



FAITHFUL FOLLOWING

The HSUS's
Faith Outreach
Campaign brings
the message of
animal advocacy
to an audience
of believers

by KAREN E. LANGE

It has been at the back of her mind for 17 years, ever since the night she lay awake listening to the slaughter-bound pigs. A truck driver had pulled his rig in to the motel lot, and for hours Christy Tennant, 19 at the time and on a theater company tour across the Midwest and South, heard the cries of crowded, thirsty, hungry, frightened animals. "I was deeply convicted, like physically moved," she says. "... They sounded almost human." The next day, she became a vegetarian.

Some people took offense at her choice—they felt like she was judging them by her diet. And after about a year, she began to eat meat again, especially in situations where refusing might insult people. In February, when a wedding director pitched a backyard barbecue theme for her rehearsal dinner in southwestern Virginia—pulled pork sandwiches—she reluctantly went along.

Then in April, just a month before her wedding, Tennant is unexpectedly hearing the message again, at a conference for evangelical Christians: Wayne Pacelle, HSUS president and CEO, and Christine Gutleben, senior director of the organization's Faith Outreach Campaign, are at the front of the hall speaking about people's responsibility toward animals. They're talking about the very sort of suffering Tennant heard that night as a teenager, the very sort of inhumanity the Bible itself condemns.

A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. (Proverbs 12:10)

Before the presentation is over, Tennant gets up and leaves the big room to contact the caterers for her wedding. She is decided: There will be no pulled pork at the rehearsal dinner, no bacon bits in the salad at the reception. Instead, guests will get

The Bible is rich in animal images. In the New Testament, sheep stand for humanity; Jesus is the shepherd who lays down his life to save them. The HSUS is inviting people of faith to reconnect to ancient symbols of stewardship and compassion.

fish and humanely raised chicken (Pacelle directs her to a website where she can find some). Not exactly a conversion. More like a confirmation of what she knows, already, is true: that the dominion humankind is given in the book of Genesis doesn't mean people are entitled to just do anything they want. That instead it's like God has given his followers stewardship of a gift. "How we handle that," says Tennant, "is an exact reflection of how we feel about God." In other words, she wonders, will people be faithful to God by taking care of his creation?

Evangelical Christian circles have gotten involved in so many causes that Tennant welcomes the attention given to animal advocacy at the conference. "Mercy is not a left-wing agenda," she says.

A NEW GENERATION OF DISCIPLES

In 1955, during the first annual report to the members of what was then The National Humane Society, chairman of the board Robert J. Chenoweth spoke in religious terms. "Our faith is that there is a God who created all things and put us here on earth to live together. Our creed is that love and compassion are due from the strong to the weak. ... If we hold this faith, and accept this creed, we are morally bound to be teachers and preachers and evangelists."

More than a half century later, The HSUS is being welcomed by the people in America best known for changing hearts and minds: the country's faith communities, particularly of late the country's large and growing conservative churches. After hosting a summit of religious leaders in late 2010, The HSUS was finally invited to

present at the annual Q ("questions") conference, where some of the most innovative and influential evangelical Christians meet to exchange ideas and set the agenda for megachurches and nonprofits alike. They're conservative theologically but progressive and pragmatic when it comes to social issues. Gutleben has been nervously awaiting this opportunity, all the more anxious because Pacelle is in the middle of a nationwide book tour and makes it to this year's conference venue in Portland, Ore., 10 minutes before their scheduled speech. They will have just 18 minutes, the maximum allowed any topic, to make their case. "This is our one chance," says Gutleben, who rose at 6 to prepare. "So we better get it right."

The 650 or so people at Q are overwhelmingly young (average age 35) and white, disproportionately male. The dress is casual but deliberately hip: stonewashed jeans, carefully chosen button-down shirts and Ts, hair cut short but fashionable—or shaved off, with a few trendy beards. Everyone is turned to their smartphones and tablets typing. The speeches take place in the Crystal Ballroom, an old dance hall hung with chandeliers and usually filled with fans of indie bands. One floor below, the leading minds and voices of the evangelical movement—religion writer Tom Krattenmaker calls them its "next generation"—gather in booths and lounge at tables, chatting in front of a big screen TV broadcasting the talks. There's free coffee at a table in the back. Fair trade. Shade grown. The conference program is glossy on thick paper with cutting-edge design. It shouts high production value. There is palpable excitement—that the people gathered here can change the world. Their faith

demands it. And even from a worldly perspective (after all, they represent some of the country's biggest churches and some of the most important new conservative Christian organizations), it's easy to believe they just might. If you go for parables—and the people gathered here could summon this one up from memory, Bibles shut—these are the followers bestowed with many talents, gifts of intellect and creativity and drive and a high-enough socioeconomic status to afford the \$825 conference tickets (plus airfare, lodging, and meals). It's not like they can just kick back.

