



The Episcopal Thread

In *A People Called Episcopalians*
(Atlanta: St. Luke's Press 1994, p. 24)

John Westerhoff says, "Anglicans have a reverence for and take a delight in

the natural earthy rhythms of life, the seasons and their changes, the natural world and all of creation." This reverence comes from the focus of Anglicans on God's entry into human life and history. Because God created the world and pronounced it good, Episcopalians see the natural world also as good and as God's gift to us. Perhaps this is why St. Francis, lover of all creation, is so beloved by Episcopalians.

Many hymns reflect this love of creation. We may sing the song whose lyrics are attributed to St. Francis himself: "All creatures of our God and King," (Hymn 400, *The Hymnal 1982*, New York: NY: Church Publishing, 1985). Another popular hymn is Hymn 405, "All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small."



Gathering

Have children gather special rocks or flowers from outside for today's Prayer. Then, as

children begin to enter the classroom, engage them in a simple activity that relates to today's lesson.

Younger children might enjoy creating clay objects using play dough or drawing pictures of God's creation, St. Francis's great love. Older children always enjoy a few minutes of fellowship time before the class begins. This social time is important for building relationships and community.

When all the children have arrived, lead them in a prayer to begin the class. Here is a suggestion:

- Thank you, Lord, for bringing us together this glorious Sunday. Turn our minds and our hearts toward you so we can learn to love you as you love us. Bless all of the children who are here today, in Jesus' name. *Amen.*



Telling Today's Story

There are many stories that you can tell about St. Francis. On the next page are just a few. To bring the stories to life for the children, use

one or more story aids. You'll find suggestions on pages 2-3 under Storytelling Enhancements in the Appendix, also found on the Website.

Francis' Conversion

The leper hospital lay near Assisi. On walks, Francis sometimes passed by the hospital. The mere sight of it filled him with horror and repulsion. Then one day, God told him, "Francis! Everything that you have loved you must now hate, and all that you wish to avoid will now become sweetness and joy to you."

As Francis was riding his horse and thinking about this, he saw a leper on the road before him. At first he was going to turn and run away as fast as he could. Then he remembered the words that God had spoken to him. "What you used to hate shall be to you joy and sweetness." And what had he hated more than the lepers and their horrible disease? Now was the time for him to believe God and to obey. Francis jumped off his horse, gave the leper some money and hugged him. Then, just as the Lord had said, sweetness, happiness and joy streamed into his soul.

The next day, Francis went to the leper hospital and gave alms and kisses to all of the lepers there.

Francis and Creation

Francis was making a trip when he came to a place where a flock of birds—doves, crows and jackdaws—had gathered. When Francis saw them, he left his friends in the road and ran toward the birds. When he was close to them, he greeted them, and they did not fly away. So he begged them to listen to the word of God: "My brother birds, you should praise your Creator enthusiastically and always love God." The birds gazed at him, so Francis touched their heads and bodies and blessed them before sending them on their way.

Francis and the Wolf

There was in a city a large and fierce wolf that was so hungry that it ate not only animals but also people. All the people in the town were very frightened. They took weapons with them everywhere they went, as if they were going to war. But even with their weapons, they were not able to escape the

sharp teeth of the wolf when they were so unlucky as to meet it on the road. The people grew so afraid that hardly anyone dared go outside the city gate.

St. Francis was visiting there one day and decided to go out and meet the wolf. The people warned him not to go, for he surely would be attacked and killed. But St. Francis ignored their pleas. Putting all his faith in the Lord, he went bravely out to meet the wolf where it lived.

The wolf came running toward him with its mouth open. St. Francis made the sign of the cross toward it, and the power of God stopped the wolf in its tracks.

St. Francis said, "Come to me, Brother Wolf. In the name of Christ, I order you not to hurt me or anyone." The wolf closed its jaws, lowered its head and lay down at St. Francis' feet. St. Francis then made peace between the wolf and the people, making the wolf promise not to hurt any animal or person ever again. The wolf promised by raising its front paw and putting it in the saint's hand. Then the wolf began to walk along beside St. Francis like a pet.

