

Steps for Building a Better Church Bus Ministry

Taught by Howard & Jason Caldwell/Seeing Truth Ministries

INTRODUCTION: Picture children running from all directions to climb aboard the church bus. No dragging kids to come to church, no begging or bribing. Real excitement that affects families, even neighborhoods. It can happen—it does happen in the bus ministry! If this doesn't sound like your bus ministry, you can change that. Start here.

1. _____ the _____

The standard for an effective ministry shouldn't be finding a CDL driver and a few happy volunteers. It's building layers of outreach to create a better ministry, always expecting the best. Outreach ministries like this type can wear you down and cause you to lower your expectations. Raise the standard again. Expect God to do the miraculous and prepare for growth. Get out of any holding pattern you may have gotten in.

- A. How complete and up to date is your paper trail for your bus route?
- B. How often is your route visited?
- C. How is the enthusiasm on the bus and is discipline necessary every week?
- D. Is there a program on the bus?
- E. When was the last time the parents were invited or attended the church?
- F. Do you have visitors weekly on the bus?
- G. When was the last time you led one of your bus riders to the Lord?

2. Do Weekday _____

A better bus ministry doesn't just occur, it takes weekday work. Living, vibrant ministries that we've worked in visited families and kids during the week. Saturdays were designated for neighborhood outreaches. Small block parties, hot dog barbecues and games in the park are just some of the Saturday ideas we've used. By the time Sunday rolls around, kids are ready for ministry!

- A. Your philosophy determines your direction. *"If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time...; " Ziglar*
- B. It starts with leadership, (Pastor, staff, S.S. Staff, Bus Drivers and Captains) The church will "buy into" and believe in the bus ministry when leadership believes that it is worthwhile.
- C. Reach out to your community where you run your buses. Show you care. Our actions speak louder than words.
 1. Funerals (family tragedy)
 2. Family financial crisis.
 3. Unexpected disasters (fire, storm, etc.)
 4. Counseling needs.
 5. Christmas gifts

6. Special invitations to special days at the church. Dedicate one service a year to the parents and families of the church bus ministry.
7. Build your VBS around the time slot that makes it possible to reach your bus families.
8. Pray daily for your bus families, children and workers.

3. Have a Bus _____

Bus ministry isn't just a transportation service. Children's church may be the "big show" but what happens on the bus is important too. If your bus trip sounds like this "Alright kids, stop that," you've got kids that need you. Coordinate lessons with the children's church. Work together to bring a single message home to kids. Use an object lesson, Bible stories and games to teach kids.

The program on the bus should be:

- * **Planned**
- * **Exciting**
- * **Enjoyable**
- * **Varied each week**
- * **Prayed over**
- * **Holy Spirit anointed**

There are 168 hours in a week. We have kids in children's church approximately 1 hour per week. You will control the children or the children will control you. The above reasons are the two leading factors that, in my opinion, mandate a program on the bus.

The program on the bus is divided in half by children's church (at the church).

A. On The Way To Church (Spiritual Time – prepare hearts and minds for children's church)

1. Songs and choruses
 - a. Can purchase visual songs
 - b. Can make visual songs
 1. Copy machine – enlarge – can color and use clear contact paper to protect
 2. Can be as simple as a marker and poster board
 - c. Can teach short choruses with no visuals
2. Teach a memory verse
 - a. Put on poster board
 - b. Repeat in short phrases a number of times with children
 - c. You can have a reward for those that learn it
3. Have a Bible lesson
 - a. Have a visual lesson, simple and short
 - b. Tell a Bible story
 - c. Preach (aiming at the rider's hearts)
 - d. Always make plain the plan of salvation
 - e. Have review questions on the way home

