

# Church Bus Buyer's Guide



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# Church Bus Buyer's Guide

Inside:

**BUY THAT BUS! 10 TIPS  
FOR CHOOSING THE RIGHT WHEELS**

**WHY BUSES — NOT VANS — ARE  
THE SAFEST BETS FOR YOUR MINISTRY**

**NEED TO REPLACE THAT VAN?  
HERE'S WHERE TO START**

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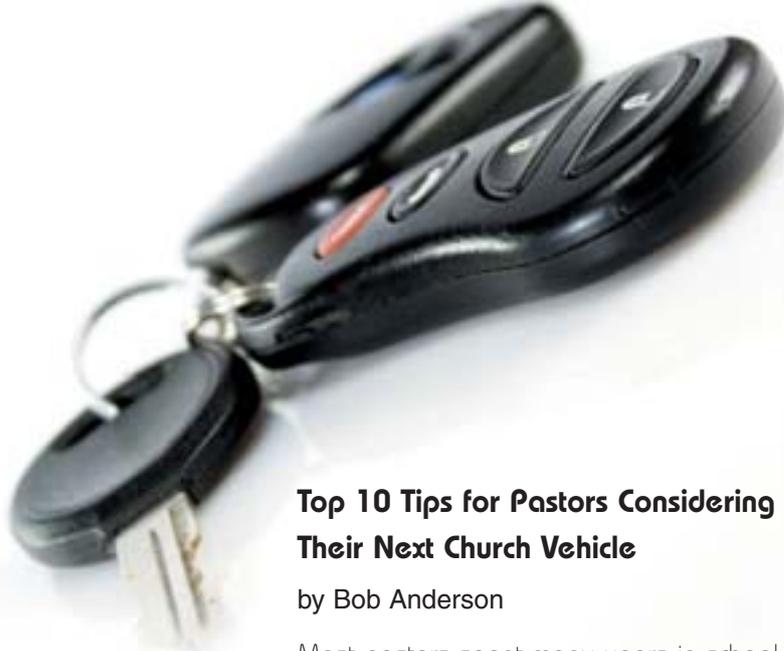


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# Buy That BUS!

## Top 10 Tips for Pastors Considering Their Next Church Vehicle

by Bob Anderson

Most pastors spent many years in school studying theology, Biblical literature, counseling and a number of other topics that equipped them to be effective ministers of the Gospel — but very few are equipped to make an informed decision about their congregation's 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, let me offer my top-10-tips list:**

**1 There are many styles and sizes of buses.** Help the salesperson understand what types of ministries a bus purchase would facilitate. Tell them the age of the people who would use a bus the most. Will the bus 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 them know your budget. Explain your concerns, and ask as many questions as necessary to help determine the best possible bus for your specific situation.

**2 There's no universal pricing with buses.** There's often a significant difference in products, both new and used. Partner with people you feel comfortable with because faithful stewardship of the Lord's resources is important.

**3 Answers to your questions are often 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. Don't be afraid to ask questions!

**4 Front/rear air-conditioning and heat are standard features on most buses.**

**5 The most common chassis warranty is 5 years/60,000 miles, from Ford.** This covers the "power train" of the vehicle. The rest of the chassis is covered for 3 years/36,000 miles. Service work on the chassis can usually be performed at a local car dealership (same model). Ask about non-chassis-related issues.

Service of your vehicle is an important issue. One question to ask is whether or not the distributor has the parts you'll might need in stock, or if they'll have to be ordered.

**6 Most buses come equipped with the same standard features as a family car** — power steering, power brakes, cruise control, tilt wheel, stereo system, etc. All are standard features on most church buses.

There's also a long list of available options: electric entrance door, upgraded cloth, reclining seats, overhead parcel bins with reading lights, and many more. Generally, customized graphics can be added at little or no extra cost.

**7 It will usually take 90 to 120 days to receive something that must be ordered.** In some cases, however, you can find exactly what you're looking for "in stock" at a great savings. These units can often be delivered in seven to 10 days.

**8 The following should be considered minimum safety requirements:**  
**Dual rear wheels** — This means there are four tires on the rear axle, which creates great stability.