From that day on, the wolf and the people lived peacefully together. The wolf went from door to door for food, hurting no one; the people fed it gladly and not a single dog barked at it. When the wolf grew old and died, the people grieved because its peaceful kindness and patience reminded them of the holiness of St. Francis.

After telling the stories, proceed to today's Prayer, saving any discussion for later, while having snacks.



Prayer

Set up a small worship center in your classroom.

Materials

small table with a cloth to cover it

2 candles or a single large Christ candle

matches

Bible

cross

optional: flowers (real, fake or handmade by the children)

Have the children set up a simple altar with the materials listed above. Invite them to place on the altar the rocks or flowers that they collected before class along with any drawings or crafts that they created during Gathering time. Then light the candles.

Read a few verses of scripture to help the children connect the story that they just heard with the Bible. In this case, we have chosen passages that connect to St. Francis' love of creation, especially the animals under our care. If working with younger children, you may want to shorten the reading to one or two verses.

An especially appropriate reading for this day is:

Psalm 104:10-23 (a song of thankfulness for creation)

Other suggestions for the reading:

Genesis 2:18-24 (Adam names the animals)

Genesis 9:8-17 (Covenant with Noah)

Help familiarize the children with our liturgy by doing the reading as it is done in church. Read as follows:

Reader: A reading from the book of Psalms (or Genesis): (*Read the selected passage.*)

Reader: The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Invite the children to sit in a circle and join in prayer. Say a brief prayer yourself then invite prayers from each child in the circle:

- Invite prayers of thanks to God for God's presence in our lives during the past week. Ask the children to share any experiences in which they have felt that God has guided them.
- Welcome prayers of intercession. Especially on this day when we celebrate the life and ministry of one who served the poor, encourage the children to pray for all those in your community and in the world who are poor.
- Ask if anyone has had a birthday or celebrated a special day during the past week and give thanks for these special occasions.
- End the prayer time by praying together the Lord's Prayer.

Carefully extinguish the candles.



Sharing

Pass out snacks and say a simple grace, such as this

singing grace:

- Thank you, God, for the world so sweet,
Thank you, God, for the food we eat,
Thank you, God, for the birds that sing,
Thank you, God, for everything. *Amen.*

Or encourage children to share a favorite table grace from home or camp.

This is a good time, while sharing a snack, to begin discussing today's stories. Encourage the children to look at everything in thankfulness for the goodness of God's creation. Help them wonder at the marvelous diversity in the world and be joyful. Even the food that they are eating may be relished with joy.

You might also talk about how St. Francis called the birds and other animals his brothers and sisters because, he said, "We all have the same Father." In other words, we are all one family with God. Invite the children to talk about their pets, how they love them, how they are part of their family.

St. Francis loved all the earth equally. Can we love all the earth and all the creatures and people on the earth equally? You can see the beauty in animals such as the lion and kitten, the peacock and the zebra, your own family dog or hamster. But what about the ones that scare us, like spiders and snakes? What about the ones that can harm us, like the shark and crocodile? What about the ones that are just plain inconvenient because they eat our tulips or get into our garbage or stink up our garden—the raccoons, the skunks, the moles? What about the ones that we think are ugly—worms and giant octopuses, green mamba snakes? Can you see the beauty in these creatures? Can you love them?

If you have a recording of the hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King," you may want to play it at this time as background music and discussion opener. Or you might teach the children "All Creatures Great and Small," Hymn 405 in *The Hymnal 1982* (New York: NY: Church Publishing, 1985).



Memorization

There is no memorization for this lesson.



Weaving Our Faith

Before your closing prayer, help the children pull the strands of the lesson together by asking questions such as:

- Who did we talk about today?
- What stories did we hear about St. Francis?
- What does St. Francis teach us about God and about God's world?

