

A Christian Community Service Outreach Ministry



**Volunteer
Manual**

Effective: 03/25/2026

<https://canines4christ.org>

Introduction

Thank you for joining a unique Therapy Dog Ministry that serves the Lord through our own personal dogs, by going into the community to show God's unconditional love, hope, and kindness. God has called us to do all for His glory. We all strive with God's help to do the following: "Build caring relationships with the hope of gaining permission to share the life-changing good news of Jesus Christ" with those we serve. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31

Therapy Dog vs Service Dog — The Difference

Therapy Dog: is a specifically trained dog that provides affection, comfort, and support to a wide variety of people in many different settings.

Service Dog: According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a service animal is defined as a dog that has been trained to perform a task for an individual with a disability.

Therapy dogs serve others and can be petted. Service dogs serve their owner and should not be petted by others. Federal law mandates that a Service Dog can essentially go anywhere with the person it serves. Therapy dogs are not protected by that law. Any facility manager can tell you that your therapy dog is not welcome in that facility.

Business Cards

When you become a volunteer for Canines for Christ you are given business "ministry" cards with the picture of your dog on it. On the back of the card is "How to Make Heaven Your Home." That includes John 3:16 and a Prayer of Surrender. Many of our volunteers have personally led people to Christ using what is written on the back of the card. You may order additional business "ministry" cards by visiting the C4C Store on the website (<http://canines4christ.org>).

Where To Serve/Places to Visit (But NOT Limited To)

- Hospitals
- Nursing Homes
- Fire and Rescue Department
- 911 Call Centers
- Police Departments
- Schools
- Your Church
- Local Festivals
- Airports
- USO
- Funeral Homes
- Courts
- Hospice
- Dog Friendly Stores/Mall
- Memory Care Centers
- Rehab Facilities
- Special Needs Facilities
- Senior Day Cares

Be creative in discovering new places to visit and ask the Lord where He would want you to visit. We all have different gifts and talents, and we are not all going to go to the same place. Our dogs like variety as well, if possible, take them to different places. Make it fun for the dog.

Preparing To Serve

Pray before approaching a facility and ask the Lord to open doors where He wants you to serve. You can call facilities and speak to activity directors, letting them know who you are. "Hello! My name is ____ and I am with Canines for Christ Therapy Dogs. I was wondering if you would be interested in having us visit your facility?" If they say yes, then make an appointment to introduce your dog and yourself to them in person. Or you can go to the facility with your dog (their vest on, your shirt and ID lanyard on, ministry card in hand) and ask how you can serve at the facility. When you visit, they can see that you have a well-behaved dog and that you come from a credible organization, things they cannot see when you call. Either way, take a folder with copies of your dog's shot records, insurance papers, C4C pamphlet, and your dog's business card.

- Always carry a backpack or bag with everything you need for your dog's visits:
 - Poop Bags
 - Water/Small Bowl
 - Treats/Treat Bag
 - Hand Sanitizer
 - Wipes
 - Small Towel for any Drool or Spills (Paper Towel)
 - Pen and Small Pad of Paper for Prayer Requests
 - Charged Cell Phone / Contact Information of the Facility You are Visiting
 - 4' - 6' Foot Leash with Either a Flat Collar, Martingale Collar or Gentle Lead/Harness

Always have a current rabies certificate, insurance papers, C4C pamphlets, and lots of business "ministry" cards to hand out as appropriate on any visit with your dog. Occasionally a facility will have requirements that they want you to meet before you serve. If you want to meet their requirements, then no problem. If not, you can discuss it with them, but, if you do not like the administrator's requirements, then go to another facility. If you are told they do not want a visit at a facility, say thank you and leave. Always be pleasant. We represent the Lord, and they will watch and see how we handle ourselves.

- Some facilities require orientations and background checks. If you are not willing to do these, politely excuse yourself.
- Ask about their dress code. Some facilities require certain attire, but we always wear a Canines for Christ shirt, lanyard with our C4C card, close-toed shoes, and a C4C vest or bandana on our dog. The only exception is if you are required to wear a professional shirt due to work setting, the lanyard/badge must be worn at all times. We represent Christ and are a Ministry of Presence. You will get many conversations started from people seeing/noticing the shirt, bandana, or vest before you ever say anything.
- When it is hot or you are serving outside, please wear mid-thigh or longer shorts or Capris for modesty

purposes.

