

## SERVICE AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMAL POLICY

We, God's people of [Name of Church], believe that God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. *"For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine."* Psalm 50:10-11 Moreover, scripture tells us *"A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal."* Proverbs 12:10, and *"In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind."* Job 12:10 We recognize that our gracious LORD gave us animals to assist us in our time of need. One example is the accounting of Jonah, *"The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."* Jonah 1:17 After Jonah prays to God in distress, *"The Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land."* Jonah 2:10.

God calls us to be good stewards of his whole creation, including his creatures. *"You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them. Noah did everything just as God commanded him."* Genesis 6:19-22.

The American Disabilities Act ("ADA" - ADA Revised Requirements: Service Animals), and we at [Name of Church], recognize and define Service Animals as **"dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability. The task(s) performed by the dog must be directly related to the person's disability."** Examples of such work or tasks include, but are not limited to, assisting people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling a wheelchair, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications, calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder ("PTSD") during an anxiety attack, or performing other duties. [Name of Church] also understand that service animals are working animals, **NOT PETS**. The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person's disability. Neither the ADA or [Name of Church] recognize that animals whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as Service Animals under the ADA. When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, the Elders at [Name of Church] may ask questions of the handler to include: 1) *Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?;* and 2) *What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?* While we understand that [Name of Church] is a religious institution and is exempt from this ADA requirement and does not have to allow individuals to bring their Service Animals into the facility, we believe it is our obligation to continue to show the love of Christ to those with such recognized disabilities and to ensure that ALL people are welcomed to receive God's grace and mercy here at [Name of Church] as we worship together.

We also have a responsibility to our church membership, guests and visitors to provide a safe and meaningful worship environment while worshipping at [Name of Church]. Therefore, we have enacted this policy to provide guidance to those who attend our services with a Service or Emotional Support Animal and to set forth the expectations we have regarding the animal and its handler:

- Service and Emotional Support Animals must remain with their handlers at all time while on our property.
- Service and Emotional Support Animals must wear their vest identifying them as a Service or Emotional Support Animal at all times while they are on the property.

- Service and Emotional Support Animals must not sit on church furniture.
- Service and Emotional Support Animals must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered, unless these devices interfere with the service animal's work or the individual's disability prevents using these devices. (In that case, the individual must maintain control of the support animal through voice, signal, or other effective controls.)
- Service and Emotional Support Animals must not whine, bark, grumble, or make other noises except and unless such noise is an alert, such as to notify the handler who is experiencing a physical complication.
- Service and Emotional Support Animals must not obstruct an area used for emergency evacuation.
- Service and Emotional Support Animals must be in good health and must be current on all vaccinations including, without any limitation, Rabies vaccinations.
- Service and Emotional Support Animals must use outside designated areas for their support animal and the Handler must pick up all solid waste from their support animal.

[Name of Church] defines Emotional Support Animal as an animal (cat, dog, etc.) that provides a therapeutic benefit to its owner through companionship and is not specifically trained or certified to perform tasks for a person who suffers from emotional, psychiatric or mental health-related disabilities. An Emotional Support Animal **DOES NOT QUALIFY** as a Service Animal as defined above and, thus, is not necessarily granted access to [Name of Church]. Persons wishing to participate with any ministry at [Name of Church] should contact our church by phone or email prior to attending any event with their support animal. An appointment will be set up with the Elders to discuss the nature of their mental health-related disability and to discuss approval for their emotional support animal. Approval to bring an Emotional Support Animal to the facility is strictly on a case-by-case basis.

For a person to seeking to bring an Emotional Support Animal to The Elders of [Name of Church] must be considered emotionally disabled by a licensed mental health professional (therapist, psychologist, psychiatrist, etc.) and as evidenced by a written letter directed to the Head Elder of [Name of Church]. The letter must be dated, written on the treating mental healthcare provider's letterhead, include the provider's license type, number, date and state in which the license was issued. Without divulging any particular individually identifiable healthcare information, the letter should state in part:

- That the applicant is, at the time of the request, a patient of the mental health provider.
- The applicant is, at the time of the request, under the mental health provider's care for the treatment of mental disability found in the DSM IV or V (the Diagnostic and Statistical manual of mental Disorders, version 4 or 5).
- The applicant's disability substantially limits at least one major life activity.
- The mental health provider prescribes for an Emotional Support Animal (the numbers and types of animals) as a necessary treatment for the applicant's mental health.

Without approval from the Elders, an Emotional Support Animal is not permitted access to [Name of Church] for Sunday Services or other classes, events, and programs. Therefore, we encourage

all those wishing to bring their support animal to [Name of Church] to make an appointment well in advance of any plan to attend our worship service or sponsored event.

Persons with Service or Emotional Support Animals who are members of [Name of Church] will receive a special tag [*Option* - for both the handler and the support animal] to enable staff, ushers, greeters, and other members to readily identify they have been approved by the Elders to participate in the activities of [Name of Church].

We ask that all handlers and their Service and/or Emotional Support Animals limit their seating and walking areas to be sensitive to members of [Name of Church] with animal allergies. We also ask that while on the property you would sit in a specified designated area of the sanctuary during worship or in designated areas of our fellowship or classrooms during bible study.

Should a Service or Emotional Support Animal or its handler fail to comply with these expectations, the handler will be asked to remove their Service or Emotional Support Animal from our property immediately. The Elders may revoke approval of any non-compliant handler or Service or Emotional Support Animal.

**The Elders of [Name of Church] may make exceptions to this policy to accommodate unique events and situations.**