Encourage the children to remember key words and phrases from today's story, such as:

- *creation*
- *creatures*
- *humble*
- *gentle*



Closing Prayer

Before the children leave, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service or back to their homes with God's love and blessing. A good closing prayer for this lesson would be the prayer traditionally attributed to St. Francis (*BCP*, p. 833):

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
 Where there is injury, pardon;
 Where there is discord, union;
 Where there is doubt, faith;
 Where there is despair, hope;
 Where there is darkness, light;
 Where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be
 consoled as to console,
 to be understood as to understand;
 to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
 and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

Or say this children's prayer:

Lord, we thank you for giving to us St. Francis and his love for your world. Send us now back to our homes where we can love the world as he did, especially our families, our friends, our neighbors and our pets. This we ask in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

End the class with a dismissal that is used in church, such as:

- Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

The children respond:

- Thanks be to God!



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

PINE CONE TREATS

for Preschool, Primary

Children make pine cone bird feeders filled with a treat that the birds will love.

Materials:

- large pine cones
- peanut butter
- cornmeal
- wire
- plastic knives or spoons
- plastic bags or wax paper

Preparation:

Mix together equal amounts of peanut butter and cornmeal. Each bird feeder will hold around 2 tablespoons. The cornmeal keeps the peanut butter from being sticky and is safer for birds to eat.

Directions:

Hand out the pine cones and invite each child to make a bird feeder. Help the younger children as needed. Give the children these directions:

1. Tie a piece of wire around your pine cone for hanging from a tree.
2. Spoon the peanut butter mixture in between the pine cone petals.
3. Wrap the bird feeder in a plastic bag or wax paper to take home.



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

EGG CARTON CAFETERIAS FOR THE BIRDS

for Primary, Elementary

Children make bird feeders out of egg cartons, filling the cups with a variety of bird foods. Birds can select their favorites at this cafeteria.

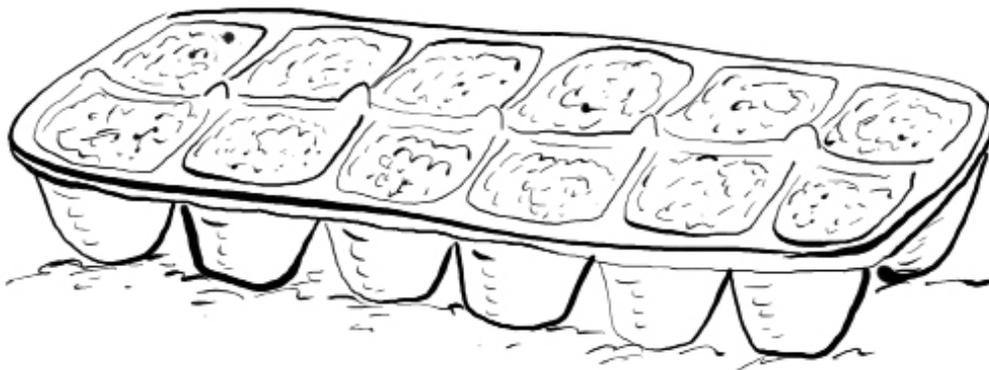
Materials:

- styrofoam egg cartons
- sand or gravel
- small nails
- variety of bird food (cracked corn, wild birdseed, sunflower seeds, etc.)
- scissors

Directions:

Hand out egg cartons and invite each child to make a bird feeder. Give the children these directions:

1. Cut off and discard the top of the egg carton.
2. Use a small nail to punch a few drainage holes in the bottom of each egg cup.
3. Fill two of the cups with sand or gravel. This will help keep the lightweight feeder from blowing away and will also provide grit for the birds to eat.
4. Fill the rest of the cups with bird food of different kinds.





WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

MILK CARTON BIRD FEEDERS

for Elementary, Intermediate

Children make covered bird feeders for the hungry birds.