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required. (Luke 12:48)

Gutleben and Pacelle invoke the names of people highly respected in evangelical circles: 19th-century reformer William Wilberforce, who took on animal cruelty along with slavery and a host of other evils; 20th-century scholar and writer C.S. Lewis, who grappled with God's and humankind's relationship with animals. It's essential to show that animal welfare is not some novel or peripheral concern for Christians. There's no telling how it will go. Q is about big issues—huge ones. Poverty and human trafficking and Muslim-Christian relationships, the future of the church in what the people in this room see as a post-Christian society. For the most part, human issues. And here are Pacelle and Gutleben up on stage talking about animals—the kind a lot of people eat for dinner.

"We can choose to be abusive or exploitative," says Pacelle, "or we can choose to act with decency and mercy. ... Christians and people of conscience and values are the ones who have to be at the forefront of [the humane] effort."

It's an enlightening moment for many audience members—when they think about it, they say, it makes sense. And there are already vegetarians in the audience, stirred by compassion if not what was preached from the pulpit to change their way of eating. Long a proponent of more humane treatment of animals raised for food, The HSUS has spent years documenting the pervasive abuses in factory farms. The images Pacelle and Gutleben share are disturbing: a downed cow pushed around by a forklift, pigs jolted with electric prods, a veal calf tied at the neck in a tiny pen, hens jammed into small cages. One man says he can't watch. Others turn away or cry. But no one disbelieves. No one says this isn't the type of thing they should be showing at Q. Quite the opposite.

"I've never heard that before in a Christian forum," Jeremy Jones tells Gutleben afterward. "... [People] don't want to think about it. ... [But] if you're going to be willing to eat it, you need to be able to engage this life you're taking."

Jones's wife is from South Dakota. Recently they went back and saw how farming there had changed: In place of rotated crops, there was corn as far as the eye could see, an unnatural and environmentally destructive monoculture made possible by the heavy application of chemicals. "In one generation, [look] how far removed we are from what God gave us," says Jones. "We as Christians let this go down."

CREED OF COMPASSION

Though conservative churches focused for many decades on winning individual human souls, the conference is about moving beyond that and engaging with the wider world, explains Q founder Gabe Lyons, author of *The Next Christians*. "They like being challenged," he says of those at the conference. "They don't assume they know everything about everything." Q is supposed to inspire them to reform and restore the culture, to become a sort of Christian counterculture. In the case of animal welfare, the Gospel—the good news that Jesus preached—supports this.

Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? (Luke 12:6)

There is palpable excitement—that the people gathered here can change the world. Their faith demands it.

After the presentation, there are free animal-friendly lunches, featuring wrap sandwiches. For many people it's the first such meal they've ever eaten. Also 200 complimentary copies of a grim and imposing book called *CAFO (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation): The Tragedy of Industrial Animal Factories*. Conference gift bags contain the HSUS-produced DVD *Eating Mercifully*. And there is a visit to a county animal shelter, which Gutleben says will provide a realistic picture of pet overpopulation. Just three women go along—while other conference goers head off to spend the afternoon at other Q events, touring Nike headquarters, visiting art galleries, or sipping microbrews and tasting oysters—but they're deeply interested. "These are the forgotten animals," Gutleben says on the way over, leaning from the front passenger seat over the headrest so she can talk to them face to face. Fortunately, it's a solvable problem, she tells them: If more people adopted from shelters—and more resources were available to help pet owners in need—pet homelessness could end.



Cuddling a 20-pound cat at a shelter outside Portland, The HSUS's Christine Gutleben gave a small group from Q, a conference of evangelical Christians, a glimpse of the consequences of pet overpopulation.



Wayne Pacelle, HSUS president and CEO, spoke to a new audience at Q but delivered a familiar message: the need for human responsibility.

“Churches can play a huge role in this.”

Most of all, there is Gutleben herself, a former financial account executive turned divinity school graduate who in 2009 traveled cross country with a Christian rock band. She is all smiles, irrepressible, relentlessly positive, whether holding one of the very fat cats at the shelter or encountering a woman on the conference floor whose friend turns her in for eating chicken for lunch instead of the HSUS-provided sandwich. As it happens, Gutleben’s mother, Candace, up from the San Francisco Bay area, is by her side, sharing her own passion for the cause. The elder Gutleben, like the younger, has the ability to approach anybody and instantly engage them in a conversation. If, in some people’s minds, animal welfare has connotations of animal rights activists bent on overthrowing the social order, there could not be anyone more reassuring than these two. They are wholesome and churchgoing and kind, even as they carry a gospel, a message, every bit as world-changing as Jesus’.

