



WillowCreek

A guide to establishing an automobile ministry

Willow Creek Community Church C.A.R.S. Ministry
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Table of Contents

Establishing an Auto Ministry

- Auto Ministry Idea
- Point Person
- Define Ministry Mission
- Church / Elder / Board / Pastor Approval and Support
- Obtain a Non-Profit ID and Tax-Exempt Status
- Funding Options

Church-Funded Auto Ministry

- Create a Qualification Program
- Establish Volunteer Teams
- Find Garage Space / Liability Insurance
- Find Partner Auto Shops
- Locate or Build a Facility (Optional)

Self-Supported Auto Ministry

- Hire Staff / Create Small Group
- Obtain a Dealer License (as necessary)
- Create a Qualification Program
- Establish Volunteer Teams
- Locate or Build a Facility (Optional)
- Establish Hours of Operation, Forms, and Recording Structure
- Marketing and Advertising
- Establish Donation Guidelines
- Obtain Tow Truck or Towing Services
- Find Partner Auto Shops

Successful Auto Ministry

- Delivery of an Automobile
- Follow Up with Qualified Recipients
- Value Ministry Volunteers
- Shop Inventory and Office Supplies
- Further Information

ESTABLISHING AN AUTO MINISTRY

In order to operate a successful auto ministry, the following points need to be addressed. These points are listed in chronological order, based on the flowchart. These key points are not hard-fast rules, but rather suggestions that might help you think about how to develop your own automotive ministry.

1. Auto Ministry Idea

Someone will catch the vision of helping those in need with automobiles. This person will get the idea, document their thoughts, and rally other people around their vision. This person may not even be involved with the ministry when it launches, but they will get others around them thinking about the idea of an automotive ministry.

2. Point Person

One person will have to assume responsibility for launching the ministry. As with any organization, there needs to be a leader with vision and a real passion for the ministry. They also need a passion for the people they will be serving. This person should volunteer and be affirmed in this role by others assisting in the launch of the ministry.

3. Define the Ministry Mission Statement

Clarify your objectives and define exactly what your ministry will be about. Think about goals for the ministry. Write down a concise mission statement in order to give clarity and purpose to key ministry decisions. Determine if the ministry will be giving away cars, selling them at low cost, leasing them to those in need, or all three.

Willow Creek C.A.R.S. Ministry uses the following as its Mission Statement:

The C.A.R.S. Ministry of Willow Creek Community Church is committed to meeting the transportation needs of people within our church community who are unable to meet those needs themselves.

4. Church / Elder / Board / Pastor Approval and Support

No ministry can be truly successful without the support of the church it stems from. If the key leaders of the church are not behind the point person 100%, ministry growth will be nearly impossible. Create a ministry outline or plan, present it to the church leaders, and gain their support. Seek counsel from them during the planning process. Allow them to feel a sense of ownership and involvement in the ministry.

5. Obtain a not-for-profit ID and Tax-Exempt Status

If the ministry is part of the church, it is automatically a non-profit entity. If the ministry is independent of the church, non-profit status requires completing paperwork for the state in which the ministry will be operating. Check with your state business office to determine their requirements.

Tax-exempt status is only recognized after applying for recognition of exemption from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The IRS will recognize an organization as tax-exempt if it meets the requirements of the Internal Revenue Code. For more information on becoming tax-exempt, visit the IRS web site.

6. Funding Options

Funding is one of the most critical elements of the ministry. The ministry will either be self-supporting or church-funded. This pivotal decision will determine the size and requirements of the ministry.

The church will likely need to provide the financial backing for any auto ministry in its infancy. The primary question is what goals have been set for the ministry. If it is going to be a small operation catering to a small congregation, church funding may be the answer. If the goal is to eventually support other members in the community or a big congregation, self-supporting is likely the goal to choose. Answers to funding questions frequently change once the ministry begins to grow and change, but an initial direction will help determine short-term needs and goals.

Willow Creek Community Church C.A.R.S. Ministry is now a fully self-supported ministry, although it did start as a simple church-funded auto repair ministry.

Some questions to consider include:

Can your church support this financial burden with its current budget?

How will you pay for the parts to repair cars?

Who will do the repairs on the cars, and how will they be paid?

How much revenue can be raised to support ministry efforts?

How many needs are there in your congregation?

