

Buying a Bus?



10 Things to Know Before You Visit the Lot

By Bob Anderson

Most pastors spent many years in school studying theology, Biblical literature, counseling and a number of other topics that equip them to be effective ministers. But very few are prepared to make an informed decision about their congregations' transportation needs.

As someone who spent nearly 25 years in full-time pastoral service and is now employed by the nation's largest volume bus distributor, here is my top-10-tips list for buying a bus.

10. In most states, a commercial driver's license, or CDL, isn't required to operate any vehicle that seats 15 or fewer people (including the driver) and weighs less than 16,000 pounds. Have you tried getting 15 adults into your 15-passenger van lately? They won't fit! The good news is that vehicles offering 14 individual seats, plus a driver, are available.

The convenience of not needing a CDL-licensed driver for a 15-passenger bus is something to consider when deciding what size vehicle to buy.

9. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has declared 15-passenger vans unsafe. There have been more than 1,500 deaths involving these vans in the past 10 years, and in many states it's illegal for a car dealership to sell a 15-passenger van to a school or to a church. The NTSB recommends that mini-buses be used instead.

8. Consider the following to be minimum safety requirements:

(a) *Dual rear wheels* — This means there are four tires on the rear axle, which creates great stability.

(b) *Steel-cage construction* — Be sure there are steel beams placed every few feet in the side walls and in the roof. This forms a steel cage to protect passengers.

(c) *Seat belts are not usually a standard feature.* Choose a company that puts safety first and always includes them.

7. It typically takes 90 to 120 days to receive a vehicle that must be ordered. In some cases, however, you can find exactly what you're looking for in stock. These vehicles often can be delivered in seven to 10 days.

6. Most buses come equipped with the same standard features as a family car. These include power steering, power brakes, cruise control, tilt wheel, stereo systems, etc. There's also a long list of available options, including an electric entrance door, upgraded cloth, reclining seats, overhead parcel bins with reading lights, and much more. Generally, custom graphics can be added to your bus at little or no extra cost.

5. The most common chassis warranty is three years/36,000 miles. Service work on the chassis usually can be performed at a local car dealership (same model). Ask about non-chassis issues.

Service of your vehicle is an important issue. Consider asking if the dealership has parts you might need in stock, or if they would have to be ordered.

4. Front and rear air-conditioning typically comes standard. In 15-passenger buses with dual compressors, however, the second compressor usually isn't covered under the chassis warranty. Only the company that installed the second

compressor can do warranty work on it. I recommend 15-passenger units with a second *condenser* (skirt-mounted), not a second compressor, as it's covered by the manufacturer's warranty.

3. Answers to your questions often are just a phone call away. Use a toll-free number and ask for the sales manager, parts manager, service manager or warranty manager. Ask for an information packet that provides pictures, specs and other pertinent information about the types of vehicles you're considering.

2. There's no such thing as universal pricing when it comes to buses. Often there's a significant difference in pricing for products, both new and used. Partner with people with whom you feel comfortable. Faithful stewardship of His resources is important.

1. There are many styles and sizes of buses. Help the salesperson understand what types of ministries a bus purchase would facilitate. Tell him or her the age of the people who would use the bus the most. Will it be used for a school? Daycare? Youth ministry? Senior adult trips? Do you have individuals who might need a wheelchair lift?

Explain what features are most important to your congregation. Let the salesperson know your budget. Explain your concerns, and ask many questions.

You probably never attended a "Bus Purchasing 101" class in seminary; hopefully, you're now better equipped to buy a bus that meets your congregation's unique needs.

Bob Anderson is the national sales manager for www.churchbus.com, distributor of a complete line of buses for the church bus market.

driver can focus on the road. Traffic, weather and passengers provide ample distractions without the additional pressure of reading a map in one's lap.

Switch drivers every few hours. Giving drivers a break lets them grab a quick nap or cup of coffee and stay fresher. Remind them not to compete or socialize with other caravan drivers.

Have a Plan B. Before leaving, all drivers should have a plan for what to do if they become lost or separated from the rest of the caravan. Where should they meet? How can they communicate with the others? Agree on a distress signal — such as flashing the headlights twice — that will cause the lead vehicle to stop.

Are There Alternatives?

Drive independently. The easiest alternative to driving in a caravan is to provide each driver with good directions and a map. This will enable group members to reach the destination independently and meet at a given time. You might even stagger departure times so that everyone travels separately.

Charter a bus. Hiring professionals can relieve the stress of providing transportation, especially on long trips. It might cost more than using church-owned or private vehicles, but the benefits of safety and convenience could outweigh the expense. Choose a bus company with a good safety record. Ask the company's management to provide the names of other groups it has served, and call those groups for a reference.

Limit vehicles. If traveling in a group appears to be your only option, limit the number of vehicles involved. A van is better than three passenger cars, a bus is better than a van, and so on. This doesn't mean you should stuff 20 people into a 10-passenger van. You should only carry as many passengers as you have seatbelts, and all passengers must wear them.

Avoid 15-passenger vans. Fifteen-passenger vans have been involved in more than 1,500 fatal crashes since 1990, leading the federal government to issue multiple warnings about them. The vans have a long wheelbase and high center of gravity, making them more prone to roll over than other passenger vehicles. Occupants who aren't wearing seatbelts are likely to be fatally ejected during a rollover. Small buses must meet stricter safety requirements, so they're a better option.

If you must use a 15-passenger van, remove the rear seat and carry no more than 10 passengers. The more vans weigh, the more likely they are to turn if the driver suddenly swerves.

A little upfront attention pays off. When someone is needed to drive a church vehicle, it's tempting to hand the keys to an available person and assume everything will be OK. Many times, it will. But consider how much grief your church will be spared if a fatal accident is avoided.

Perhaps because safety precautions seem mundane, many drivers don't give them much attention. In group travel situations, however, basic safety measures are more critical than ever. Take the time to evaluate your church's

group transportation methods. You'll be thankful you did.

Laura J. Brown is a writer and communications specialist with Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Co., an insurer of churches and related ministries. Founded in 1917, the Fort Wayne, Ind.-based company is committed to providing quality property and liability insurance coverage, custom-designed to help churches and related ministries do their work safely and effectively. For more information, visit www.brotherhoodmutual.com or call 800.333.3735.



Your Source

for Church Management Software

Church Windows

Flexible
Powerful
User Friendly

- Designed to fit the needs for small or large size churches.
- Free Trial CD call today 800.533.5227
- Free 15 months Update and Support.
- Modules available for Membership, Contribution Financial, and Payroll.

"Church Windows is the best and most user-friendly church software I have ever used! After many years in our previous system we became frustrated at not getting the reports we needed. It was a nightmare! Church Windows is fantastic and I cannot think of anything I would change."

Rochelle S.
Houston, Texas

www.churchwindows.com

2004