And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.
(Matthew 11:6)

The HSUS’s Faith Outreach Campaign is four years old but still in its beginnings. It started with a staff of one, Gutleben, who had to

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PROJECT COMPASSION

Church ministries protect and celebrate animals

The service takes place in a church basement. Worshippers sit on stackable vinyl chairs. An iPod provides musical accompaniment. Occasionally the barking gets so loud the Rev. Thea Keith-Lucas has to stop because she can’t be heard.

But for the 40 to 50 people who show up one Sunday evening a month at Calvary Episcopal Church in Danvers, Mass., the 30-minute Perfect Paws Pet Ministry service is sacred: a chance to share their love and grief for their pets and each other, and an opportunity to connect to God. Some drive an hour or more each way, whiskery companions in tow.

There’s Nibbles, a German shepherd adopted by a retired Marine after the military dog was wounded while sniffing out roadside bombs in Iraq. When the veteran served in Vietnam during the 1970s, orders forced his fellow soldiers to abandon the

dogs they were working with. Nibbles is his way of putting that right. “Marines don’t leave Marines behind,” he says.

And there is Jumma, a Rhodesian ridgeback beloved by Deanna Grimm and Charlotte Norris—present at least in memory. After he died in July, he was honored during an August service with a video and a quilt made by a friend with bandanas accumulated from grooming sessions over the years. And there are Ethel and Lucy, a pair of Yorkies rescued from a puppy mill and adopted by Don and Debbie Mailloux. Once their fur was matted. Now they sport carefully coordinated clothes.

Following some scuffling amongst the dogs, candles are lit and the service begins—a compressed version of the normal liturgy, complete with Holy Communion. Miraculously, the leashed dogs (and the odd cat or gerbil) focus on the homemade wooden altar and cross at the

front of the room and, for the most part, sit still. Afterwards are blessings and prayers and treats for the pets, as well as their people.

Fran Weil came up with the idea for the service in 2010 after an outpouring of warmth from fellow congregants helped her cope with the painful decision to put down one of her dogs—he was 12 and had bladder cancer. “There’s a need to recognize those creatures that have tails and paws, that really fill our world with so much beauty ... and teach us about compassion,” she says. “... They’re deeply spiritual and wonderfully soulful.”

The Perfect Paws ministry includes a foster and adoption network and a pet bereavement support group. Churches elsewhere in the country are finding other ways to incorporate animals into their work. Dorchester Presbyterian in Summerville, S.C., a rapidly developing suburb of Charleston, bought 42 acres of wetlands adjoining the church property to preserve it for wildlife—deer, foxes, owls, turkeys, raccoons, opossums, turtles, and frogs. McLean Bible Church in Virginia enlists a dozen or so volunteers to take their pets, mostly dogs,

demonstrate to colleagues that the faith community is a natural ally. The work to be done is vast. So for now, the campaign's outreach to religions outside Christianity focuses on a newly formed advisory council—with a rabbi, an Islamic scholar, an evangelical scholar, and a priest—and efforts to make their observances, such as kosher and halal slaughter, more humane. Much of the rest of the campaign centers on connecting with large evangelical nondenominational churches because they are dynamic and fast-growing, and have not been on the forefront of the animal welfare movement.

Gutleben and her staff recruit congregations to host clinics for vaccinating and microchipping pets, and they encourage church food banks to collect and distribute pet food. They sponsor screenings of *Eating Mercifully* and provide "St. Francis Day in a Box" kits that include the DVD and other resources, such as The HSUS's booklet on organizing animal protection ministries. The campaign is building a database of churches with such ministries so they can share ideas and connect. A year ago in Washington, D.C., Faith Outreach held its first national summit of religious leaders—35 evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Seventh Day Adventists—who met with the executive director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Another summit, at which Catholics are represented, will take place this month.

The campaign's success is the result of years of hard work and two converging trends: The HSUS's growing influence and churches' rediscovering their legacy of caring for the earth and its creatures.

At the same time, the work moves as much by the Spirit, one might say, as it does according to plan. This year, for example, a nationally known hymn writer was inspired to support The HSUS after learning about the campaign online. At Limestone Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, Del., the Rev. Carolyn Gillette and her husband and copastor, Bruce Gillette, have held several blessings of the animals on St. Francis Day in October. She took the well-known tune for the hymn "I Sing the Mighty Power of God" and wrote new words to create "O God Your Creatures Fill the Earth." The new hymn was posted online for use by United Methodist churches and by The Text This Week, a website used by ministers across denominations. Verse three: "Lord, bless the animals we keep; may all farms be humane."