**Steel cage construction** — Be sure there are steel beams placed every few feet in the side walls and in the roof, creating a "steel cage" for passengers.

**Most bus distributors do not consider seatbelts a standard feature.** Choose a company that puts safety first and always includes them.

**9 The National Transportation Safety Board has declared that 15-passenger vans are extremely unsafe, and they recommend mini-buses instead.** There have been numerous deaths involving these vans in the past 10 years. In fact, these vehicles are so unsafe that in many states, it's illegal for a car dealership to sell a 15-passenger van to a school or church.

**10 In most states, a Commercial Driver's License (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, 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 definitely worth considering when trying to determine what size vehicle to purchase.

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

Bob Anderson is the national sales manager for ChurchBus.com. He has more than 20 years of pastoral ministry experience in the Church of the Nazarene, but — through what he calls "some incredible, and suspiciously God-ordained," events — Anderson took a break from pastoral ministry to begin this new type of ministry. Visit [www.churchbus.com](http://www.churchbus.com) or call 888.353.2192.



# Bus vs. Van



14 + Driver = 15

14 + Driver = 15

Rollover protection	Yes	No
Individual seats with seat belts	Yes	No
Aisle down center	Yes	No
Rear emergency door	Yes	No
Easy step up entrance	Yes	No
Joint strength construction	Yes	No
Steel cage construction	Yes	No
Rear Heat	50,000 BTU	15,000 BTU
Front & Rear A/C	45,000 BTU	28,000 BTU
Rear Wheels	Dual	Single
Room to stand	Yes	No
Preferred by Insurance Companies	Yes	No

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# Take the Bus!

Why Buses — Not Vans — are the Safest Bets for Your Ministry

by James Johnson

When replacing 15-passenger vans or adding additional transportation, a multi-functional school activity bus (MFSAB) is the safest alternative and offers flexibility for churches.

Liability exposure and increases in insurance premiums are causing many churches across the country to re-evaluate their transportation policies. Churches that continue to use 15-passenger vans for transportation to and from church or church-related activities need to consider the grim facts about these vehicles.

According to the National Transportation Safety Board:

- Between 1994 and 2004, there were more than 1,500 fatal crashes involving 15-passenger vans.
- Eighty-one percent of crash-related deaths in 15-passenger vans occur in *single-vehicle rollovers*.
- Since 2001, more than 500 passengers have lost their lives — more than 120 in 2004 alone!



The SafeGuard Bus Seat with lap-shoulder belts gives a church transportation program flexibility. It easily adjusts to fit a child, with height- and weight-appropriate restraints to an adult.

Fifteen-passenger vans tip and roll more easily as extra passengers climb aboard, due to the increase in the height of the center of gravity. This is exacerbated as these passengers bring aboard their personal belongings for longer trips.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has issued at least four consumer advisories warning of the risks associated with operating these vehicles. The

federal government prohibits automotive dealers from selling them to schools for use in transporting students for any purpose. Colleges



Author James Johnson with Corbell's Valet bus

and universities across the country have instituted transportation policies, and many no longer use 15-passenger vans for sports-related travel. National childcare providers are transitioning their fleets away from vans and into multi-function activity buses.

## So, What's Your Alternative?

Bus manufacturers are now designing vehicles with church transportation as the focus.

Transportation is an integral part of provided services for many churches across the nation. Administration of transportation will become more complicated over the coming years, and liability will continue to grow as 15-passenger van crashes continue to make national news headlines. Churches without established policies need to develop strategies and budgets that call for the replacement of 15-passenger vans. Only buses that include the multi-function activity bus, or

MFSAB, certification should be considered for purchase.

If at all possible, specify lap and shoulder belts for all passenger seating positions.

The best way to protect your congregation is to plan ahead and base your future decisions on facts and industry trends. Talk to your insurance agent and get a feel for your liability exposure. Churches with schools and childcare centers that are using 15-passenger vans need to check with local authorities to ensure state law isn't being violated.

A full understanding of all the issues will be essential in helping you develop the resources and budgets necessary to support your policies and strategy. 🙏

James Johnson has more than 15 years of experience in developing and testing bus safety systems for bus manufacturers and their passengers. Johnson is the director of marketing and dealer development for Corbell Bus. Contact him with questions at 877.267.2345, or e-mail him at [jjohnson@corbellbus.com](mailto:jjohnson@corbellbus.com).

