

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. The dogs are trained (and accredited) service animals, prepared to interact with people in ways that provide a bridge for compassionate ministry to take place. This ministry contributes to our church mission of leading people to a full life in Christ ... by helping them 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 are needed for 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. We must follow many specific guidelines for their care and use, as spelled out in the LCC handbook.

Time requirement: Caregivers spend a minimum of one hour a day caring for the dog according to the guidelines. 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 an hour a day in working the dog, following the given guidelines.

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

Training: Initial information is provided by St. Peter volunteers, but full training is provided by LCC, both an 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; must love the dog and have patience and calmness when the dog is working in difficult situations. 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.