” brought into the Ark? (Refer to the Introduction video on wolves)
* What does God’s determination to save all animals tell us about him?
* What is the meaning of the rainbow at the end of the story?
* How does this apply to your life?

Give each person a copy of Eucharistic Prayer 111 and read it out loud together.

You are indeed Holy, O Lord and all you have created

rightly gives you praise,

for through your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ,

by the power of the Holy Spirit,

you give life to all things and make them holy

Give him praise! How do you think we can praise God in our everyday lives?

**Mural Landscape**

We will praise him by making a mural depicting his Creation. (Supplies needed: coloured pencils or crayons and a long sheet of paper) I invite you to put your creative talents to work. We need you to draw a landscape with hills, a lake, trees and a rainbow. Don’t worry about the animals. The youngsters from the other group will supply them later.

After the landscape is drawn, the groups come together to share the insights they have gained.

**3. Our Role in Creation** (30 min. All)

Break up into small groups of mixed ages.

Ask one group to brainstorm to identify and “list the things we do either directly or indirectly that are harmful to the environment”.

Ask another group to brainstorm to identify and “list the actions we can do to protect the environment”. (See examples in Annex 2)

Bring the groups together to share the results of their brainstorming.

Read this Bible verse out loud: “And Jesus said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” (Mark 16:15)

Invite each person to make a commitment to answer the call of Jesus. Everyone takes a moment to reflect and then write out: “For the love of God’s Creation, I pledge to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” (See models in Annex 3)

Complete the mural by drawing a rainbow and sticking the coloured animal drawings under it. While the finishing touches are being added, some music could be played in the background (Such as “All Things Bright and Beautiful”) (10 min.)

**4. Appropriate the Message** (20 min. All)

Everyone has a good look at the mural. Should we add anything else to it?

Take a moment for spontaneous prayers of praise, of thanksgiving, of petition. (The Canticle of the Creatures by St. Francis of Assisi could be an inspiration).

Make a big human chain, holding each other by the hand, to show that together we are caretakers of Creation and that we count on each other to sustain this Creation of God for a very long time to come.

As Pope Francis writes: “I ask all Christians to recognize … that the power and light of the grace we have received may also be evident in our relationship to other creatures and to the world around us … so that we help nurture that sublime fraternity with all creation which St. Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied*. “ Laudato Sί”, Par. 221*

Show one of the videos of the Canticle of Daniel (**1.** **Start**)

**5. Thanksgiving and Dismissal** (5 min. All)

**Annex 1** Discussion Material for **2.**

* What sounds strange in the story?

(Answers: the enormous size of the boat; predators and prey in close proximity.)

* Is it even possible to build such a huge boat? Why not? (Answer: No. Spanish galleons made of wood were half this size. Efforts to build bigger ships failed and came apart in the ocean because the wood couldn’t resist the pressure.)
* Is this story historically valid? Why?

(Answer: Biblical scholars (exegetes) categorize the flood story as a mythical account. It is concerned with treating existential questions rather than with describing actual historical events.)

* The story contains another kind of validity. Are responses to modern existential questions found in this story?

(Answer: yes. Does God love animals? Like Noah, do modern humans have a responsibility toward animals?)

* How many animal couples did God bring into the Ark?

(Answer: We don’t know, but we do know that each species was represented.)

* In your opinion, why was each species saved? (Some indications are found in the introductory video of the Yellowstone wolves.)
* (Answer: because each species plays an essential role in nature.)

What does it tell us about God, that he wants the creatures to be saved?

(Answer: God loves the animals he created. He is a God of love.)

* What is the meaning of the rainbow at the end of the story?
* (Answer: the establishment of a covenant between God, humanity and all creatures.)

How does this affect your life?

(Answer: it makes me want to learn about and to protect God’s creatures, as Noah did.)

**Annex 2** Discussion Material for **3.**

Identify behaviours that can be harmful to the environment (10 min.):

* We eat vegetables that have been treated with pesticides, but this also kills birds.
* We print on paper which is often produced through deforestation.
* We habitually use cars to go here and there, but burning fuel causes climate change.
* We eat fish which often comes from overfishing depleted ocean fish stocks.
* We drink bottled water and the plastic bottles pollute nature and kill seabirds and whales.

Give examples of behaviours that protect endangered species and the environment.

* Eat organic (pesticide-free) fruits and vegetables,
* Reduce the number of copies you print,
* Walk, bike, take public transport to get around,
* Eat fish bearing “sustainable seafood” certification,
* Drink water from the faucet that can be carried around in a lovely reusable bottle.

**Did you know?**

The Greenpeace ecological boat, “Rainbow Warrior”, is not only green, but painted with a rainbow and a dove in direct reference to the Ark and to Noah’s vocation as protector of biodiversity.

**Annex 3 Model of the Written Commitment**

For the love of God’s Creation, I pledge to . . . .

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