

## **Proposed Addition to First Baptist Policy Manual**

### **First Baptist Church of Copperas Cove Policy regarding admission of service animals into church facilities**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) specifically exempts churches and other places of worship from mandatory admission of service animals. However, we endeavor to accommodate anyone who wishes to worship with us. Our objective is to provide a safe environment conducive to collective worship of all attendees. Therefore, the following policies and procedures will be followed for anyone who wants to bring a service animal into church buildings at any time.

1. Service animals will be dogs only. No other animals are allowed.
2. The dog must be a service dog as defined by the ADA. Emotional support, comfort, therapy, or companion animals are not allowed.
3. The church reserves the right to restrict certain dog breeds from church property, whether they are trained as a service dog or not. This restriction would apply to certain breeds that have a natural tendency towards aggression, or that a majority of people may be afraid of including but not limited to pit bulls and Dobermans.
4. Only one service animal per person will be allowed.
5. Service animals will be admitted by permission only. Anyone wanting to bring a service animal to any church function or service must apply in advance for permission at the church office, and be granted such permission by an officer of the church.
  - a. Applicants will be given a copy of this policy statement at the time of application.
  - b. Applicants will be interviewed by a church officer. Church officers include the Pastor, Associate Pastors, Ministers, and Deacons. Applicant must bring the service animal to the interview. The interview will assess the dog's degree of training, what work or task the dog has been trained to perform, and whether the animal is required due to a disability. The dog's appearance and behavior, and the owner's degree of control, will be key in making a decision.
  - c. A church officer will conduct the interview and either grant or deny permission at that time.
  - d. Once permission is granted, the church office will notify the Head Ushers so that the animal can gain admission.
  - e. Any service animal showing up at a church function without such permission (first time visitors) may be denied entrance. The head usher will contact a church officer who will assess the situation and make a decision, or by the person responsible for the function, i.e. - Connection Group leader.
6. Service animals must be fully trained. Dogs "in training" will not be allowed. Although formal training and licensing are not required, the handler must demonstrate the dog's training at the initial interview.
7. Service animals must be appropriately marked as such. For example, a vest identifying the dog as a service animal, or a bandana with a service animal patch. Commercial markings are not necessary—they can be homemade. However, the markings must clearly and visibly identify the dog as a service animal.

8. While on church property, the service animal must remain under the constant control of the owner. The animal must be physically tethered to the owner by a leash or support bar or other physical connection at all times.
9. During corporate worship in the sanctuary, service animals will be restricted to the rearmost pews. The animals must remain inside the pews and on the floor. No animals will be allowed to remain in the aisles. During Connection Groups, the Connection Group leader will designate where the animal must remain. During other church functions, a church officer will designate where the animal will remain.
10. The owner will discourage, calmly but firmly, anyone from interacting with the animal in any way, especially children. This includes petting, touching, talking to, or any other interaction.
11. The dog must be clean, well groomed, and properly vaccinated and licensed by the City (if necessary). The dog must wear its licensing tags at all times. The dog must not be disruptive to the worship experience of other attendees. Audible barking, whining, excessive fidgeting, and any other disruptive behaviors will be grounds for immediate removal.
12. The owner is fully responsible for any damage caused by the dog and cleanup of any mess created by the dog. Physical damage to church property may result in monetary reimbursement by the owner for repair costs.
13. The church will not be responsible for any actions of the dog. The owner assumes full responsibility for any injury caused by the dog on any other attendee.
14. Non-compliance with this policy may result in revocation of permission. A determination of non-compliance will be made based on the facts of the case by the Senior Pastor or the Deacon Chairman.
15. The church may revoke its permission to allow the service animal at any time, for any reason. The owner will be notified of a revocation by the Senior Pastor or the Deacon Chairman.
16. Any complaints against the service animal from any attendee may result in revocation.
17. Any situations that develop outside the parameters of this policy will be handled and decided upon by a church officer. The church officer's decision is immediate and binding.

Approved/Disapproved

---

Applicant Signature

---

Church Officer Signature