Materials:

half-gallon milk cartons
paper clips
brass paper fasteners
wire coat hangers
felt-tipped pens
nails
scissors

Directions:

Hand out the milk cartons and invite each child to make a covered bird feeder. Give the children these directions:

1. With a felt tip pen, mark cutting lines on the milk carton for the opening. The bottom of the feeder should be about 1 ¼" deep. Cut out, leaving the top to be folded back for the roof.
2. Straighten the paper clip and push it through the carton about 1 ¼" from the gable. Bend the clip inside the carton to secure. Insert the other end of the clip through the feeder roof and bend it back to hold.
3. Push paper fasteners through the peak to seal the top of the feeder. Punch a hole in the peak with a nail to hold a coat hanger hook.
4. Punch a few small holes in the bottom of feeder to let out moisture.

Give each child a coat hanger to take home with with his or her bird feeder. Instruct the children to fill their feeders with mixed bird seed or sunflower seed and hang them from tree branches. Remind the children that birds also like bread crumbs, nutmeats and dog biscuits.



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

NATURE PLAQUES for Primary

Children make clay plaques imprinted with objects from nature.

Materials:

- self-drying clay
- natural objects such as pine cones, leaves, twigs and rocks
- pointed sticks, pencils or nails
- string, ribbon or twine
- wax paper

Directions:

Hand out lumps of clay and invite each child to make a nature plaque. Give the children these directions:

1. Press or roll the lump of clay into a flat shape.
2. Place twigs or other natural objects on the clay.
3. Put a piece of wax paper onto the top of the clay and carefully press the objects into the clay.
4. Remove the wax paper, then the objects.
5. Use a pointed stick or pencil or nail to poke a hole in the top of the clay.
6. When the clay is dry, thread a string, ribbon or twine through the hole and tie, making a loop for hanging.





WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

LEAFY PLACE MATS

for Preschool, Primary

Children make place mats with leaves and the words to a table grace.

Materials:

- clear adhesive shelf paper
- various kinds of leaves
- words of the table grace (p. 13) or use your own
- scissors

Preparation:

Cut two pieces of shelf paper for each child. They do not need to be exactly the same size, since the edges will be cut later. Make the pieces approximately the size of a place mat, about 12" x 18".

Make copies of the table grace on white or other colored paper, one copy for each child.

Directions:

Hand out copies of the table grace and invite each child to make a place mat:

1. Remove the adhesive backing from one piece of shelf paper and lay it on the table, sticky side up.
2. Ask each child to cut out a table grace and lay it on the adhesive.
3. Then have the children place leaves on the adhesive, around the table graces.
4. Remove the backing from the second piece of shelf paper and carefully place it over the leaf picture.
5. Help the children cut their place mats into rectangular or oval shapes.



TABLE GRACE FOR LEAFY PLACE MAT

Thank you, God, for the world so sweet.

Thank you, God, for the food we eat.

Thank you, God, for the birds that sing,

Thank you, God, for everything.

Amen.



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

FRAMED LEAF RUBBINGS for Elementary

Children use leaves to make pictures and then frame them with craft sticks.

Materials:

white paper
crayons
various leaves
craft sticks
glue
scissors

Directions:

Invite each child to make a leaf rubbing and frame it. Give the children these directions:

1. Place a leaf on a flat surface.
2. Place a piece of white paper on top of the leaf.
3. Using the broad side of a crayon, lightly rub the paper back and forth many times to bring out the outlines and details of the leaf.
4. Make a frame for your picture by gluing four craft sticks together.
5. Cut out the picture to the same size as the frame and glue the frame onto the picture.





WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

CREATION MOBILES

for Elementary, Intermediate

Children make mobiles that celebrate all of God's creation.

