



SERVICE ANIMAL / ESA POLICY

1. SCOPE

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Victory Church and its campuses are defined as religious institutions and are exempt from the provisions of the ADA. As many faith-based organizations do, VC has elected to comply with the provisions of the ADA to accommodate persons with disabilities requiring the assistance of Service Animals or Emotional Support Animals.

The purpose of this policy is to establish standards for supervising Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals at Victory Church campuses and to define Service Animals, Emotional Support Animals, their purpose, restrictions/limitations, and enforcement.

2. SERVICE ANIMAL DEFINED

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Victory Church (VC) defines service animals (SA) as “dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. Examples of such work or tasks include guiding 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. Service animals are working animals, not pets. The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person’s disability. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support, known as Emotion Support Animals (ESA), do not qualify as service animals under the ADA.”

3. EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMAL DEFINED

An Emotional Support Animal (ESA) is defined as an animal that provides a therapeutic benefit to its owner/handler through companionship and is not specifically trained or certified to perform tasks for a person who suffers from emotional, psychiatric or mental health-related disabilities. Under the law, an ESA does not qualify as a service animal and, thus, is not granted legal access to places of public accommodation by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).



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4. VC POLICY

Any Service Animal or ESA will be identified by their uniform (e.g., vest) and will be granted limited access within the church, under the care of their owner/handler. When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, a VC staff member or leader may ask two questions of the owner/handler:

1. *“Is the animal required because of a disability.”*, and
2. *“What work or tasks has the SA/ESA been trained to perform.”*

Additionally, a staff member or leader may request documentation of the dog’s purpose, and/or proof of liability insurance. Documentation may be submitted prior to visit or presented upon arrival. Failure to furnish the required documentation may lead to request for removal.

VC expects SA / ESA’s and their handler to meet the following expectations:

- Must not be a pet, but must serve some service toward the physical or psychological wellbeing of a person
- An SA / ESA will be identified by their uniform (labeled vest, harness) and owner/handler must maintain documentation and identification for their approved animal
- Must remain within the owner’s control at all times while on campus (i.e., cannot be tied up or chained to a pole)
- Must be housebroken.
- Must not be a nuisance.
- Must not sit on church furniture.
- Must be leashed, harnessed, 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 animal through voice, signal, or other effective controls.
- Must not display aggression, whine, bark, growl, howl, cry, or make other noises. An exception may be made if the animal is trained to give an audible alert in response to detecting a medical emergency.
- Must not obstruct an area used for emergency evacuation.
- If considered a distraction to guests, then the owner may be requested to leave with the SA / ESA.
- SA / ESA’s are not permitted in VicKids classroom areas or the Nursing Mother’s Room
- Handlers with SA / ESA’s will be directed to designated seating areas within the sanctuary, chapel, or Multi-Purpose Room, and away from other approved service animals.



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The Executive Team and Director of Security may make exceptions to this policy in order to accommodate unique circumstances during uncommon events and situations. VC maintains the discretion to remove an animal at any time as deemed necessary.

5. OWNER / HANDLER RESPONSIBILITIES

All owners / handlers will be required to submit an Information Form (see Attachment 1). Approval is strictly on a case-by-case basis.

If a request for an SA/ESA is denied, and the handler of the SA/ESA in question believes that denial was made in error, the handler should call or e-mail the VC Director of Security to request an in-person appointment to discuss approval for an exception to the finding.

ESA handlers should have current documentation from a licensed mental health professional or physician treating their mental health-related disability, stating that the person has a mental health-related disability; and the animal accompanying the customer is necessary to the customer's mental health or treatment. The ESA owners should provide the number and type(s) of animal(s), and that the individual providing the assessment of the customer is a licensed mental health professional or physician and the person is under their professional care. The ESA owner should also include the mental health professional's license number (or type, issue date, and state in which the license was issued), along with copies of relevant liability insurance information pertaining to the ESA.

Approved ESA's must comply with all the requirements listed under the service animal policy. ESAs are not permitted in the VicKids classroom areas, or the Nursing Mother's Room, and are encouraged to find seating in a designated section of the sanctuary, chapel, or Multi-Purpose Room, and away from ADA-approved service animals. Should an ESA not comply with these requirements, the owner will be requested to remove their ESA from the campus immediately, and approval of the ESA may be revoked.

For the purposes of this policy, service animals and ESA's permitted within Victory Church and its campuses will be limited to dogs.



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Support Animal Information Form

Date: _____

OWNER PHOTO	SA/ESA PHOTO
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ESA SA (Please check one)

OWNER / HANDLER INFORMATION				
Name:				
<i>First</i>	<i>MI</i>	<i>Last</i>		
Home Address:				
Phone:		Email:		
Emergency Contact:				
Qualifying Condition:				
Physician's Name:				
SERVICE ANIMAL / EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMAL INFORMATION				
Canine Name:		Primary Color:		
Breed:		Secondary Color:		
Age:		Gender:		
Spayed/Neutered? (Please check one)		Yes	No	
Relevant Training / Certifications:				
Trainer:		Name:		Phone:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form. If the VC needs additional information, a staff member may contact you at a later date.



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4. REFERENCES

- Department of Justice on Service Animals
https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.html
<https://www.nps.gov/deto/planyourvisit/upload/Service-Animal-Policy-DOJ.pdf>
<https://www.natlawreview.com/article/doj-releases-supplemental-guidance-service-animals-under-americans-disabilities-act>
- Georgia Laws on Service Dogs - <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/georgia-laws-on-service-dogs-and-emotional-support-animals.html>
<https://usaservicedogregistration.com/statelaws/georgia-service-dog-laws/>
- Additional Information - <http://parkviewfamily.org/about-us/policies>
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/does-your-church-have-policy-procedure-service-dogs-bob>
<https://www.registermyserviceanimal.com/service-animal-requirements.html>
<https://leadinglds.org/service-animals-at-church-what-lds-leaders-need-to-know/>
https://www.westmont.edu/_offices/disability/documents/ESAProviderForm.pdf