Are community groups asking for help in this area?

Do other area churches want to join in this ministry?

CHURCH-FUNDED AUTO MINISTRY

1. Create a Qualification Program

Qualifying recipients for auto repairs auto donation can be a difficult process. If the church already has an appointed benevolence board in place, it greatly simplifies this process. We strongly suggest that you keep the qualification process and the actual repair process separate.

Qualification of benevolence recipients depends on their situation, history of past benevolence, established qualification criteria, and much more. Creating a program for qualification can be difficult. Once word gets out that an organization distributes vehicles, the benevolence board will receive many inquiries each day about the program. Having established boundaries and criteria for the program makes the whole experience significantly easier. Beware of people who will do all they can to circumvent the rules to receive a vehicle. We have seen benevolence clients begin attending the church strictly to receive a car, and then stop attending once the car is received. Other times, these clients will become interested in the church and become regular attendees.

Some questions to consider include:

- Who will make the qualifying decisions?*
- How many times will a recipient be aided by the ministry?*
- What type of assistance will be appropriate to each case?*
- Will qualification program counselors need mechanical knowledge?*
- Will you only distribute vehicles to attendees of your church?*
- Will recipients need to have attended the church for a certain amount of time?*
- Will any exceptions be made to your program to provide assistance outside the program?*
- Can the recipient of the vehicle drive a vehicle with a manual transmission?*
- Can the recipient of the vehicle obtain auto insurance?*

2. Establish Volunteer Teams

Most auto ministries cannot exist with just a primary mechanic who does all the work. Volunteers allow repair work to be done quickly and in more volume. Due to the unique nature of this volunteering opportunity, many volunteers may step forward! Make sure the ministry need for volunteers is well publicized within the church via program or bulletin announcements and an announcement from the front of the church during a service.

Once volunteer teams begin to form and the volunteers tell their friends, you may find some non-believers asking to work with your ministry. This can be a great opportunity to introduce these people to Christ while utilizing their skills to repair cars.

Each team will require a leader – someone who can be counted on to accomplish the tasks set before the team. This should be someone with good automotive knowledge, with the gift of leadership, who is very approachable by both clients and team members.

The number of teams, as well as the number of members per team, is dependent on the size of the shop, how often repairs are needed, and how many benevolence clients are approved. Willow Creek's C.A.R.S. Ministry teams average 6-10 members, meeting once every other week, for approximately 3 hours. The average workload is 4 cars requiring repairs or inspections for each of the 10 teams.

Volunteers in an auto ministry typically fall into 1 of 4 skill categories:

- *Professional Mechanics*: These are the people everyone thinks of when looking for volunteers. Their skills are very desirable when repair work is required. However, since this is their occupation, they are often somewhat reluctant to volunteer.
- *Enthusiasts / Hobbyists*: These people often have advanced automotive knowledge, and they may have a “toy” or “project” car at home. Their automotive knowledge is excellent, but their occupation is likely not in the automotive field.
- *“Shade-Tree Mechanics”*: These people do light work to their own vehicles, such as brakes and tune-ups. They may not have as much automotive knowledge, but they are very helpful with the basics.

- *Servants*: These people have little or no automotive knowledge. They want to help out and likely will desire to gain automotive knowledge along the way. This may include younger volunteers (teen or college age). This group also may include those with automobile detailing interests.

3. Find Garage Space / Liability Insurance

Some kind of facility will be required to do the vehicle repairs. As with the establishment of volunteer teams, repair shop size and location requirements will depend on how many benevolent repairs are required.

Perhaps someone at the church has a large garage to begin working on the cars there, but likely there will be no means to insure those premises against an improper repair.

If someone within the church has a facility that they will allow to be used for ministry repairs, this can be a great way to get started. However, the owner of that facility must make sure that the garage liability policy will cover the work of the volunteers. This may require somehow qualifying the volunteers to be covered by the policy. The facility owner should check with the insurance provider for details.

Perhaps the church has a maintenance facility of some kind that could double as an automotive repair workspace. Again, a garage liability policy will be required, along with a volunteer endorsement rider that addresses any injuries that may occur.

A critical element of the shop requirement is liability insurance. Keep the volunteers protected! If a car is repaired incorrectly, this is the means of protecting the ministry and the church from liability. Liability insurance for automotive shops is usually very costly, sometimes making ministry cost-prohibitive, but it is a crucial piece of the ministry operation.

