



## Driver Selection

An 18 year old, who had recently graduated from high school and was soon to be headed off to college, volunteered to drive some of the youth group participants across town to go bowling. Though the church had a rule prohibiting any for the youth group members from driving, they felt he no longer fit into that category.

Two youngsters piled into his car and off they went. Moments later, the young boys and the teen driver raced up the exit ramp at a high rate of speed, slid out of control, and struck a light pole. Fortunately, nobody was killed. Unfortunately, the two passengers had serious injuries and recovery will take years.

Every week, in churches across America, parents and youth leaders are asking them, “who should be allowed to drive to youth events?” And the broader question emerges, “should anyone who volunteers are allowed to drive our people to and from events?”

Next to selecting a safe vehicle, driver selection is critical to ensure a safe transportation program. Exactly what should be considered?

### PRE-APPROVED DRIVERS

Many church leaders could save themselves a great deal of stress if they would consider adopting a pre-selected driver list policy. By pre-approving drivers and having enough names on it, churches will not have to run the risk of settling for ‘whoever volunteers’. There are a few important steps to the process.

First, once a year, the call should go out that you are in need of occasional drivers for youth and other church events. Whether you own your own church vehicles or not, it’s important to know who has the potential to serve as a driver when needed. Therefore, a short application is necessary. Drivers may indicate any special licenses they have. Also, this will give the

applicant and congregation an opportunity to know you take the safety of the people you transport, seriously.

Most policies involving driver’s age will indicate that drivers are to be within a particular age range. Obviously, there are some exceptions, but special attention should be paid to the experience and training a driver has behind the wheel. Also, check with your program administrator or annual conference for the policy restrictions.

Once the application is received, a motor vehicle check (MVR) should be run on the applicant. This will allow you to determine what offenses they may have had. Those with numerous infractions or with serious violations should not be included on your approved driver listing. To avoid any embarrassment, let drivers know before they apply that you will run an MVR and will not select drivers with multiple or serious violations. This way, a person can choose not to apply.

Also, if there is any possibility that the drivers will be transporting minors, a background check should be administered. These checks may be done on-line, at a very affordable rate. Please check with your program administrator, annual conference office or the PACT Service Center for additional information on the Trak-1 background screening product. The important thing to remember, don’t allow those with serious criminal records or motor vehicle violations to be included on your list.

Once you get your approved list of drivers, you should be good to go for the remainder of the year—right? Not quite.

### TRAINING

Unfortunately, numerous accidents involve drivers who are unfamiliar with the vehicle they are asked to drive. Obviously, those driving larger buses need a commercial driver’s license (CDL). Regardless, each driver should be briefed, trained, and certified on each of the vehicles they will be driving. Again, regardless if it is a church owned or private vehicle, the more familiar a driver is to backing up, turning, starting, stopping, lines of sight, and blind spots, the better chances they will be able to safely drive.

Even after drivers have been trained, especially in church-owned vehicles, regular updates will help to reduce the chances of an accident. Both for the initial

and ongoing training, it is best to document it in their file. This will also help, if you are ever asked to testify in a courtroom situation.

## EVALUATION

Sometime a driver with a spotless record might not be the best choice as a driver. Some people have had a hard time transporting children or elderly, or get nervous when anyone else is in the vehicle. If they get easily distracted or you observe erratic drive behavior or violations of the rules, it might be best to sit down and talk; and either fix the problem or replace the driver.

Listen to the passengers, talk to other drivers, and observe. You can learn a great deal this way, and can follow up with discussions. The key is to not wait until a problem driver causes an accident or has a real problem. By having a systematic method of evaluation drivers, you can make sure you always have the best driver available.

Often church leaders complain that they don't have enough drivers. By lifting the standards and recognizing your drivers occasionally for a good, safe driving record, you can sometimes increase those willing to help and show once again, how much you value the people of the church and point to those ways you are caring for them.

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