

## **SOUTH GATE BAPTIST CHURCH**

### **Animal Policy**

#### **SERVICE ANIMAL**

In concert with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), South Gate Baptist Church defines service animals as “*dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability. The task(s) performed by the dog must be directly related to the person’s disability.*” (ADA Revised Requirements: Service Animals)

Examples of such work or tasks include, but are not limited to, assisting 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 do not qualify as service animals under the ADA.

When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, South Gate Baptist Church staff or leaders may ask two questions of the handler:

- 1) Is the service animal required because of a disability?
- 2) What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

South Gate Baptist Church, being a religious institution, is exempt from the ADA and does not have to allow individuals to bring their service animals into the facility. South Gate Baptist Church desires to be inclusive of all people with disabilities and to ensure freedom to worship to everyone. We also have a responsibility to our church membership to help educate our members and provide a safe environment for all people desiring to worship at South Gate Baptist Church.

Therefore, if someone attends our services with a service animal, we expect the service animal and the handlers to meet the following ADA standards and expectations:

- Service animals remain with their handlers while on campus.
- Service animals will not sit on church furniture.
- Service animals must be harnessed, leashed, 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.
- Service animals do not whine, bark, grumble, or make other noises (example: snoring). An exception may be if the whining is an alert, such as to notify the handler who is experiencing a physical complication.
- Service animals do not obstruct an area used for emergency evacuation.

The church leadership staff may make exceptions to this policy to accommodate unique events and situations.

#### **EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMAL (ESA)**

South Gate Baptist Church defines Emotional Support Animal (ESA) as an animal (typically a cat or dog) that provides a therapeutic benefit to its owner 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 accommodations by the American Disabilities Act (ADA).

Persons wishing to access the South Gate Baptist Church campus with their ESA should contact our church by phone or email prior to attending with their support animal. An appointment will be set up with church leadership to discuss the nature of your mental health-related disability and to discuss approval for an exception to the service animal policy. Approval is strictly on a case-by-case basis.

We understand that for a person to qualify for an emotional support animal, he/she must be considered emotionally disabled by a licensed mental health professional (therapist, psychologist, psychiatrist, etc.) as evidenced by a properly formatted letter. **The letter must be dated, written on his/her letterhead, and include his/her license type, number, date of license, and state in which the license was issued.** The letter should state:

- You are currently his/her patient.
- You are under his/her care for the treatment of mental disability found in the DSM IV or V (the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, version 4 or 5).
- Your disability substantially limits at least one major life activity.
- He/she prescribes for you an emotional support animal (the numbers and types of animals) as a necessary treatment for your mental health.

Unless a member of the leadership staff grants approval, an ESA is not permitted access to the campus for Sunday services or other classes, events, and programs. Therefore, requests for appointments should be made well in advance of a plan to attend. Persons with ESAs who are granted approval will receive a special tag for staff, ushers, greeters, and other leadership to readily identify their ESA as approved.

Approved ESAs must comply with all expectations listed under the service animal policy. In addition, ESAs are not permitted in areas of the church where the handler's presence is not necessary.

**Courtesy and Respect:** We ask that all Service Animals and ESA handlers please limit your seating and walking areas to be sensitive to our members with animal allergies. We ask that during services you would sit in a specified designated area of the Worship Center. Should an ESA not comply with these expectations, the owner will be asked to remove their ESA from the campus immediately, and approval of the ESA may be revoked. South Gate Baptist Church seeks to maintain a clean, healthy environment for our members and guests. Please do not allow your animals to emit bodily fluids of any type while in the facilities, including drool, urine, feces, blood, or semen.

### **PERSONAL PET**

Personal pets are not permitted on the South Gate Baptist Church campus. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis after the person has contacted the church by phone or email prior to attending. Approved pets must comply with all expectations listed under the service animal policy. In addition, pets are not permitted in areas of the church where the handler's presence is not necessary.