ONE BELIEVER AT A TIME

Many specific cruelties aren't addressed in the Bible, but sprinkled throughout is a respect for animals as God-created beings, plus a hunger for a world in which compassion and harmony reign. The Book of Isaiah contains a vision of wolves with lambs, leopards with kids, young lions with calves. All the animals, even the carnivores,



GUIDING LIGHT:

For congregations looking to undertake animal-focused projects, The HSUS's Animal Protection Ministries: A Guide for Churches offers inspiration. The booklet and accompanying website share ideas such as organizing a collection drive for a local shelter, creating a mini wildlife sanctuary on church grounds, and visiting a farm animal sanctuary. To download or order a copy, go to humanesociety.org/ministryguide.

to nursing and retirement homes, libraries that encourage kids to read to pets, and programs for disabled children. "They have kids who won't talk to anyone, but when there is a dog, they talk to the dog," says Nagwa Aziz, who started the Paws4Hearts ministry. The Rock in San Diego (ranked by *Outreach* magazine as the 23rd biggest church in the country) runs a Dog Lovers Ministry with around 40 volunteers who help out at

adoption events and low-cost spay/neuter clinics, says ministry leader Nesia Britton. "We believe that a dog is a lifelong commitment, and we hold people accountable."

Misunderstandings sometimes occur about the new ministries. After a local news anchor covering Calvary's service quipped that "all dogs go to heaven," Keith-Lucas had to deal with angry objections from people who thought she was out to save

animals' souls. The *National Enquirer* called and asked for an interview (she declined). But the controversy died down once she explained the church was trying to reach out to pet owners and inspire them to act morally by caring for God's creation.

The bond people feel with animals is profound and powerful, Keith-Lucas says. "For many people it can be their deepest experience of God's love."



Love and pride mingle in the eyes of kids who brought their dog to a free rabies vaccine and pet licensing clinic at Proviso Baptist Church in Maywood village, just outside of Chicago, where many families struggle to pay for veterinary care. Spay/neuter vouchers were also handed out during the event, which was sponsored by The HSUS and hosted by the church, benefiting both animals and their owners. The Faith Outreach Campaign encourages believers to care for the earth, for animals, and for each other.

are peaceably eating straw together. The words, almost wistful, evoke the memory of an unspoiled creation.

*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain:
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD,
as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:9)*

This is the vision that The HSUS hopes to tap into. In a world where animals are often treated as objects, without regard to their pain or innate dignity, it's audacious. But hope is something Christians are called to have plenty of. The Bible says that if they can summon even a small amount of faith—the size of a mustard seed—nothing will be impossible for them.

As the Q conference ends, a guitar plays and the audience rises and lifts their hands in praise. People sing: "Savior, you can move the mountains ..." It's a closing song and a sort of prayer that they will be able to carry what they have heard here into the world.

Very likely, many of them will actually do something about animal welfare, says Lyons, the conference founder. When asked which presentation made them think or most challenged their core assumptions, respondents ranked the HSUS talk in the top five of 35. "It's planted [the issue] firmly in the heads of these Protestant Christian leaders," says Lyons. "This is an issue that we can't turn away from."

So many people have already come up to Gutleben to compliment her on The HSUS's presentation. She has the names of the 20 or so people who attended a question-and-answer session after-

wards, down the street, and is slowly but steadily finding takers for all the books. She gets an email from Kevin Palau, president of the Luis Palau Association in Portland, an evangelistic organization that engages in social action and community service. Palau would like to find a way to team up with The HSUS, perhaps to add vet care to free medical and dental clinics put on by churches in the region. "It was encouraging to be reminded of the strong Christian heritage of animal protection and care," Palau says later, in an email. "... The Q presentation challenged many Christian leaders, like myself, to continue advocating for the humane treatment of God's creation."

And then there is Tennant. Soon after she arrives home in Seattle, she sits down with her fiancé to look at the seven-pound CAFO book. They're about to start a life together, and it seems like they need to figure out what sort of life. After leafing through the big photos of commodified animals and corpses of chickens and cows, landscapes buried beneath manure and water dark with pollution, they agree they don't want to support a system so cruel, so destructive, so unhealthy. They decide to follow a mostly vegetarian diet, supplemented by the fish Tennant's fiancé sometimes catches, and, when they do buy meat, to pay extra for products from animals raised more humanely.

Modest, seemingly mundane decisions. Nothing much has changed. And everything has. ■

▶ **FOR A VIDEO** of The HSUS's Q conference speech, go to humansociety.org/faith.