



Lutheran Church Charities

LCC K-9 Ministries • Disaster Response • Crisis Response

Working with you to show the Mercy, Compassion, Presence and Proclamation of Jesus Christ

For background:

The K-9 Ministry of Lutheran Church Charities

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What an LCC K-9 Comfort Dog is

The purpose of a comfort dog is to interact with people of all ages and circumstances. But in particular, comfort dogs provide a vital service to people who have undergone natural- or human-caused trauma (hurricanes, tornadoes, mass shootings, etc.). All dogs in the LCC program are purebred golden retrievers.

What a comfort dog does: Together with their handlers (members of a sponsoring Lutheran church congregation), LCC K-9 Ministry comfort dogs are good listeners, non-judgmental and confidential. Many people will talk to a comfort dog before talking to people. It helps them process the stress or grief that they are experiencing. Handlers are present and ready to offer compassion and prayer.

What are the benefits? The body of scientific research clearly indicates the calming effects of petting a comfort dog can contribute to lowering blood pressure and reducing heart rates. Several peer-reviewed studies indicate the health and psychological benefits of dog-human interaction is related to the release of oxytocin, a naturally produced peptide hormone and neuropeptide that also plays a role in social bonding, reproduction, childbirth, the period after childbirth, and it is associated with characteristics such as generosity, trust, and the modulation of inflammation and wound healing.

Twenty LCC K-9 Ministry comfort dogs are profiled for their work in a wonderful book, "Extraordinary Dogs, Stories from Search and Rescue Dogs, Comfort Dogs, and Other Canine Heroes," by Liz Stavrinides and John Schlimm (St. Martin's Press, 2019). In story after story, the comfort dogs enable victims of trauma and tragedy to experience very human emotions with the support they need.

Where are comfort dogs already working? Currently there are 130 K-9 Ministry comfort dogs working in 27 states, with over 70 congregations either interested or in process to receive a trained and certified comfort dog.

All dogs and handlers are extensively trained

Training required/dogs: LCC trains all comfort dogs and handlers out of our Northbrook, Barrington, and East Dundee, Illinois facilities. The training is conducted by LCC's professional canine trainers working with volunteers who foster the dogs during the training period, which involves 2,000 hours over a period of about 18-24 months. When the dogs achieve specific performance and behavioral metrics, they are placed with an in-process congregation to continue training with LCC K-9 Comfort Dog trained handlers.



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Training includes teaching dogs the commands of their handlers, respecting the private space of individuals (such as those who are hospitalized), and to be receptive to touch and affection from children and adults they are unfamiliar with.

Training required/human handlers: Our “on the ground” team – handlers and the local leader (the “Top Dog”) – all receive 20 hours of initial training as well as ongoing support, coaching and training updates from our Northbrook, Illinois headquarters.

How a comfort dog is different from other types of working dogs: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines working dogs in several categories, including guide dogs, hearing (or signal) dogs, psychiatric dogs, service dogs for people with physical limitations, autism assistance dogs and service dogs trained to recognize seizures.

Other types of working dogs employ their extraordinary sense of smell for search and rescue, explosives detection, cancer detection and to detect allergens and illicit drugs.

Comfort dogs are conditioned to be comfortable in new environments, to interact with different people, to have a calm temperament, to be unfazed by unfamiliar noises and movements, to be comfortable with being handled, and to “love people,” per the AKC.

For more information: <https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/lifestyle/service-working-therapy-emotional-support-dogs/>

Natural disasters, mass shootings, nursing homes, schools, court systems ...

LCC’s K-9 Comfort Dogs serve when invited, which can include church events, school visits, chapel talks, school and library reading programs, nursing homes, hospitals, and community special events.

In particular, either with one dog or whole teams from multiple congregations, the LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs serve a very important function at:

The aftermath of natural disasters (hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, fires, and earthquakes): Often, the losses of loved ones and property can overwhelm the survivors of natural disasters. LCC comfort dogs are also invited with their handlers or ministry teams, to temporary food and clothing distribution centers and shelters. Some such disasters include Hurricane Harvey in Texas and wildfires in Oregon and California.

