

# All about First United's newest member . . . Frida

Hello First United Lutheran Church community,

Many of you have met or seen pictures of my service-dog in training Frida. Frida and I have been working with service dog training since June. We are in the final stages of formal training, following a weekend with a professional training team the first weekend in February. Right now, she knows how to behave appropriately in public (called "public access" training), and I'm working to teach her the specific service skills she'll be using with me.

In February, I began bringing my service dog Frida to work with me at the Welcome Center. Since February, her training will conclude with on-the-job learning (sort of like a service dog apprenticeship) at the Welcome Ministry while she learns what her roles will be, finishes learning her service tasks, and learns to do the tasks at the office. In spring, she will hopefully test out of formal training as a service dog. This training is quite intensive and covers specific tasks to work with my disabilities, and also very advanced training in how to behave in public. This training and certification ensures that I can ensure that she is safe, appropriate, focused, controlled, and clean in public.

She's begun practicing how to be under control in worship through ELM events and practicing in an empty sanctuary. Unlike when we bring pets to St. Francis Sunday, she has to learn how to listen to whispered commands, ignore people standing, heel through communion, walk past the snack table, be quiet during worship (no snoring!) and generally be as inconspicuous as possible so that people can worship in peace. Based on her practice, I think she'll be ready to worship with us soon.

Service animals are not pets. Service animals have strict rules to follow, such as not being allowed to chew on items, make messes, or approach people without my permission. In order to have access to go public places, the animal and handler (person) have to prove that they can maintain this level of control.

People also have different rules for how to be around service dogs. It's important that people not try to touch, distract, feed, or make noises at a service dog. It can distract the service animal from doing its work to help minimize disabilities, put the handler in danger if alerting is distracted, and make it more difficult to maintain the control needed for public access. It's also important to not interfere with either of us doing our work by interrupting or talking about the service animal in a social or unnecessary way. It's fine to ask questions, but please try to do so when the office is less busy and we're not in the middle of other tasks.

## Questions and Answers about Frida

### **What kind of dog is she?**

Frida is a Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier, an Irish dog bred for all-around work including herding, retrieving, and companionship.

### **How old is she?**

Because she was adopted as an adult rescue, we don't know for sure. Based on her teeth and microchip, we think she's around five years old. She's definitely a grown up.

### **Where did you get her?**

She was adopted from the rescue organization Milo in the East Bay. Amazingly, she already knew basic commands, was potty-trained, and had good dog manners.

## **Is Frida bad for allergies?**

There is no such thing as a truly hypoallergenic dog, but some breeds have lower allergen potential. I have bad allergies to dogs, so I picked a dog with hair instead of fur who doesn't shed or drool much. Dogs also pick up allergens like pollen when they go outside, just like human hair can. For this reason, she'll be getting weekly baths and wiped down with an anti-allergen soap/lotion regularly. *If being around dogs is a disability access issue for you, see the last question below.*

## **Can I pet Frida?**

To start, the answer has to be "no." Once Frida is doing well in not getting distracted, we might be able to work it out. Please remember that this isn't personal, it's about safety and helping Frida to do her job.

If Frida is taking a break from working, if you ask permission from me, and if it isn't too crowded or busy, we might be able to arrange some petting time.

When this happens, the rules are:

- Please ask permission first. Remember I may need to say "no" sometimes.
- I will need to find a quiet and not busy space.
- I will ask Frida to sit or lay down and stay still, and will hold her collar to remind her she is working and needs to listen to me.
- You can come to her when I say it's OK.
- It will probably be a short time to pet so that Frida can get back to work.

It is hard for dogs to learn not to approach people who they want to meet or who are distracting, so it works best to reinforce this boundary when people want to greet her.

## **What about Kid's Time or other times when Jay is leading?**

At first, Galen may accompany me sometimes to help make sure Frida stays controlled and focused during these times. She's trained to stay laying down under a table or chair, and often does this so well she falls asleep. The rules with the kids will be the same, and if it's too much of a distraction for the kids to participate and learn, we can figure out another arrangement.

In weeks when I'm leading worship, she may stay at home if needed.

## **What does Frida do to help with a disability?**

Frida is learning the following tasks to work with me:

- Medical alerting to help catch medical emergencies before they get dangerous
- Making space in and navigating through crowds, such as helping not to get bumped
- Providing consistent sensory feedback to minimize sensory overload
- Retrieving items I drop and bringing an emergency kit

It's likely as we complete training she may be learning other tasks related to my disabilities.