4. Find Partner Auto Shops

If the auto ministry will be small, perhaps all that is required is a partnership with area repair shops that will do the work. This option requires fewer volunteers, and there is no shop or liability insurance requirement for the church.

Even if volunteers are lining up and the facility requirement is covered, it is still in the best interest of any auto ministry to partner with some area repair shops. There will be times that tires or body work or other repairs like these are best left to area shops. There are also repairs the ministry may not want to tackle, such as transmission rebuilding or engine replacement.

Drive around the area and introduce yourself to area shop owners. Do some research first, if necessary, to find reputable shops in the area that will do quality repairs for the ministry. Give them your phone number and some written information about what your ministry hopes to accomplish. Ask them if they are interested in working with the ministry. Often, these shops will see an opportunity to do some good and to gain some business and they will offer their services at a 10-25% discount. Willow Creek's C.A.R.S. Ministry has developed relationships with 6-10 area repair shops for specifics such as tire replacement, exhaust replacement, engine replacement, wheel alignment, transmission repair, major vehicle maintenance (like timing belts), and miscellaneous overflow repairs.

Another benefit of these shops is that they often help promote the ministry. Frequently, donated vehicles will come from these shops when people feel the repair costs to their vehicles are higher than the vehicle value. They may also maintain relationships with benevolence clients who may still need some discount repairs but may no longer qualify through the church program for free repairs.

Lastly, develop a relationship with a salvage yard. Most auto ministries will have vehicles donated that are not worth repairing, and a good relationship with a local salvage yard can help offset repair costs by maximizing salvage car values. If the owner of the salvage yard knows that the ministry will primarily or exclusively sell its cars to him, he will typically pay more for the vehicles. This relationship can also minimize the cost of parts that may be needed for benevolent repairs, since there will likely be more parts needed by the ministry than an individual.

5. Locate or Build a Facility (optional)

If the ministry continually grows, expectedly or unexpectedly, a ministry-controlled repair shop may be the next step. This facility may be built, bought, or leased. Consider the needs of the ministry, as well as the volunteers.

If there is room on the church property, a facility located at the church is very desirable. Many volunteers like the idea of serving at the church. Also, benevolence clients can easily find the repair facility. People can drop off vehicles for donation during church meetings and activities or after services at the church, creating an ideal situation to receive vehicles.

If building a facility is not an option, consider renting or buying a shop near the church. Purchasing an existing facility is typically a costly option. Leasing or renting a shop can be more cost-effective in the short-term, especially for a growing ministry.

No matter which facility option the ministry pursues, it is critical to consider the growth and future requirements of the ministry. If the ministry currently requires 3 repair bays for a volunteer team, consider building a facility with 6 bays. Anticipate growth by doubling the amount of currently required space!

Remember also that a facility should have offices, a changing area for volunteers and staff members, a waiting room for benevolence clients, bathrooms, and an eating and fellowship area.

Some questions to consider regarding facilities include:

- How many bays does the ministry need to adequately perform repairs?*
- How many lifts are required?*
- How fast is the ministry growing?*
- Can future shop space requirements be calculated?*
- Where will the shop equipment be purchased?*
- Can any equipment or tools be donated?*
- Where is the ideal location for your ministry?*
- Is there room on the church property for a repair facility?*
- How much office space is required?*
- How much space is required for a waiting room?*
- How many people will use the facility at any given time?*
- How will old fluids be recycled and environmental regulations met?*
- How will used tires or other non-trash items be removed from the premises?*

SELF-SUPPORTED AUTO MINISTRY

1. Hire Staff / Create Small Group

If the ministry will be a self-supporting entity, a full-time point person will be required. This person will require mechanical skills and automotive knowledge. They will also need to be able to interact properly with benevolence clients and vehicle donors. If there is evidence that the ministry will grow rapidly, perhaps beginning with two staff members will be more beneficial – one to oversee daily operations and donations and one to oversee mechanical repairs.

As operations grow, seek out qualified volunteers to help manage specific items such as title processing. As the growth continues, add staff accordingly. Willow Creek C.A.R.S. Ministry has found that 5 full-time staff can adequately manage a ministry of up to 2000 vehicle donations per year, benevolently giving approximately 10% of those to those in need. Of course, this is all based on having an adequate number of volunteers!