The aftermath of mass shootings: The absolute trauma of mass shootings have become all too common in recent years. For over ten years, LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs have been deployed to serve after shootings at Sandy Hook (Connecticut), Pulse Nightclub (Florida), El Paso (Texas), Las Vegas (Nevada), Milwaukee (Wisconsin), and many more. (For a more detailed list of past engagements, see “LCC K-9 Ministry Major Crisis Response Deployments” (PDF) available here: <https://www.lutheranchurchcharities.org/media.html>)

Lucas County, Ohio court system: Since November 2017, LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ezra has served in the county prosecutor’s office to bring a calming presence to people in the criminal justice system, serving individuals affected by crime. For more information, see: [Lutheranchurchcharities.org/lcc-k-9-court-system-Ofund---ezra.html](https://www.lutheranchurchcharities.org/lcc-k-9-court-system-Ofund---ezra.html)



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COVID-19 pandemic era: In April of 2020, the LCC K-9 Ministry began conducting “virtual visits” via Zoom and FaceTime platforms to visit people who are isolated and alone during the pandemic.

History: How LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry came to be

Lutheran Church Charities, as with many faith-based groups, responded to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 by helping rescue homeowners who had pets, as FEMA did not have the capabilities for handling animals. It was there that Tim Hetzner, president and CEO, first saw the importance of the strong bond people have with their dogs.

When LCC staff returned to Chicago, they began to borrow dogs to take to disaster scenes to comfort victims. When a mass shooting occurred on the Northern Illinois University campus in February of 2008, LCC was given special access to grieving students and faculty because of the dogs. This is when Hetzner felt God was sending him a message: “Don’t wait for disasters. Place dogs in churches.” That same year LCC acquired its first four K-9 comfort dogs, two of which were assigned to churches. From there, the program proved to be increasingly popular with Lutheran church congregations:

2009-2010: K-9 ministry expands visits to nursing homes, hospitals and community events; plans made to place dogs permanently into northern Illinois Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregations. Breeders and trainers engage in the program to increase number of available dogs.

2012-2013: K-9 ministry responds to Superstorm Sandy, Sandy Hook Elementary School mass shooting, Boston Marathon bombing, and several more disasters and shootings.

2014: LCC Kare 9 Military Ministry was launched. *See below for more details.*

2016: LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ruthie was named the ASPCA “Dog of the Year” for her work with her handlers in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012. Ruthie and more than 30 other LCC comfort dogs provided exemplary affection to traumatized children and adults in the months following the awful shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

“Animals like Ruthie go into all these situations where the pain is so great – people just stand over these dogs and pour out their sadness – and they take it all in and carry it with such grace,” Jenny Hubbard, the mother of victim Catherine Violet Hubbard, told the NBC Today show. *“They take it and take it and take it, and they give back love.”*

2017: LCC K-9 Police Ministry was launched. *See below for more details.*

Military and Police Ministry comfort dogs

Two additional types of comfort dog ministries are provided to bring a comforting presence to active military, veterans and police officers in need:

The LCC Kare 9 Military Ministry: Established in August 2014, the LCC Kare 9 Military Ministry teams of veterans and dogs serve veterans, active military and their families in a variety of ways. The presence of a Kare 9 dog and veteran handler serves as a bridge for compassionate ministry to those who have given so much. LCC Kare 9 Military Ministry dogs are trained to obey specific commands, welcome affection and connect with individuals. Each Kare 9 handler is a



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veteran who shares the bond of duty, service and memories. Some of these memories can be difficult to bear. All of these elements combine to create a relaxed setting to encourage conversation.

The LCC Kare 9 Military Ministry Dogs and handlers serve as follows:

- Yellow-ribbon reintegration events
- Military stand-downs
- Visiting VA hospitals and medical centers
- Holiday events (Memorial Day parades and ceremonies, Veterans Day ceremonies)
- Visiting veterans in their homes or nursing homes
- VFW, American Legion, and AmVets events

There are approximately 80 Kare 9 Military Ministry dogs in service in 25 states. The program expands as veteran handlers become available.

The LCC K-9 Police Ministry: Launched in July 2017, the LCC K-9 Police Ministry handlers are law enforcement officers (current and former) who understand the unique challenges facing the law enforcement community who protect and serve, as well as their families. Our brothers and sisters in law enforcement can take comfort in the knowledge that the LCC K-9 Police Ministry handlers can relate to them as peers.

The LCC K-9 Police Ministry Dogs and handlers serve as follows:

- Crisis response – Serving law enforcement and family members in their time of need, by providing comfort following injuries, deaths, or major incidents.
- Ongoing support – K-9 visits (headquarters, substations, dispatch centers), assistance with department missions (Christmas shopping with children, summer camps, public events), comforting crime victims (prior to interviews, counseling, or courtroom testimony), and general support for department members and their families.

