



Church Vehicle Management

GENERAL SAFETY OVERVIEW

Every year we read about vehicle accidents where a church group is involved. One can only imagine receiving a phone call that a youth has been involved in an accident on the way to a mission trip, or a member of one of your women's groups was seriously injured on a church-sponsored outing.

While these accidents may have been preventable, they did happen. Has your church developed a transportation safety program? There are some simple areas of concern that should be reviewed in your program, or considered if you do not have one.

TRANSPORTATION POLICIES

Every church, regardless if they own any vehicles or not, should have a written transportation policy. The guidelines will allow you to follow a set of principles and practices to ensure the safety of everyone utilizing church vehicles or attending church-sponsored events. The policy should cover driver selection, vehicle selection, inspection and maintenance, trip safety and oversight.

The policy does not need to be a long set of rules that are difficult to remember and follow. Instead, it should contain short, clear, easy-to-follow guidelines. The policies should be shared with everyone involved in transporting people and be revised regularly.

DRIVER SELECTION

Very few churches have more drivers than needed. It seems to be an age-old problem lining up drivers. For a church with a fleet (one or more vehicles), driver selection is even more important. Drivers should be prequalified to drive. A current list should be readily

available as to contact information and which vehicles that person is authorized to drive.

It is recommended that drivers fill out an application, and an interview be conducted. If the driver seems to be a good fit, then a motor vehicle records check should be conducted to verify his or her driving record. Those with recent or extensive citations should not be considered.

Further, if the driver will potentially be transporting minors, then a criminal background and sexual predator background check should be conducted. Once this is completed, the driver should be trained on the specific vehicles they will be driving. Any vehicle that transports 16 or more occupants will require the driver to have a CDL license. Also, be aware that each state has specific guidelines on transporting as well as special licenses that you should be familiar with.

Always seek to have a listing of available drivers to adequately cover a trip and be able to step in should there be an emergency or change of plans, and be sure they are aware their assistance may be needed if necessary.

VEHICLE SELECTION, INSPECTION, AND MAINTENANCE

Obviously, you want every trip to go safely and smoothly. One way to make sure of this is to put the right driver in the safest vehicle. Several issues emerge with vehicle selection. Most church-owned vehicles are buses, vans, or shuttles.

First, the age of the vehicle should be considered. Any bus manufactured prior to 1977 does not meet the basic standards of safety and should be replaced as soon as possible. Buses that are post-1977 should be placed on a regular inspection and maintenance schedule, as well as all other church-owned vehicles. Have a trained mechanic conduct the repairs and document the repairs that have been completed.

Secondly, if you own or plan on using a 15-passenger van, you should be aware these vehicles have received several safety notices by the federal government for their ability to easily roll over. With five or more passengers, these vehicles get top-heavy, and if a tire blows out, or swerving maneuver completed, they often tip over and roll.

Some of the popular airport-style shuttles are not designed for long trips, as they lack the safety measures necessary to keep passengers safe. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) presents the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) that is used to rate the safety of vehicles. Further, any vehicle that is used for transporting children or used by churches should meet the MFSAB (Multi Function School Activity Bus) standards.

Finally, consider where you park your vehicle; keep it in a secure area. If that is not possible, park it in a well-lighted area of your parking lot. Also, if the vehicle is not used often, make it a habit to start it and drive it regularly. Extended periods of parking a vehicle can cause tires to become unsafe.

TRIP SAFETY

Once you have safe drivers and safe vehicles, there is one more step. That step is planning. Unexpected situations will often happen, however, planning can make the difference between life and death.

If using your vehicle locally, as many churches do, several issues should be considered. First, consider how you load and unload. Teach drivers and communicate to passengers the safest way to load and unload.

Next, when transporting minors, it is always preferred never to have one adult alone with a child. This is both for the safety of the child and the protection of the driver. Be sure to check state and federal laws regarding transporting children to and from schools.

For longer trips, planning for most emergencies can minimize problems should they occur. In addition, drivers and leaders should plan for the necessary supplies for the trip. The following is a more complete list to consider:

- Communication devices (cell phone, walkie-talkies)
- List of emergency contact numbers
- Current maps and directions
- Bottled water
- Blanket
- First-aid kit
- Moist wipes
- Emergency food supply
- Operating flashlight with extra batteries

- Flares or emergency markers
- Vehicle registration information
- Insurance information
- Jack and functional spare tire
- Gloves
- Jumper cables
- Dry chemical fire extinguisher
- Health and "consent to treat" forms for all travelers
- Accident reporting form

All passengers being transported should understand the nature of the trip, the church guidelines for what to do in case of an emergency. A pre-trip briefing is recommended. Again, if you have a written policy that says all passengers will wear seat belts (which you should), that should be communicated to those taking the trip. Behavior and responses to emergencies should also be shared. Here are several that you should share:

- The driver (or designated leader) is responsible for the trip and their instructions are to be followed at all times.
- All occupants must wear their seat belts any time the vehicle is moving.
- Nothing hazardous may be brought inside the vehicle at any time.
- All occupants should keep arms, legs, and other objects inside the vehicle at all times.
- Excessive noise and loud music is not permitted.
- Do not put anything in front of a window or in a position where the view of the driver is obstructed.
- In the event of an accident or an emergency, follow the driver/leader's instruction. Exit the vehicle on the passenger (or curb) side of the vehicle only after instructed to do so.
- Violation of these rules may result in the termination of the trip for the individual or the entire group.
- Report any concerns or hazards you observe.
- Aid and assist the drivers and others to make this a safe trip.

Especially when transporting minors and the elderly on longer trips it is important to have health forms and contact information with you. Should something happen, a quick response with the best information can reduce the severity of the incident.

OVERSIGHT

It is great to have a written plan, but if it is not followed, it can do more harm than good. The best approach is to have a Transportation Committee. This committee can ensure the established guidelines are followed and protect the drivers, passengers and ministry as it relates to transportation.

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