- Dogs are required to wear a C4C vest or bandana and not to be dressed in a manner that attracts unusual notice or attention to the dog.
- Make a schedule of when you will return with the person in charge, i.e. once a week, monthly and the time that works best for them. If you can't make it on your scheduled day and time, make sure you have a contact number so that you can let them know as soon as possible for their planning purposes.

Now that you have a place to visit, a schedule set, pack is ready, proper attire on, dog is clean, nails are trimmed, and the vest or bandana is on, let's get started!

Making Visits – Best Practices

- Pray for the Lord to prepare the way as you go out and pray for those you will visit. May God open their hearts to Him through your dog. Conduct yourself in a Christ-like manner to those you meet and encounter.
- Arrive at your visit 10-15 minutes early or more if needed. Always be on time for visits. Take your dog potty and pick up any dog waste in a poop bag. Place in trash or in your car to dispose of later. Get your dog's energy out before you enter a facility as best you can.
- At some facilities the staff will walk you through or have the clients in a special area for you. Other places give you the freedom to visit staff and clients throughout their building. Ask how they want you to serve them. We are there to serve them, so let's do it to the best of our ability.
- If in a Hospital or Nursing Home and going to rooms, knock on the door and ask if they want a visit from a therapy dog or ask, "Would you like to pet a dog?" If they say "YES", enter and introduce your dog by name, and that he or she is a C4C therapy dog.
- If someone is talking to a staff member or having any kind of cleaning or medical procedure done, or talking on the phone or sleeping, we do not want to disturb them.
- Bring your dog to side of bed, wheelchair, or walker, and never in the front so they don't lean over and fall. If they have a walker or cane, you may want to ask them to sit down so they can pet the dog. This is for stability reasons.
- Always ask before touching anyone.
- Have your dog get petted and do some tricks if they know any. Mainly you are just there to listen. Do not ask what is wrong with them health wise.
- If the client or patient wants you to get them something or to help them sit down or get up, that is not for us to do. Tell them you will let the nurse know.
- Visits in rooms should be brief. As you leave tell them thank you for allowing your dog to visit them and ask if they would like your dog's business card.
- Do not enter NO CONTACT rooms. They usually have yellow pockets on the doors, and they say NO CONTACT.

- Do not let your dog paw anyone because their nails can tear elderly skin or scratch someone unintentionally.
- If in a bed, ask if they have any injuries and allow your dog to do “paws up” on the edge of the bed or on a chair next to them for petting (teach a “paws up” command).
- If you have a small dog, carry a small blanket, and ask if the dog can be placed next to them with the blanket under the dog as a barrier.
- Remember, some of the clients are not able to remember or make decisions so be cautious and ask the nurse if possible.
- If you are in a facility and a fire alarm goes off, take your dog and leave out the nearest exit. Your responsibility is to your dog and not the clients. The staff is trained to handle the clients.
- You can also go as a tag team on visits, but only one team at a time in small spaces.
- Always keep your dog on a leash and never let anyone else have control of your dog. We do have certain exceptions for a dog working off leash, please contact C4C Director of Membership to discuss.
- No flea collars are allowed. Do not use topical flea medications prior to a visit. Use pill type if possible.
- We highly recommend that you don’t allow others to give your dog a treat. It can take the focus off the petting and your dog will want treats from everyone, which can be a bad thing. It may cause them to start mouthing at client’s hands. Graciously say your dog cannot take treats from clients. If you allow others to give treats to your dog, please instruct them to hold the treat with an open palm and offer guidance.
- Be cautious when you give your dog a treat and other dogs are around, they can be aggressive if they are food motivated.
- If you visit with other handlers and are attending a group event with other dogs, hold the leash close and keep your dog 2 to 3 feet from other dogs for safety purposes.
- Do not let dogs make eye to eye contact with another dog. That can lead to aggressive behavior. They are therapy dogs, but they still are dogs.
- Do not take a female dog out on a visit if they are in heat. A male dog must not mark at inappropriate times or while in a facility.
- We allow a single handler to handle up to and no more than 2 dogs when making visits. We recommend that you train with the dogs to prepare for making visits together.
- If making visits to children or around children, get down to their level. We suggest that you put your finger through the collar on your dog to keep control. Children can react and move fast. We never want an accident to happen or to give the appearance that we aren’t in control of our dog.
- Keep the dog’s mouth back or have a child(ren) pet on the back of your dog.
- Know your dog and be aware of your surroundings, especially the ground. If you see your dog getting stressed or unsettled, excuse yourself and take your dog out for a break. Return to area, sometimes you just must work

through a new distraction. Calm your dog, talk to them, let them know it is OK, use treats, and gentle petting.