There are approximately 29 K-9 Police Ministry dogs in service in 16 states. The program expands as current or retired law enforcement handlers become available.

How this is part of a church outreach ministry

Comfort dogs are consistent with the LCC mission: The LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs are a bridge for compassionate ministry, opening doors for conversation about faith and creating opportunities to share the Mercy, Compassion, Presence and Proclamation of Jesus Christ to those suffering and in need. LCC K-9 Ministry teams do not proselytize but rather are a ministry of presence bringing comfort, a listening ear and prayer.

The LCC K-9 Ministry is one of presence. When the Lord calls, we must go and serve Him. Isaiah 6:8 tells us, *“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me.’”*

We only go where we are invited, and we never charge those we serve.



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Every LCC K-9 Comfort Dog has their own specific Bible verse which has been selected at the start of their training to bring comfort and hope to others in all that they do. Their Bible verse is on a K-9 card with information about the ministry and the church in which they are placed that is shared with everyone they meet. It serves as the basis for compassionate ministry to those in need.

About Lutheran Church Charities

Lutheran Church Charities' (LCC) mission is to share the **Mercy, Compassion, Presence and Proclamation of Jesus Christ** to those who are suffering and in need. LCC works primarily through churches to help individuals and families. Headquartered in Northbrook, Illinois, LCC serves nationally and internationally. LCC never charges those we serve.

Originally headquartered in Addison, Illinois, and currently in Northbrook, Illinois, Lutheran Church Charities (LCC) was founded in 1947 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit ministry to help support Christian human care ministries of the Church. LCC works throughout the United States and internationally with and in partnership with our churches. LCC is an RSO (Recognized Service Organization) of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. We operate with a "dollar in–dollar out" funding process where every dollar given for a cause or need goes directly to that cause or need, with LCC acknowledging the gift and overseeing that the money is used as intended.

Other work of LCC:

Disaster Response: LCC Disaster Response deploys, coordinates and manages volunteer teams as they respond to disasters throughout the United States. LCC trains volunteer Lutheran Early Response Teams (L.E.R.T.) through our LCMS congregations in many areas of disaster response. Approximately 850 active LCC L.E.R.T. volunteers are trained, many with expertise in the area of chainsaw, heavy equipment, debris removal, flood recovery with pumps, mucking homes, and how to provide emotional and spiritual care. L.E.R.T food handler certified volunteers can utilize the LCC Mobile Food Kitchen to prepare, cook and serve meals to volunteers and an affected community while deployed. For L.E.R.T. volunteers, disaster response is an essential relief and outreach ministry.

LCC Disaster Response also offers Congregational Preparedness Training (CPT) to help churches and ministries prepare to reach out to their communities following a disaster or crisis.

Hearts of Mercy & Compassion, Crosses for Losses provide a physical and spiritual symbol for families and friends who have suffered a loss or serious illness. The hearts and crosses are wood that is lovingly cut and painted by LCC volunteers, and are provided with presence and prayer upon request.

Human Care Ministry (Families in Need & Ministries in Need): Specific appeals to the LCC supporter community help individuals, clergy support staff and congregations. Support may be financial, in-kind donations, people resources, emotional and spiritual. Through LCMS congregations, LCC's Human Care Ministry supports soup kitchens, food pantries and lending closets, refugees, and veterans just to name a few.



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International Ministries:

LCC works with LCMS Missions to offer support to international partners in disaster recovery, medical missions, construction, collecting and distributing funds for education, feeding, and clean water programs, school tuition just to name a few.

Haiti:

LCC continues to work through our Haiti Mission Partners to send emergency funds to Haiti. They work diligently to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ by assisting wherever possible. Specific initiatives include: Haiti Lutheran School Tuition, food for Haitian school children; food for families and elderly at risk, goat cooperatives and agriculture, beds for the elderly, hygiene supplies and hand-washing stations, Haiti Lutheran School teacher salaries, water filters, and shoes for children in tent cities.

Israel:

LCC donors support Four Homes of Mercy, a Christian run home for the emotionally and physically disabled children (many of whom are orphans) and adults in the poor area of Bethany Israel in Jerusalem – the very location where Jesus always stayed when he came to that ancient city (home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, and Simon the Leper).

Ghana:

LCC works through Church Without Walls, a Christian organization that provides clean drinking water that effectively improves upon the country's poor infant mortality rate, and a medical clinic. Additionally, funds support the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana and its work to expand within the country.

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