ASK THE EXPERTS



Gary Plunton  
Vice-President Sales

# “How Can We Maximize Safety?”



**Q:** We recently purchased a new Multi-Function Activity Bus but it will not be delivered for six more weeks. Unfortunately, we have had to use a 15 passenger van for several outings. How can we maximize safety and minimize chances for rollover?  
Daniel Tucker  
Tennessee

**A:** Daniel, At a minimum, follow these tips:

1. Check tires for wear and proper inflation before every trip. Remember, rear tire pressure and front tire pressure may be different. Follow manufacturer's guideline.
2. Never transport more than 10 passengers, and make sure they all sit in front of the rear tires. (Transporting more than 10 passengers increases the likelihood of a rollover by three times.)
3. Make certain that all passengers wear their seatbelts!
4. Do not place cargo on the roof. Keep it on the floor and in front of the rear tires.
5. Use a driver with a safe driving record and one who has experience driving 15 passenger vans.

To ask the Corbeil team your question, send your e-mail to [ask-the-experts@corbeilbus.com](mailto:ask-the-experts@corbeilbus.com)

**Corbeil is the leader in providing Multi-Function Activity Buses for churches, child care centers, YMCA's, and community transportation programs across the country. Our team of engineers and transportation experts are willing to answer all of your questions about best practices in transportation. Here is a recent question Corbeil received concerning transportation safety.**



877-267-2345

[www.corbeilbus.com/ask-the-experts](http://www.corbeilbus.com/ask-the-experts)

# So, We Have to Replace Our Van with a Bus...

## Where in the World Do We Start?

by Evan Kushner

**B**y now, it's no secret the van your church bought from the local car dealer can't be used to transport children from church-run educational programs, nor should it be used to carry them at all. This leaves many church leaders asking, "Now what?"

### First Things First

To start, let's understand the applicable laws. The Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Act prohibits the sale or lease of vehicles to schools (public or private) for transporting students if that vehicle doesn't meet stringent federal school bus safety standards. This means for a vehicle to legally be sold for purposes of transporting school-age children, it must be certified as a school bus or a multi-function school activity bus (MFSAB).

An MFSAB meets all the same safety regulations as a school bus, except: (1) it can't be school bus yellow, (2) it can't have the overhead warning lights, and (3) it can't have a stop sign. Normally, MFSABs are used when an organization doesn't have the authority or the need to stop traffic on the street, but rather a way to simply transport children or children and adults to school-sponsored activities.

Although the Federal government can only regulate the sale of new vehicles and can't regulate their use, individual states have started passing laws that prohibit the use of non-conforming vans for transporting school-age children. Additionally, insurance companies are now opting not to renew policies written on non-conforming vehicles. Finally, liability is tremendous for your church and its key decision-makers.

### Relax! There Are Answers

In most cases, the best choice for churches that need vehicles capable of transporting congregants of all ages is the MFSAB. Although they're designed to meet the same safety standards as school buses, these vehicles can be whatever color you choose, and they can feature your church logo. MFSABs can be equipped with luggage racks, stereo systems and a lot more.

The important difference between an MFSAB and any old bus or van is compliance with applicable

Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS). That's right! Even if you already have a bus for your church, it might not be an MFSAB or a school bus. This would make it *non-conforming*.

If you're ready to replace your non-conforming vehicle with an MFSAB or school bus, it's important to talk to a bus dealer who understands this unique segment of the business. Not all bus dealers carry MFSABs, and prices for MFSABs can vary. Typically, though, you can expect to pay in the upper \$30,000 range for a vehicle with a gas engine and the usual equipment. For churches who don't keep that kind of cash on hand, special lease and finance programs are available.

In many cases, you can lease an MFSAB with very little money out of pocket for about \$700 a month.

Better yet, bus dealers who specialize in selling MFSABs will often be able to accept your non-conforming vehicle as a trade-in.

### Pre-Purchase Considerations

#### Which chassis and body combination makes sense for us?

Remember that the chassis of your bus gets serviced by the local car/truck dealer, and the body will probably get serviced by the bus dealer. Also remember that in most states, buses sold with a capacity of 14 or less don't require a special drivers license. This makes the 14-passenger the most popular configuration.