- To report an incident on an official visit where first aid or potential complaint is pending, please find C4C Incident Report Form at the end of this manual, copy and follow the procedures outlined in document.

It is always our job to pay close attention to our dog when on a therapy visit. Controlling and protecting your dog are your primary responsibilities. Be an advocate for your dog's physical and emotional well-being. Never put your dog or yourself in a questionable or threatening situation, do not force your dog to interact with a person if they are showing reluctance.

Stressors in Therapy Dog Work

- ✓ Working on a Tight Leash
- ✓ Allowing Dog to be Handled Inappropriately by Participants
- ✓ Not Allowing Dog to Take a Break When Needed
- ✓ Not Allow Dog Room to Move Away

We recommend that you only visit with your dog 2 – 3 times per week and for 1 – 3 hours maximum per day depending on the demand of the visit. Be mindful that our dogs get tired, and we don't want to burn them out.

Common Signs of Stress in Your Dog

- ✓ Turning /Backing Away
- ✓ Excessive Lip-Licking
- ✓ Crouching
- ✓ Excessive Yawning
- ✓ Heavy Panting
- ✓ Ears Back
- ✓ Hiding
- ✓ Losing Willingness to Interact with People / Socialize

Immediately cease a therapy visit if any one of the following situations arise:

- Improper behavior of the dog (growling, repeated barking, scratching, biting)
- If a participant has an allergic reaction or medical emergency
- Dog is showing signs of fatigue or undue stress

General Information

Remember that training with your dog never ends. There will always be new distractions that you will encounter. Whatever you allow your dog to get away with will become a habit for them, so be careful of what you allow. The handler/dog team should be relaxed, teams should appear to work effortlessly. The dog should be quiet, alert, and responsive. The dog should not pull-on leash, nor should the handler have to pull the dog's collar or leash excessively. Verbal corrections should be firm but discreet. Cues to the dog should be given gently, quietly, and in a pleasant tone of voice. Always praise your dog for good behavior. If you have any questions or we can serve you in any way, please contact our C4C Canine Program Facilitator Team or C4C Director of Membership.

Stories and Pictures

- When taking photos, make sure they are appropriate, especially in a crisis situation.
- Make sure you have authorization to take photos in any facility or situation.
- Do not put names with photos.
- Many families do not want to be on Facebook or other types of social media. You *must* ask for their consent before doing it.
- No facility names unless you are allowed to do so by their permission. In many posts, we put our dog's name and a facility such as nursing home or hospital, but not the name of the facility.
- Make the posts brief and let the photo speak for itself.

Registering Your Dog with AKC (OPTIONAL)

If you choose (optional) to register your dog with the American Kennel Club, take the following steps: Go to <https://www.akc.org>, click on Register Your Dog, and follow the prompts. All C4C dogs must have either earned the Canine Good Citizen or equivalent. A copy or picture of the form/certificate will need to be on file with your application for membership. If you need to contact AKC for any reason, they may be reached at <https://www.akc.org> and go to the "Contact Us" link at the bottom of the home page.

Individual Visits Made

This can be done through our Track it Forward App, you can create a profile at this link <https://k9forchrist.org/report-volunteer-visits> and follow the prompts. It is a simple and easy way of tracking visits. **We ask that you track your visits whether you desire to earn AKC Therapy Dog Titles or not, they will be used for internal tracking and information for possible funding by organizations supporting Canines for Christ.** If you desire to earn AKC Therapy Dog Titles once you reach a specific requirement (see below), please request a letter of recommendation from the C4C Director of Membership to include with the AKC Therapy Dog Title Application.

C4C follows the AKC Guidelines for making visits. One visit equals one facility regardless of time or the number of people that you interact with during that visit. For full details please visit: <https://www.akc.org/products-services/training-programs/akc-therapy-dog-program/>

Therapy Dog Titles and Patches (OPTIONAL)

Keep track of your visits to earn AKC therapy patches. See the “INDIVIDUAL VISITS MADE” section above. You will have to register with AKC. Follow the “REGISTERING YOUR DOG WITH AKC” section above.