B. On The Way Home

Review of the Bible lesson taught on the way to church

A. Bible quizzes

1. You make up questions

2. Use Bible trivia, etc. that you can purchase at Christian bookstores

B. Review Bible verse taught on the way to church.

C. Play games

1. Ugly face contest (see who can make the ugliest face on the bus)
2. Sleeping game (everybody fall asleep, best sleepers are rewarded. This is your driver's favorite.)
3. Marshmallow stuffing (how many can you stuff in two selected riders' mouths)
4. Balloon blowing (who can blow up and burst a balloon first; select two riders to participate)
5. Balloon relay (relay a balloon from seat to seat on each side of the bus aisle; see which side can do it first)
6. Balloon popping – prize inside
(Accumulate a supply of small prizes. Look at closeouts at discount stores in your town or order an assortment from Oriental Trading or Kipp Brothers. Put the names of about 6-8 prizes on a small slip of paper and put in a different balloon. Blow up the balloons before the return trip home and tape them to the plastic ceiling lights on the bus. Assign each rider a number. Have a bowl with the numbers enclosed. Draw numbers out of the bowl and if the rider whose number is drawn is seated, he/she can select which balloon they want. Pop the balloon and give them the prize you listed on the slip. Do the game slowly so as to take up time on the ride home.)
7. Shaving cream on nose (put a dab of shaving cream on each rider's nose; see who is the last one to keep it there)
8. 30 second game (quiet and in your seat for 30 seconds; at end of 30 seconds ask them to show you an item they would have on them – the first to show you wins)
9. Life Saver (small children – tootsie roll might work better) on tongue (have each rider put a Life Saver on their tongue at the same time; last one to dissolve wins)
10. Bubble blowing (first one on bus to blow bubble wins; all start by putting gum in their mouth at the same time)
11. Toilet paper unrolling (pick two riders, give each a roll of toilet paper, first one to unroll wins)
12. Quiet side contest (the quietest side of the bus for a time interval wins)
13. Mystery seat (mark a seat with masking tape under the seat before riders get back on bus after church; if that person stays in his seat and is quiet he/she wins the mystery prize seat)
14. Ping Pong match game (Buy 10 inexpensive ping pong balls and number them 1 through 9 and put a "w" on the last ball (that is the winner ball). Put the balls in a plastic jug. Go from rider to rider asking each one to call out a number from 1 to 9. Then without looking draw a numbered ball from the jug. If they don't get a match, they get one piece of candy for playing. If they get a match, they get 2 pieces of candy. If they draw the winner ball, they get 3 pieces of candy.)
15. Time out 3 minutes or 5 minutes on your watch; the quietest side of the bus wins a piece of bus candy.
16. ABC game (Each side is a team; sides take turns naming Bible characters whose names begin with the corresponding letter. For example, the left side starts with letter A and has a chance to name a Bible character (Adam would be an example). Then switch sides and go to letter B and so on. The side with the most points at the end of the alphabet wins and can be given a small treat.)
17. Name that tune (Sing part of a well-known bus song. The rider must sing the rest of the phrase. For example, you could sing "Jesus Love me this I know..." The

bus rider you pick would win a point by singing “for the Bible tells me so.” The child that has the most points when you finish wins a nice prize.)

18. Bible jeopardy (Purchase thick card stock of poster board size. Cut envelopes in half and stick to board to hold 3x5 question cards. Create your own categories and questions. You can have 100,200,300,400 and 500 point questions per category. Boys versus girls is good or sides. Play until all categories and questions are exhausted.)

19. Laughing contest (The 2 sides are teams. Pick a child to get up and try to make the other side laugh. Give him 30 seconds, then switch sides and pick another child, etc. If the rider can make the other side laugh, his team gets a point. Play to 5 or 10 points depending on the interest of the kids. You can make them be silent while attempting to make them laugh or they can also do it verbally. Warn them – no dirty jokes!)

20. Eat the licorice string contest (Buy a package of licorice strings – the thin licorice strings are 12-18 inches long. Select two bus riders about the same age and give each of them a licorice string. They are instructed to put the licorice strings in their teeth and then remove their hands. The one that can eat the string of licorice first, drawing it in their mouth with their teeth only, wins.)

C. Things That Will _____ Your Program

- A. No variation – same thing week after week
- B. No enthusiasm
- C. Lack of control
- D. Favoritism
- E. Laziness and lack of preparation
- F. Program on wrong maturity level
- G. Having no program one week

Keep in mind the most important time of the day is the ride home. If they have a fun time on the way home, they will be back next week. This last experience of the day is remembered most. Why can't we teach them of Jesus and the Bible and make it fun?

4. _____ Teachers

In the body of Christ, there are a great many teachers. Some are called to children's ministry but not all are prepared for the bus outreach. To build a better ministry, you'll have to train and prepare teachers. Give teachers a chance to express their frustrations and ask questions.

- A. Have a weekly or monthly bus workers meeting.
- B. Have and present bus rules and guidelines.
- C. Teach your workers how to properly enforce rules and discipline.
- D. Teach your workers how to enlist new riders and visit regulars.
- E. Teach them to have promotions on the bus, but that the program is what will keep them.
- F. Teach the importance of records and a perfect paper trail.
- G. Open discussion on the best ways to get the children safely to and from church and how to identify, personalize, teach and love on them while they are at the church.

5. _____ Themes and Contests

Small tools and incentives are much more powerful when ministries combine. Coordinate your children's church and bus ministry lesson ideas occasionally. For example, have a Super Power

Sunday. On the bus, talk about God's super powers in children's church. The teachers can add to the message. (*Illustrate with two-sided coin*) *It has no worth without both sides.*)

6. Keep the Church's _____ Soft

When you live in the "church world" it's easy to get comfortable. Bus kids aren't always well-behaved and it may be tempting to keep them in line by keeping them separated from the church. In our experience, this isn't a good step.

- A. Teach your kids to participate in a "hello march." After we've made it to church, we deposit our things in kids' church. We make an orderly march to the big church and using our best manners, shake hands and say hello. It keeps the church's heart soft to kids and teaches kids that they really belong. Even done monthly this can be a real effective tool.
- B. Preach at least once each quarter on the evangelistic efforts Biblically of reaching children with the gospel, constantly revealing one of the most effective soul-winning tools of the local church as the bus ministry.
- C. Constantly keep the accomplishments of long time riders before your people. (High school graduation, college selection, calls to the ministry, salvations, baptisms, etc.)
- D. Keep before the church the value of the bus ministry now and in eternity.

Building a long-lasting, effective bus ministry takes time but it also requires purposeful building. Use the steps suggested and listen to the promptings of the Spirit. Each ministry is different with its own special needs. Allow God to reveal the needs in your community and you'll grow before you realize it.