**How will the bus be used?** Will the passengers mostly be children going on short trips, or will the bus constantly be going on long trips with a mix of adults and children?

**The type of seat that you choose can significantly impact the cost of your bus.** However, few other available options can impact passenger safety so much. What seat you choose should depend on your passengers. Your dealer is well equipped to explain the different choices. The least expensive seat is the school bus bench seat. In many cases, it's more than adequate. However, if you have special circumstances, it's good to know there are other choices.

**What equipment do I need?** Your bus can be as stripped as you want, or as loaded. The list of options is long, but your dealer should be able to help you decide.

### Basic Seat Options

Seat Type	Advantage	Price Point
School bus bench	Least expensive, yet very safe. On most MFSABs, this type of seat will include lap belts.	Cheapest
School bus bench with built-in three-point belts	Added safety of car-like three-point seatbelts	Costs about twice as much as a standard school bus bench
School bus bench with built-in child safety seats	Instead of having to strap in a car seat when transporting a small child, simply fold out the built-in car seat. When you don't need it, the car seat folds into the seat.	Also costs about twice as much as a standard school bus bench
School bus bench with built-in three-point belts and built-in child safety seats	Combines the advantages of both types of seats	Costs about three times as much as a standard school bus bench
Activity-style seat	Most comfortable; available in an endless variety of fabrics and in many different colors	Prices vary depending on fabric ordered, but activity seats are usually 50% to 75% more expensive than a school bus bench.

Remember to open a clear line of communication with your dealer. If price is the main priority, explain that — but be sure not to under-spec the bus. In some cases, you get what you pay for.

One place you definitely don't want to under-spec, for example, is on rear air-conditioning. The cheapest systems often won't cool the bus on very hot days, and they can cause expensive mechanical problems that won't be covered by warranty. Unfortunately, since the prices of A/C systems vary so much, people are often tempted to under-spec in this category more than any other.

Hopefully, you'll find all of this information helpful as you shop. It seems like a lot to absorb, but the right bus dealer should be able to make buying a conforming bus a lot easier.

Evan Kushner has worked for U.S. Bus for 12 years, most recently as the director of sales. He is an experienced technical expert on small buses and played a key role in developing U.S. Bus' extensive line of MFSAB products. Reach Kushner by e-mail at [evankush@usbuscorp.com](mailto:evankush@usbuscorp.com) or by calling 845.357.2510 ext. 207.



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# Bus Roundup

Some of Your Best Bets for Safe, Reliable Wheels



1



2



3



4



5



6

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[www.trams-international.com](http://www.trams-international.com)  
562.231.1770

A growing number of churches are using Trams Intl.'s "people movers" as a convenience, safe, cost-effective connection between the parking lot and the sanctuary, or as an onsite shuttle. The popular Model 6000 features a low-floor, open design, making it easy to board for people young and old. Plus, trams are just fun to ride! People associate them with having fun since they're often used at tourist attractions, amusement parks and destination resorts. Whether you're carrying 18 people or 118, they can safely board or disembark a tram in seconds.

## 2. Carpenter Bus Sales

800.370.6180  
[www.carpenterbus.com](http://www.carpenterbus.com)

Founded in 1953, Carpenter Bus — a family-owned company — strives to ensure the process of buying, renting or repairing your bus is simple and worry-free. As the exclusive bus provider for Lifeway, Cokesbury, Gospel Advocate and the Gospel Publishing House, President Henry Headden proudly calls Carpenter Bus "America's No. 1 Church Bus Dealer."

## 3. ChurchBus.com

888.353.2192

ChurchBus.com is a division of a major name in American bus distribution, Midwest Transit Equipment. It offers a large inventory of 15-passenger (non-CDL) and 25-passenger buses that are ready for quick delivery, as well as buses with special-needs accessibility. Financing and leasing programs are also available.

ChurchBus.com offers a dedicated sales team that represents 50+ years of pastoral experience and many years of bus experience. They're devoted to meeting your transportation needs, so you can focus on ministry.