Ensure that the ministry staff is of one mind about how the ministry will operate, but for self-supported ministry, it's good to have one head for business and another for benevolence. Both pieces are equally important, because in order to give away vehicles, some will need to be sold. This money then returns to the ministry for parts, salaries, garage expenses, etc. The staff will create guidelines for which vehicles should be given away. Staff members should be church members with gifts like Craftsmanship, Helps, Leadership, and Mercy.

A small group atmosphere will help the staff operate more efficiently and will give the employees more devotion. If the employees can share intimately about their life, it enhances the operation of the entire ministry. Often, a small group in this ministry will include ministry founders, ministry staff, some volunteers, and / or some other associates of the ministry.

2. Obtain a Dealer License (As Necessary)

As donated vehicle volume increases, a dealer's license becomes important. If the ministry transfers more than the maximum allowable number of vehicles per year, the ministry must become a dealership. For example, the limit is five vehicles per year in Illinois. However, some states now allow non-for-profits to re-assign vehicle titles as a dealer would. This saves the organization the time and money involved in applying for a new title for each donated vehicle. Each state operates differently. Contact your Secretary of State office for state-specific information.

Becoming a dealership has many advantages, such as sales of vehicles through dealer-only auto auctions. It also allows staff members to have dealer license plates, which allows easy movement of vehicles off the ministry property. This is especially beneficial for road-testing vehicles that will be given to qualified recipients. It is also possible to assign a vehicle to its new owner right there at the ministry facility with a dealer license. Fleet insurance can also be easily obtained for dealerships.

Becoming a dealership also has several disadvantages, such as the process itself. There are many costs involved, and ongoing licensing costs must be paid yearly. A dealership must obtain a minimum of liability insurance, adding to costs. Taxes will have to be paid on vehicles sold (and in most instances, on gifted vehicles). Record keeping must be more stringent, and interacting with the state usually requires more paperwork! Each state has different requirements; so again, see your state's dealership requirements for more information.

3. Create a Qualification Program

If you have read the church-funded qualification program section, skip ahead to the next section. The text below is identical to the church-funded section on this topic.

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Some questions to consider include:

Who will make the qualifying decisions?

How many times will a recipient be aided by the ministry?

What type of assistance will be appropriate to each case?

Will you need a mechanically-inclined qualification counselor?

Will you only distribute vehicles to attendees of your church?

Will recipients need to have attended the church for a certain amount of time?

Will any exceptions be made to your program to provide assistance outside the program?

Can the recipient of the vehicle drive a vehicle with a manual transmission?

Can the recipient of the vehicle obtain auto insurance?

4. Establish Volunteer Teams

If you have read the church-funded volunteer team section, skip ahead to the next section. The text below is identical to the church-funded section on this topic.

Most auto ministries cannot exist with just a primary mechanic who does all the work. Volunteers allow repair work to be done quickly and in more volume. Due to the unique nature of this volunteering opportunity, many volunteers may step forward! Make sure the ministry need for volunteers is well publicized within the church via program or bulletin announcements and an announcement from the front of the church during a service.

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- *Servants*: These people have little or no automotive knowledge. They want to help out and likely will desire to gain automotive knowledge along the way. This may include younger volunteers (teen or college age). This group also may include those with automobile detailing interests.

5. Locate or Build a Facility (optional)

If you have read the church-funded facility section, skip ahead to the next section. The text below is identical to the church-funded section on this topic.

If the ministry continually grows, expectedly or unexpectedly, a ministry-controlled repair shop may be the next step. This facility may be built, bought, or leased. Consider the needs of the ministry, as well as the volunteers.

If there is room on the church property, a facility located at the church is very desirable. Many volunteers like the idea of serving at the church. Also, benevolence clients can easily find the repair facility. People can drop off vehicles for donation during church meetings and activities or after services at the church, creating an ideal situation to receive vehicles.

If building a facility is not an option, consider renting or buying a shop near the church. Purchasing an existing facility is typically a costly option. Leasing or renting a shop can be more cost-effective in the short-term, especially for a growing ministry.

No matter which facility option the ministry pursues, it is critical to consider the growth and future requirements of the ministry. If the ministry currently requires 3 repair bays for a volunteer team, consider building a facility with 6 bays. Anticipate growth by doubling the amount of currently required space!

