



“LEO” GOLDMAN: CAMPUS MINISTRY’S DOG THERAPY

By mid-afternoon on a chilly February day, Leo is sprawled out on the carpet in the office of Michael Goldman (L’69), Georgetown Law’s Jewish chaplain.

“He doesn’t stress,” said Goldman about the large white dog on his floor. “He doesn’t dream about cases or exams.”

Leo, a 10-year-old mixed American and English golden retriever, with big brown eyes and a calming demeanor, visits the Law Center several times a semester, creating smiles and lowering blood pressures. An active therapy dog who regularly calls on hospice patients, Leo has also been part of the Georgetown Law community for about five years.

Goldman, who formerly practiced law at the Internal Revenue Service, introduced the Lawyers in Balance program to the Law Center in 2008 to help students cope with stress. He considers Leo an adjunct to that program.

The day before Leo’s visit, Goldman sends around an e-mail: “Leo looks forward to meeting and/or counseling anyone who stops by.” By 3 p.m. the next day, the dog has visited the Dean’s Office and interacted with upwards of 75 students, faculty and staff.

Afterwards, Leo wanders into the Campus Ministry common area, ready for a nap. He turns onto his back, suddenly lethargic, paws in the air and gravity pulling his jowls toward the floor — revealing a somewhat toothy grin.

Two surprised international students enter the office: “Oh, my God!” (Goldman is quick to remind visitors to Campus Ministry that “dog” is “God” backwards.)

“Hi, Leo!” “Is he sleeping?” “Can I take a picture?” Leo agreeably poses for a few selfies as the students rub his belly.

After a short rest, Goldman and Leo go for a walk, the dog delighting two students leaving the gym (“Leo! You made

my day!”), interrupting a student-professor meeting, brightening the faces of two solemn-faced women with textbooks and stalling a staff member carting mail down the hallway.

“He’s like a celebrity,” says Michelle Wu, associate dean for library sciences, as she passes the Leo-jam in the hallway.

“And I’m his agent,” quipped Goldman.

The following day, one of Leo’s fans sends Goldman an e-mail, expressing her gratitude for Leo time. She’s surprised by just how mellow this dog is.

“I guess his message was to calm down, be content and rest amidst all the surrounding chaos and stress,” says Megha Upadhyaya (LL.M.’18) “Just being around him was therapeutic in itself.”

Photo credit: Ines Hilde