## 4. Corbeil

877.267.2345

[www.corbeilbus.com](http://www.corbeilbus.com)

The Corbeil Valet is a 14-passenger multi-function school activity bus (MFSAB) designed with churches in mind. The Valet doesn't require drivers to have a commercial drivers license. Lap-shoulder belts, LATCH, child check-mate system and 360-degree-perimeter mirrors are just a few standard safety features.

## 5. EIDorado National

800.850.1287

[www.enconline.com](http://www.enconline.com)

EIDorado National's Aerotech has been crash-tested in an automotive testing facility for your passengers' safety. The steel-reinforced composite body is highly resistant to impact, rust and corrosion. The gelcoat exterior keeps its glossy finish for the life of the vehicle. Fiberglass body panels allow minimal sound transmission, which provides a quieter interior for improved passenger comfort.

## 6. U.S. Bus

845.357.2510 ext.207

[www.usbuscorp.com](http://www.usbuscorp.com)

U.S. Bus manufactures quality MFSABs (activity buses) and school buses for the religious school market. Several products are available, including models that don't require a special drivers license to operate. U.S. Bus takes pride in making the transition from vans to buses as easy as picking up the telephone or visiting the company's website.

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# Ask the Expert

## An Informative Question-and-Answer Session with Bob Anderson, National Sales Manager for ChurchBus.com

**Church Business:** What exactly are the commercial driver's license, or CDL, requirements?

**Anderson:** In most states, if the vehicle seats 15 or few people (including the driver) and weighs less than 16,000 pounds, the driver isn't required to have a special CDL license.

**CB:** What does "school bus-constructed" mean?

**Anderson:** The Federal Government has adopted a very strict set of safety guidelines for vehicles used for transporting students to and from school and/or school activities. Vehicles that meet these standards are identified as "school bus-constructed."

**CB:** Are 15-passenger vans really that unsafe?

**Anderson:** Here are some facts that will help you decide for yourself:

The National Transportation Safety Board has taken a strong stance against the use of these vehicles.

It's actually illegal for a dealership to sell a new 15-passenger van to any school (public or private), or to a church, for the purpose of transporting students.

Hundreds of people have died in the past 10 years in van rollover accidents.

There's no structural support in the roof of a van. In the event of a rollover accident, these vehicles can cave in, crushing the passengers.

Many insurance companies no longer insure these vans.

**CB:** How are buses safer than 15-passenger vans?

**Anderson:** First, each bus has dual rear wheels for stability on the road. Second, steel-cage construction (offered on all our buses) means there are steel supports in each of the side walls and ceiling, so passengers are actually sitting in a steel roll cage. Finally, rigorous testing indicates they meet or exceed a long list of federal safety standards. We can provide that list upon request.

**CB:** How do you keep prices low?

**Anderson:** ChurchBus.com is a division of the largest distributor of buses in the country, Midwest Transit Equipment. This Christian-owned business sells many thousands of school, commercial and used buses each year. We want to save churches and faith-based organizations money so they can use it for other ministry purposes.

**CB:** Do you offer financing?

**Anderson:** Yes, we have a number of partners to help you with either purchase or leasing options. Each company offers competitive rates, and some offer terms as long as seven years.

**CB:** What type of warranty do you provide?

**Anderson:** Both Ford and Chevrolet have recently extended their power train warranty to five years. The bumper-to-bumper portion remains three years/36,000 miles. The warranty for the "body" of the bus varies by manufacturer. A detailed list for specific manufacturer warranties can be obtained upon request.

**CB:** Where do we get warranty work done?

**Anderson:** Chassis work can be done at any dealership (of that manufacturer) in the country. If you have a problem with something other than the chassis, simply call our toll-free number and speak to someone in our warranty or service departments. We'll refer you to the nearest shop that specializes in that type of repair. (For example, we want glass to be repaired by someone who specializes in glass repair.)

Bob Anderson has more than 20 years of pastoral ministry experience in the Church of the Nazarene, but — through what he calls "some incredible, and suspiciously God-ordained," events — he took a break from pastoral ministry to begin a new type of ministry as the national sales manager for ChurchBus.com. Visit [www.churchbus.com](http://www.churchbus.com) or call 888.353.2192 for more information.