Remember also that a facility should have offices, a changing area for volunteers and staff members, a waiting room for benevolence clients, bathrooms, and an eating and fellowship area.

Some questions to consider include:

How many bays does the ministry need to adequately perform repairs?

How many lifts are required?

How fast is the ministry growing?

Can future shop space requirements be calculated?

Where will the shop equipment be purchased?

Can any equipment or tools be donated?

Where is the ideal location for your ministry?

Is there room on the church property for a repair facility?

How much office space is required?

How much space is required for a waiting room?

How many people will use the facility at any given time?

6. Establish (A) Hours of Operation, (B) Forms, and (C) Recording Structure

As with any business, basic operating guidelines and structures need to be put in place to run efficiently.

(A) Establish hours of operation for the ministry. Much of the time, volunteers serve at times when the staff is not present, such as evenings or weekends. Volunteer serving time can also be utilized for donation drop-offs if the volunteers enjoy serving in that way as well. This gives the ministry more hours of operation.

(B) Many forms are required for efficient operation of an auto ministry. Forms are used for functions such as benevolence casework, final approval to receive a vehicle, vehicle donation and pickup, serving contact, vehicle sale, donation verification, taxes, and more. Examples of these forms can be seen in the Appendix. A bill of sale should include a clearly stated AS IS clause.

(C) Since auto ministries deal with titles, recording structures are very important. Most states have stringent requirements regarding record keeping, especially if your ministry becomes a dealership. Records should be kept regarding any of the following information:

- *Donor name, address, phone number*
- *Car make, model, VIN number, color*
- *Donation date*
- *Distribution date or date sold*
- *Recipient name, address, phone number*
- *Parts purchased for each vehicle*
- *Copy of reassigned title*

A computer database backed up to a network is ideal for all this information. At a minimum, a file folder should be created for each vehicle, containing all the information listed above.

Instructions regarding repairs are required at times, even by the best mechanics. Will repair data be available to the volunteers? An internet-based repair service like ALLDATA® can greatly assist staff and volunteers in repairs. Repair manuals can also be of great assistance. Having some documentation on hand to assist with difficult repairs is very helpful.

7. Marketing and Advertising

Word of mouth is the way many ministries grow, but getting the word out about the ministry's existence via advertising can be helpful.

If the church is large enough, word of mouth may be enough to get the ministry launched. Start with the congregation and let them know about the ministry and how it works. Initially, almost all the donated vehicles a ministry receives come from the

congregation of the church. Regular updates of the ministry during church service announcements help maintain excitement and awareness within the congregation.

Learn about competitive non-profits that operate in the area. Nation-wide groups and popular local groups can have a major impact on the number of vehicles donated to the ministry.

There are many options for advertising. Consider an advertisement in local newspapers, especially in the automotive and classified sections. Are there local radio stations that will help promote the ministry? Work with local Christian or AM radio stations to obtain reasonable advertising that will reach those most interested in the ministry.

Place your name and phone number on tow trucks, if you will own them. This is a good advertising tool, as neighbors may inquire of the driver or the donor during or after a donation. If tow trucks are contracted through another company, check if they will allow you to place magnetic signs on their vehicles when they are driving for the ministry. Placing a magnetic sign on any donated vehicle driven on the street that says something like "This vehicle was donated to Bethel C.A.R.S. Ministry" can help raise awareness of your ministry as well.

Be creative! Hold a ministry open house. Give a free car wash to the community. Organize a classic car show. There are many ways to raise awareness of this unique ministry.

8. Establish Donation Guidelines

Self-supporting auto ministries have many more options for what vehicles they will accept. Many church-supported ministries cannot afford to accept salvage vehicles or non-running cars. Self-supporting ministries, once launched, can continue to raise revenue through these vehicles more easily.

Donor vehicles vary greatly in condition. Accepting "any car, any condition" will possibly help raise awareness for the ministry, but it may adversely impact the financial gain of the ministry. Limits will likely have to be placed on what vehicles the ministry will accept.

Will the ministry accept non-vehicle items? Many auto ministries will accept items like boats, trailers, motorcycles, RV's, campers, lawnmowers, snow blowers, snowmobiles, and more. These items are good for revenue. In a self-supporting ministry they can be very helpful in achieving financial independence and as such receiving non-vehicle items is highly recommended.

