Guide Dog and Service Animal Guidelines and Etiquette

Background

Qualified service animals are to be welcomed in all aspects of church life, including worship and fellowship times. These working animals have undergone extensive training and you should barely notice they are present. The best known of these are Guide Dogs for people who are blind. You will want to designate an outdoor area where the owner, usually called the "handler" can take the dog to relieve itself, and orient the handler to its location.

Trained service animals are under the control of their handler at all times, so you will not have problems like inappropriate barking, aggressive behavior, begging or jumping up on the table, or having accidents. If any animal is out of control, you are within your rights to and should ask the handler to take the animal off the premises. See references below to help you understand the current law and implications.

There is no certification process for designating valid service animals. The crucial factors are that a) the animal is required because of a disability and that b) the animal has been trained to perform work or tasks to support the person with a disability.

Etiquette and Engagement with Guide Dogs and their handlers

- Please don't pet, call out to, or otherwise distract a working Guide Dog. Allow the dog to concentrate and perform for the safety of its blind partner. A Guide Dog in harness is "on duty", even when sitting or lying down.
- If you are in a car, please don't honk the horn or call out directions. Guide Dog handlers listen to traffic flow and other environmental sounds to decide when it's safe to cross a street.
- Please don't feed a Guide Dog. Diet and feeding times are strictly monitored to maintain good health and reliable relieving schedules.
- If the handler looks like he or she needs help, offer your assistance and take your cue from their response. Taking the harness or leash from the handler can disorient and confuse the team. If you believe someone is in a dangerous situation, voice your concern in a calm manner, but do not push, pull or grab the person.
- Speak to the person, not the dog! Some Guide Dog handlers may allow petting, but always ask first. Many folks enjoy introducing their dogs, but if they decline, please respect their wishes.
- Sometimes a Guide Dog will make a mistake, and a correction is necessary to keep up the training. This could be a verbal reprimand or a leash correction. Handlers

have been taught the proper and humane training techniques to maintain their dogs' working standards. You may not always hear it, but Guide Dogs get loads of praise when they do the right things.

- You can expect to see Guide Dog teams just about anywhere. They are granted the right of access everywhere the public is allowed. They are allowed into restaurants, offices, churches, hospitals and hotels. They travel on buses, in taxis and airplanes, shop at grocery stores, enjoy amusement parks, movies and concerts.

Emotional Support Animals

Companion dogs and emotional support animals (ESA) fall into a different category and often have far less training. Service dogs in training also fall into this category. They are not protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act. You are not required to allow these animals to accompany their owners, though churches may accept them on an individual basis if there is good reason to do so and they are exceptionally well-behaved. Be aware that a pet or ESA that is not under control may traumatize a Guide Dog who is trained to not respond to threats. You may want to establish guidelines. See the link below from the Anabaptist Disabilities Network for ideas.

A potential problem with any animal arises when other members have allergies to pet dander and fur. You will need to work with both the person with allergies and the person using a service animal to develop a plan which keeps them separated. Persons who have excessive fear of dogs may also need their needs accommodated through advanced planning and separation..

For more information:

ADA Fact Sheet on Service Animals

Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA

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