You do not have to apply for all the patches to get the next. In other words, you don't have to apply for the 10 visits. You can wait until you complete 50 visits and then apply for the 50-visit patch since each level that you apply for requires you to pay a fee.

AKC Therapy Dog Novice (THDN) – 10 visits

AKC Therapy Dog (THD) – 50 visits

AKC Therapy Dog Advanced (THDA) – 100 visits

AKC Therapy Dog Excellent (THDX) – 200 visits

AKC Therapy Dog Distinguished (THDD) – 400 visits

AKC Therapy Dog Supreme (THDS) – 600 visits

C4C Royal Ambassador – 1000 visits (Canines 4 Christ patch; no fee)

Other C4C Opportunities

- Jr Handler: Seeks to equip and encourage youth to effectively share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their communities through volunteer and community outreach while engaging with likeminded individuals within the C4C family.
- Chaplain: The leadership of Canines for Christ Ministry would like to offer you the opportunity to obtain a Certificate of Chaplaincy with Canines for Christ. The Chaplain designation will open many new doors for you to minister to people as they will view you in a different way as you reach out to them in Christ's name. Please refer to C4C website under “Serve Tab” to learn more.
- AKC Evaluator: If you have reasonably extensive experience with dogs and feel called to help our organization as an evaluator, please contact our C4C Director of Membership.
- Reading Buddies: Animal-assisted therapy teams interested in working with children in academic settings.
- Care Partner: The Care Partner Ministry is two-fold by assigning existing volunteers with a Care Partner to provide on-going support and encouragement as well as assigning new volunteers to a Care Partner to help them get started in the ministry and offer a “caring ear” to address any needs they may have.
- Local Chapter Development: Across the country C4C volunteers are forming local chapter groups, 3 or more members in a local area, to serve and do life together. For more information see “Serving Contacts” on C4C website.
- Crisis Response Ministry: All members have an exciting and rewarding opportunity to minister to hurting people during emergencies. This ministry, unlike all other C4C opportunities, is highly regulated and requires special training to participate. These regulations and training are to protect you and your dog while on

assignment. Crisis Response, also known as Incident Management, is managed by professionals using an organizational process known as the Incident Command System. C4C members must be trained in the system to be onsite with these managers. Freelancing on any Crisis at any level is strictly forbidden. Members must ask permission of the managing agency or be invited by a local or national organization to assist. The wearing of C4C logos on a Crisis is subject to similar restrictions.

More Information – Additional Resources

For Volunteer Manual questions, please contact our C4C Director of Membership, Chaplain Jill Powell at jill@canines4christ.org.

For Volunteer Resources, please check the C4C website under the Volunteers Tab – Volunteer Resources <https://canines4christ.org/volunteer-resources>

For Canine Resources, please check the C4C website under the Volunteers Tab – Canine Resources <https://k9forchrist.org/canine-resources>

For general information about C4C, please check the C4C website at <https://canines4christ.org/>

CANINES FOR CHRIST
Incident Report

An Incident is defined as an event that negatively impacts the visit because of behavior, injury, or damage to property involving you or your dog. If an incident occurs involving an employee, resident, visitor, or dog while representing Canines For Christ:

- Immediately contact the facility's supervisor on duty
- End the visit immediately and secure your dog
- Document the incident on all required forms for the facility
- Fill out and submit the Canines For Christ Incident Report below within 24 hours of the incident
- Contact Jill Powell at jill@canines4christ.org or call 210-452-5623

If the incident involves dog aggression, a suspected dog bite, or an injury, the dog shall not participate in any dog therapy activity until the incident is investigated and resolved by Canines For Christ.

Date of Report: _____ Date of Incident: _____ Time of Incident: _____

Name of Facility where incident took place: _____

Facility Address: _____ Phone: _____

Name of Facility Contact Person: _____

Facility Contact Email: _____ Facility Contact Phone: _____

Name of Dog(s) and Handler(s) involved: _____

Handler Email: _____ Handler Phone: _____

Breed of Dog: _____ Age: _____

What took place? *(Use additional pages if needed)*

What action was taken? Was medical attention needed? If so, who administered it, and what was done? *(Use additional pages if needed)*

Is there any evidence relating to the incident, such as a video, photos, or other physical evidence such as damaged property? If so, where is it located?

Additional individuals who observed the incident:

Name: _____ Contact Info: _____

Name: _____ Contact Info; _____

Submitted By: _____

Signature: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____