

Dear Parish Family:

We Americans love our animals, in particular we have a love affair with dogs. We have many sayings about dogs such as when our feet ache we say, "my dogs are barking" and when it gets hot we say, "it's the dog days of summer", heck one of America's favorite foods is the Hot 'Dog'! Over the summer we welcomed a new member of the Congregation, his name is Whistler, he is a trained Service Dog assisting a parishioner with her medical needs. Many folks saw him at the 8:30am Mass and occasionally at the 10:30am Mass and vocalized their wonder, 'Has the parish now gone to the dogs?' Covid-19 certainly has decimated Mass attendance so it seems we have been bringing in the dogs! Seriously after dialoguing with his family about his Mass attendance I asked if we could put something in the bulletin to raise awareness of people with disabilities and the service animals that assist them. There has been some rather bad publicity due to people passing off iguana's, snakes and peacocks – to mention a few- as service animals. I thought it would be nice to raise awareness about the importance of service dogs for the disabled. A lot of time, training and money is invested in selecting the right dog for the right job. It is also important for us to remember they are working animals and not pets.

Whistler, by-the-way, is not named for the famous American Painter James Whistler but for Whistler Mountain, the ski resort! He is a trained Service Unit or commonly called 'service Dog'. He is from an organization in Susquehanna Pennsylvania that breeds, raises and trains dogs to assist people with disabilities.

Here is his story told by his Human Companion Dawn whom Whistler assists:

*Susquehanna Service Dog "Whistler" joined our family in late June. By July 1st, he became a member of our parish. I have been on a waiting list for a service dog for approximately 4 years. During that time, Whistler was born and began puppy training at 8 weeks old. He then moved into more advanced training where he learned a variety of skills and the trainers determined what area he worked best at and enjoyed. It was concluded that Whistler made an excellent balance and mobility dog so he moved into another level of training to finesse his skills. He was introduced to me at a "Meet the Dogs" session. Whistler was one of 3 dogs that I had the opportunity to work with. It was concluded by the team and myself that he was my perfect match Whistler was taught to assist his partner to balance safely while walking, provide support while stepping up and down curbs and steps, pick up dropped items, open handicapped press button doors, and "get help" if needed. The final phase of training consisted of "Partner Training". Whistler and I spent several weeks practicing the skills he learned in order to help me maintain independence. Whistler is an amazing dog and is incredibly happy to help and be with people. Whistler is 2 years old and we continue to learn together. At times, you may hear a "clicker" training tool being used or hear him crunching his treats during mass. Most importantly, Whistler really helps me. As exciting as it is to see him at mass, Whistler is a working dog and he still has to work on the Sabbath. While he is working, his attention to his job is critical for my safety. I am excited that so many have welcomed him into our parish family. Thank you Father Bambrick and the many members of our faith community for making Whistler so welcome.*

Thank you Dawn for allowing me to raise awareness of the important role of service animals.

Peace and Good – Fr. Bambrick