Materials:

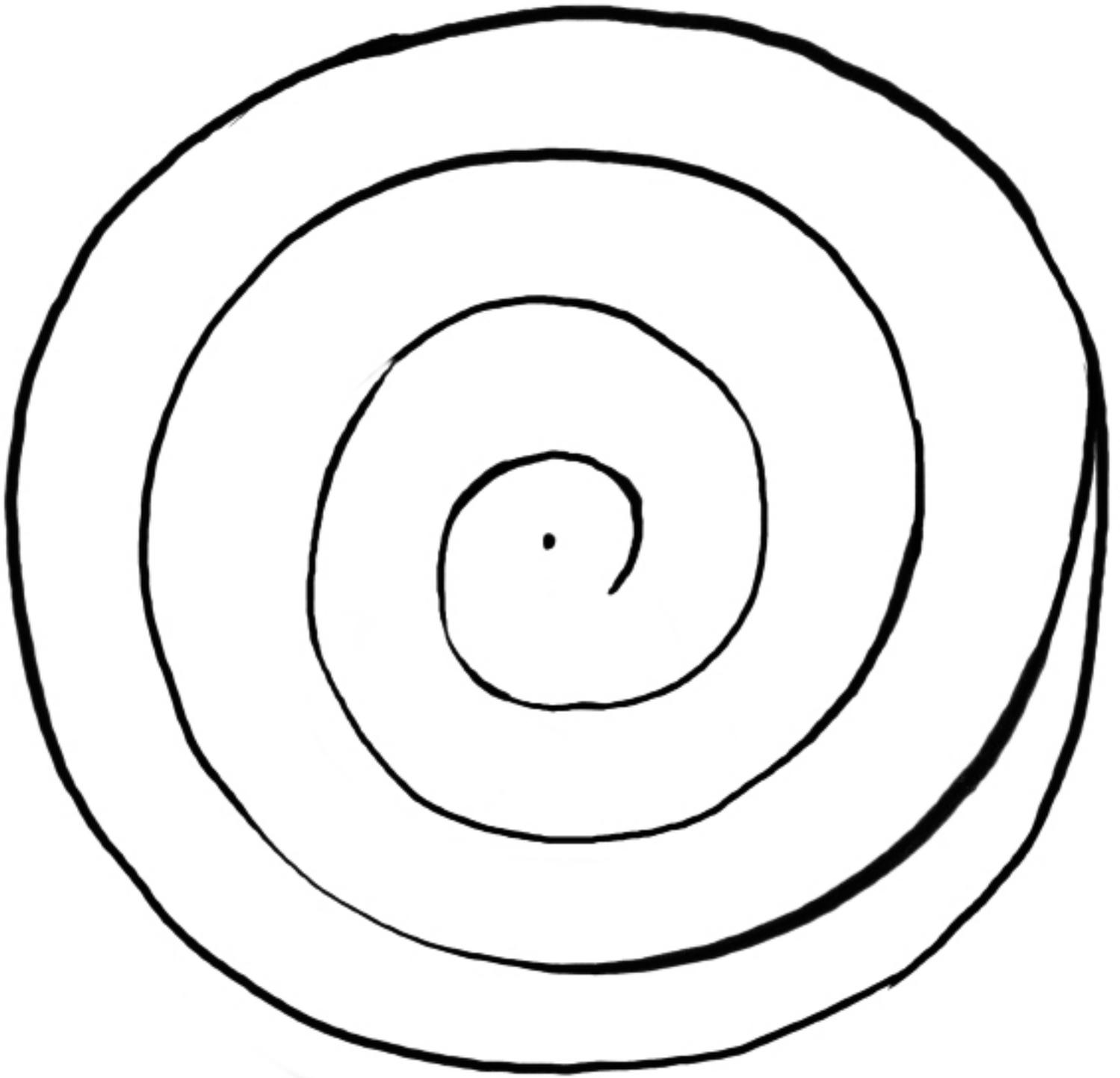
foam sheets of various colors
scissors
string or thread
glue
glitter
hole punch
pencils

