



The Service of Service Animals

Dogs have long been trained to guide people with vision loss to move safely about. Different animals, even horses and monkeys, have also been trained to perform tasks to help people with sight, hearing and physical disabilities; autism, seizures, traumatic brain injury and psychiatric disorders. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) narrowed the legal definition of service animals to only include dogs and some miniature horses, excluding other trained animals or even untrained pets however importantly they function as companions.

Service dogs accompany children to school, adults to work; and provide access to the community at large, including houses of worship. Welcoming service animals is just another way parishes make the Sacraments, and therefore Christ, accessible to all.

What assistance dogs can do:

- Retrieve dropped items.
- Pull a wheelchair.
- Open a door, window or cabinet.
- Nuzzle a deaf parent when their baby cries.
- Alert a person with epilepsy of an imminent seizure.
- Wake someone who sleeps through alarm clocks.
- Provide stability for dizziness or balance disorders.
- Remind someone to take medication at specific times.
- Signal someone with bipolar disorder when they're beginning a hypomanic episode.
- Alert someone to the onset of a panic attack.
- Lead someone with a brain disorder to a safe place when experiencing confusion or psychotic event.
- Interrupt obsessive compulsive behaviors.
- Scout out the safety of the environment for someone with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

How the community should respond to service animals:

- Always ask the person for permission before petting a service animal. This is a safety guideline as well as good manners.
- Don't make assumptions regarding someone's disability or ask intrusive questions about their disability when you see a service animal.
- Accept the person and their service animal as a team; don't ask them leave their dog home when extending an invitation.
- Do not offer food or treats to a service animal.
- Don't call or whistle for a service dog, or in any way distract the dog from its work.
- If you are afraid of dogs/animals, excuse yourself and go to another area.

Resources:

Anabaptist Disabilities Network - http://www.adnetonline.org/Topics/Service_Animals

Psychiatric Service Dog Society - <http://www.psychdog.org/>

National Catholic Partnership on Disability, *Guidelines For The Admission Of Service Animals To Church Facilities, Programs And Activities* - <http://www.ncpd.org/views-news-policy/policy/church/ncpd/resolutions/service-animals>

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