

The First Presbyterian Church – Willoughby

Service and Emotional Support Animals Policy

The First Presbyterian Church - Willoughby (the Church) welcomes everyone to receive God's grace and mercy and believes it is its obligation to ensure that ALL - church members, guests, and visitors - have a safe and meaningful worship environment. Recognizing this, the Church has enacted this policy to provide guidance to those who wish to attend one of our services or events with a Service or Emotional Support Animal.

The First Presbyterian Church is a religious institution, is exempt from Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and is not required to allow service or emotional support animals on the premises. However, as a religious organization, the church believes it is its obligation to continue to show the love of Christ to those with such recognized disabilities and to ensure that ALL people are welcomed.

Service Animals

First Presbyterian Church, recognizes and defines 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.”**

The Church recognizes that Service Animals are **NOT** pets, but are trained to perform specific tasks which 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.

When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, the Session at The First Presbyterian Church may ask questions of the Handler such as:

- Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability? And/or
- What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

Service Animals are allowed under the following conditions:

- The Handler of the Service Animal must present certification if requested
- Service Animals must be in good health and must be current on all vaccinations including, without any limitation, Rabies vaccinations; and able to present proper documentation upon request
- Service Animals must always remain with their Handlers while on the property

- Service Animals must always wear vests identifying them as a “Service Animal” while they are on the property
- Service 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 Service Animal through voice, signal, or other effective controls.)
- Service 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 Animals must not obstruct any area used for emergency evacuation
- Service Animals must use outside designated relief areas and the Handler must pick up all solid waste from their Service Animal
- Handlers and their Service Animals are required to limit their seating and walking areas on church property and Service Animals must not sit on church furniture
- Out of respect for other Church members who may be sensitive to animals and/or have allergies, the Handler and Service Animals are required to sit in a designated area of the sanctuary during worship and/or in designated areas of the fellowship hall.

Should a Service Animal or its Handler fail to comply with these expectations, the Handler will be asked to remove the Service Animal from the church property immediately.

The Session may revoke approval of any non-compliant Handler or Service Animal.

Emotional Support Animals

The ADA and The First Presbyterian Church - Willoughby do not recognize that animals whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as Service Animals.

The First Presbyterian Church defines an Emotional Support Animal (ESA) as an animal (cat, dog, etc.) that provides a therapeutic benefit to its owner who has been certified as “emotionally disabled by a psychologist, therapist, psychiatrist, or other duly licensed and/or certified mental health professional.” This certification should be a formal and appropriately formatted letter, known as an ESA Letter.

An Emotional Support Animal **DOES NOT QUALIFY** as a Service Animal and **is not permitted access to The First Presbyterian Church for Sunday services or other classes, events, and programs.**