

Comfort Dog Ministry

Purpose: This ministry uses the unique abilities of dogs to open opportunities to touch people with the mercy and compassion of Christ.

LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs are trained (and accredited) animals, prepared to interact with people in ways that provide a bridge for compassionate ministry to take place, opening doors for conversation about faith and creating opportunities to share the Mercy, Compassion, Presence and Proclamation of Jesus Christ. This ministry contributes to our church mission by helping people to better know, worship and serve the Lord, bringing the compassion of Christ to those in need.



Responsible to and supported by: Lutheran Church Charities (LCC) K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry works to place K-9's in Christian churches and schools as a nation-wide outreach tool. St. Peter Lutheran Church partners with LCC to provide this ministry on a local basis. Pastor Paul Klopke, Senior Care and Special Needs Ministry, provides staff support for this ministry at St. Peter. The contact person for Comfort Dog activities and information at our church is Stephanie Keller. Comfort Dog assignments outside of our congregation are coordinated with LCC and our leaders

Job duties: Volunteers fill the positions of **dog caregiver** (the dog lives with the caregiver) and **dog handler** (the volunteer handles the dog at events). A volunteer may be both a caregiver and handler. These are working dogs and are not treated as pets. Specific guidelines for their care and use are spelled out in the LCC handbook. Persons who are interested in helping with this ministry, but are not able to, or don't care to be involved with the animals, should contact Stephanie for other volunteer opportunities.

Time requirement: Caregivers spend a minimum of 1½ to 2 hours a day caring for the dog. They must be home for handlers to get the comfort dogs for events. It is also best that caregivers have no young children or other pets in the home.

Handlers normally take the dog to at least one event per week, with an estimated 4 hours of time required per event. Handlers also spend at least 1 hour per week training, working or walking the dog.

Length of commitment: A two-year commitment is required, due to the amount of time invested in training.

Training: Initial information and orientation is provided by St. Peter volunteers; but full training is provided by LCC, both in initial training (2 days) and ongoing training (up to once a week).

Skills and qualifications needed:

- A volunteer must pass the initial and ongoing LCC training courses by demonstrating competency in the skills taught in the training.
- Volunteers must have sufficient strength, skill and energy to work with the dog and must love the dog.
- Patience and calmness is needed when the dog is working in difficult situations. The volunteer must be able to work with a variety of ages and abilities.
- Must be willing to pray with individuals as needed.
- Volunteers must be able to consistently follow the guidelines for the dogs' care and work.
- **At least some of the handlers need to be able and willing to travel on short notice to crisis situations, near and far.**

Benefits to the volunteer: This job is not for the faint of heart. It's time-consuming, involves many requirements, and can be emotionally draining. But it's also richly rewarding. Partnering with the dog in ministry opens many doors you'd never otherwise walk through. You see God at work through the dog in wonderful ways. Every handler can tell you stories of miracles happening when these dogs bring comfort to the hurting.