Directions:

Invite each child to make a creation mobile. Give the children these directions:

1. Cut a foam sheet into a circular wreath or spiral shape, about 2" wide. (See pattern, p. 16.) Save leftover pieces for making the mobile shapes.
2. Out of various colors of foam, draw and cut out various shapes of God's creation, about 2"-4" in diameter. You can cut out stars, the moon, the sun, animals, people shapes, trees, flowers, scenes (waterfall, desert). You can glue foam pieces together for a multicolored flower. Use your imagination!
3. Spread a thin layer of glue onto the foam and sprinkle glitter on it, if you want.
4. Punch as many holes in the wreath or spiral as you have mobile shapes. Put the holes at various parts of the wreath or spiral.
5. Cut a hole in the top of your creation pieces. Thread string or thread through the holes and tie the shapes to the wreath or spiral.
6. Tie a string or thread to the center of the spiral or top of the wreath to hang it up.







WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

ANIMAL MAGNETS

for Elementary

Children make animal magnets out of foam or clay.

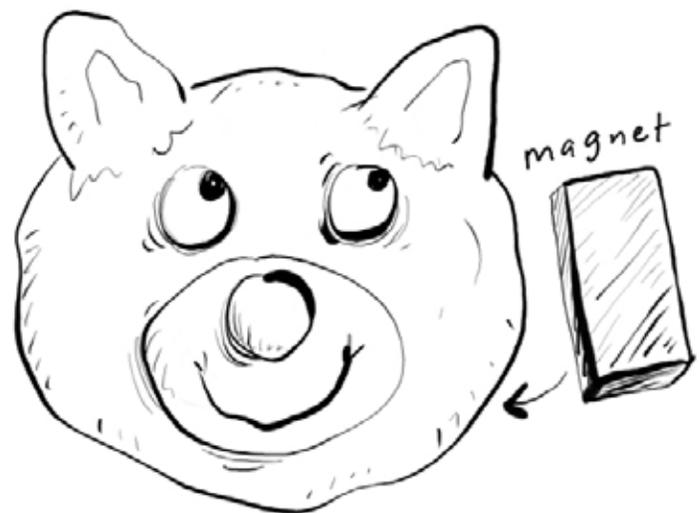
Materials:

- fun foam sheets of various colors or air-drying (self-hardening) modeling clay
- markers (for clay)
- magnetic strips with adhesive
- glue
- scissors
- markers (for clay)
- optional*: googly eyes

Directions:

Invite each child to make an animal magnet. Give the children these directions:

1. If using clay, shape a small piece of clay into an animal figure or head. Slightly flatten the back of your animal so that the magnet will stick on.
2. If using foam, cut out an animal head or body shape. Cut ears, a nose, paws, etc. from different colored foam and glue the parts onto the animal head or body.
3. Glue on googly eyes, if you wish.
4. Cut off a piece of the magnetic strip. Remove the paper backing and stick the magnet onto the back of your animal.
5. For clay magnets, let the clay dry at least overnight. Then color the animal with markers.





WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Children

ANIMAL FACE PAINTING for Preschool

With a little face paint and paper ears, children become the animals that St. Francis loved so much.

Materials:

- face paints
- construction paper: white, brown and black
- scissors
- stapler

Directions:

Ask the children to decide what animals they want to be and invite them to wear paper ears and have their faces painted:

1. Cut strips of construction paper about 2" wide and a little longer than the diameter of a child's head.
2. Cut out ears from brown, black or white construction paper. Staple the ears to the head strips. Make long ears for a bunny, triangle pointy ears for a cat, floppy ears for a dog, rounded ears for a lion. Place the ears on the children's heads.
3. Use face paints to create lions, cats, dogs and other animals on the children. Here are some tips on animal designs:
 - Paint noses black for animals such as lions, cats and dogs.
 - Draw black lines from the mouth to make whiskers.
 - Draw dots on cheeks of lions.