Church Together

Meet Pumpkin: Lutheran Miniature Service Horse

by Trudy Franzen

Imagine you are sitting someplace you would rather not be, experiencing something that you would rather not have to endure. You aren’t liking this “new normal,” and the future is completely unknown. You feel powerless and overwhelmed. But out of the corner of your eye, you see something odd.

At first you think it might be a dog, but you look again. It is a small horse with kind, gentle eyes, looking right at you. She approaches you and lets you touch her. She gently nudges you with her soft nose. You smell her slight, fresh, outdoor scent, and for a moment you remember how good it is to be alive. When the visit is over, you have a new outlook. You feel better. You feel loved.

Pumpkin, age nine, has been doing this ministry for some years now in Northern California. She’s an eager servant of God.
Pumpkin first met Laura Skinner, her beloved handler and companion, when Laura was enduring very hard times. Laura had suffered physical setbacks and unsuccessful surgeries after a traumatic injury, but her spirit was hurting, too. Though she had always been a faithful church-goer, Laura had become frustrated and angry with God and set aside her faith.

By a series of miracles, Pumpkin became God’s agent and transformed Laura’s life both physically and spiritually. Together, they now provide a vital outreach to schools, hospitals, rehab facilities, assisted living centers, and hospices, making upwards of twenty-five visits a month. Though it is perceived difficult for people to share their faith in secular settings, Pumpkin provides opportunity like nothing else can. Pumpkin is a certified service animal, and Laura has meticulously sought training for herself to offer quality care to all in need. Many hours of preparation have made their ministry possible. They are supported 100% by donations, friendship and prayer.

Pastor Ben Colahan of Faith Lutheran Church in Chico, and the staff at St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church in Chico have come to value the gifts of Pumpkin in their midst. They can always count on Pumpkin to lend a hoof, eagerly playing the parts of Mary’s transport to Bethlehem and Jesus’ companion on Palm Sunday. Pumpkin thoroughly loves her church family and attends many events at Faith Lutheran and the surrounding community. With her wardrobe of costumes and accessories, Pumpkin is one of Faith Lutheran’s primary evangelists.

God uses every tool available to touch the human heart, including service animals like Pumpkin. Sometimes people are more able to connect and accept God’s love through a lovely creature like Pumpkin, rather than another human beings with opinions. God’s creation has a tremendous capacity for healing.

After the Carr Wildfire, Pumpkin was very active in offering service to those who were impacted. What Laura and her husband did not expect, was that they, too, would be traumatized by fire. Months later, the Camp wildfire displaced Laura and her husband. At the very same time, their 24 year old Ford Explorer, used to transport Pumpkin, finally gave up the ghost. They are currently looking for housing and a new way of transporting Pumpkin. She is no bigger than a large dog, so thankfully she has no special needs when it comes to housing. As a service animal, she can legally live anywhere and go anywhere.

Visit Pumpkin’s Facebook page to learn more and find out how to help: Pumpkin the Miniature Service Horse. She has over 500 friends and followers! Thanks be to God for this marvelous gift to us.

Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church Together story requests to mic@spselca.org.