One note--if you meet other service dog teams and wonder why a person has a service dog, or what disability the person has, the polite and legal way to ask this is to ask "*what service dog tasks is the dog trained to do?*," because it allows the person to be in control of whether or not to share personal medical information and focuses on the service dog's role.

## Questions and Answers about Service Dogs

### **How is a service animal different from a pet?**

Service animals have public access training to behave appropriately in public together with training on specific skills to reduce the impact of a disability for a particular person. Because they have both of these types of training, they can go with a trained person with a disability to public places and to work to help the person to be more independent and productive.

### **What laws cover service animals?**

There are federal, state, and local laws that say different things about the rights and responsibilities of service dogs and handlers. In San Francisco, service dog laws are more permissive than federal laws. Because I travel and because I work as a professional, it is important to me to go by the more restrictive federal laws, which are the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008:

[http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110\\_cong\\_public\\_laws&docid=f:publ325.110](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ325.110)  
<http://www.dredf.org/ADA.shtml>

But to me, the questions about whether a place is legally forced to accommodate a disability are less helpful than the question: **Why *wouldn't* we want disabled people to have as much access to public life and be as healthy and functional as possible?**

### **What about churches?**

Churches are considered “private,” therefore do not fall under the ADA. But, because The Welcome Ministry is a public non-profit and I work for the Welcome Ministry, my work there falls under the ADA. While the law is complicated, I think the bigger question are the justice issues:

- How can FULC best include all people with disabilities in the life of the congregation?
- What can we do to promote fuller participation of disabled people in all aspects of church life?

For most people who use service animals, more full participation on more levels is possible when they are allowed to participate with the animal. How service animal teams are included is also a sign that many disabled people watch for to know if we are really welcomed as we are into church life. Since current statistics underestimate Americans with disabilities at 18% in 2005, it makes good sense to work toward greater inclusion. It's also a Christ issue: Rather than responding with pity, charity, or moralism about disabilities, what if we follow Jesus' example in bringing disabled people to the center of community life?

### **I can't tell you're disabled--why do you use a service dog then?**

Like the majority of people with disabilities, my disabilities aren't always obvious. That's why I wrote in May to introduce myself and why I do things in different ways that many people. In figuring out the best ways to do my job, live in the city, and still have energy for my family, working with a service dog will help me to better be able to do my job interacting with people because I will be less overloaded with sensory disintegration problems and will help me to have more warning to avoid potential medical emergencies. Eventually I hope she will also be able to do some Therapy Dog work at Welcome Ministry, once she learns her other jobs.

## **What if someone has a disability like a phobia or asthma and can't be around dogs?**

Let me (Pastor Jay) know ahead of time if possible, and we can arrange a solution that meets your disability access needs as well as mine. You're welcome to talk to Pastor Susan too, but it'll be more direct to talk to me.

I've worked in disability rights for most of my adult life, and have lots of experience figuring out access solutions. My approach to access challenges where two people's access needs seem to be conflicting is first to affirm how wonderful we're doing with inclusion to get to that point! I value hearing about and accommodating your access needs. There are many ways to work out such solutions.

If a problem arises that hasn't been anticipated, let me know as soon as possible and we can figure out a solution, but it is best to plan ahead so that it's not disruptive to the church or to the work Frida and I will be doing.

### **MORE INFORMATION:**

-Basics:

<http://community.deltasociety.org/Document.Doc?id=239>  
[http://www.dbtacnorthwest.org/\\_public/site/files/ada/documents/ServiceAnimals.pdf](http://www.dbtacnorthwest.org/_public/site/files/ada/documents/ServiceAnimals.pdf)  
<http://www.ada.gov/qasrvc.htm>

-About how service dogs work with various disabilities:

<http://www.k9web.com/dog-faqs/service.html>  
<http://community.deltasociety.org/Page.aspx?pid=330>  
<http://www.iaadp.org/A-dogWorld.html>

-The trainers I'm working with:

[http://www.darnfar.com/SERVICE\\_DOG/](http://www.darnfar.com/SERVICE_DOG/)

-More specific information in this instance:

[http://www2.codegnome.org:59321/blogs/autism\\_service\\_dogs/articles/faq.html](http://www2.codegnome.org:59321/blogs/autism_service_dogs/articles/faq.html)  
[http://www2.codegnome.org:59321/blogs/autism\\_service\\_dogs/articles/AutismServiceDogAwareness.pdf](http://www2.codegnome.org:59321/blogs/autism_service_dogs/articles/AutismServiceDogAwareness.pdf)  
<http://www.dogs4diabetics.com/news/articles/Diabetes-Forecast-03-2008.pdf>  
<http://www.dogs4diabetics.com/news/articles/contracostatimes-09232007.html>