Some ministries have their origins in a body shop, so the target donation is a vehicle with body damage. Donation guidelines would obviously be very different for this ministry than for a mechanically-oriented ministry. Perhaps the ministry can perform both functions well. Based on the capabilities of the staff and volunteers, as well as area shop partnerships, guidelines to optimize ministry efficiency and financial responsibility can be formed.

Keep up with IRS reporting and donation law changes, as their changes will impact donors and the ministry. These law changes may also impact what vehicles the ministry is able to accept. Watch the local newspapers and major internet sites for articles on vehicle donation that will impact the ministry operation, possibly making the week very busy. Some donors will ask about recent law changes, and ministry knowledge will convince the donor to donate or not to donate their vehicle!

Some vehicle guideline questions to ask include:

Is there any age limit on the vehicle donated?

Will the ministry accept vehicles with significant body damage?

Can the ministry accept vehicles with major mechanical failures, like a bad engine?

Will the ministry accept large vehicles, such as dump trucks or buses?

For towed in vehicles, will the criteria be different than for those dropped off?

Will the ministry accept vehicles if they are towed in by the donor?

Will the ministry pick up non-vehicle items like motorcycles or snowmobiles?

Will the ministry accept vehicles with salvage or rebuilt titles?

How many miles will the ministry travel to pick up a vehicle?

9. Obtain Tow Truck or Towing Services

Many donors value pickup of a vehicle, even if the vehicle is in running condition. Time is a valuable commodity, and if pickup can save time for your donor, they will often be more eager to give the ministry your vehicle.

It is also important to have these services because often, donors will have cancelled their insurance or transferred license plates to their new vehicle, rendering it legally un-drivable. These vehicles can be picked up without a tow truck if the ministry has

dealer plates, but that requires twice as many people to accomplish the task. At first, this will not be a problem, but as the ministry grows and gets busier, staff time will become crucial.

Many vehicles are desirable, but are not currently running and need to be towed. This includes vehicles with bad batteries or starters, bad alternators, bad fuel pumps, or similar failures. These are easily repairable vehicles that can benefit the ministry greatly. A towing service is the only solution to this problem. If the ministry cannot tow the donor's vehicle, and they are unwilling to pay to have it towed to the ministry, the donation will likely end up donated to a different non-profit.

If tow volume is low, a tow dolly and a pickup truck may be enough to accomplish the task. As tow volume increases, ministries frequently must contract with a local towing service to retrieve the donated vehicles. This adversely affects ministry costs, but it is worth it for the right vehicles. Eventually, if the ministry continues to grow, purchase of a tow truck should be considered. Willow Creek C.A.R.S. Ministry purchased a tow truck and the cost of operations dropped nearly 20% versus using a contracted service.

10. Find Partner Auto Shops

If you have read the church-funded partner shops section, skip ahead to the next section. The text below is similar to the church-funded section on this topic.

Even if volunteers are lining up and the facility requirement is covered, it is still in the best interest of any auto ministry to partner with some area repair shops. There will be times that tires or a battery or other repairs like these are best left to area shops. There are also repairs the ministry may not want to tackle, such as transmission rebuilding or engine replacement.

Drive around the area and introduce yourself to area shop owners. Do some research first, if necessary, to find reputable shops in the area that will do quality repairs for the ministry. Give them your phone number and some written information about what your ministry hopes to accomplish. Ask them if they are interested in working with the ministry. Often, these shops will see an opportunity to do some good and to gain some business and they will offer their services at a 10-25% discount. Willow Creek's C.A.R.S. Ministry has developed relationships with 6-10 area repair shops for specifics such as tire replacement, exhaust replacement, engine replacement, wheel alignment, transmission repair, major vehicle maintenance (like timing belts), and miscellaneous overflow repairs.

Another benefit of these shops also is that they often help promote the ministry. Frequently, donated vehicles will come from these shops when people feel the repair costs to their vehicles are higher than the vehicle value. They may also maintain relationships with benevolence clients who may still need some discount repairs but may no longer qualify through the church program for free repairs.

Lastly, develop a relationship with a salvage yard. Most auto ministries will have vehicles donated that are not worth repairing, and a good relationship with a local salvage yard can help offset repair costs by maximizing salvage car values. This relationship can also minimize the cost of parts that may be needed for benevolent repairs.

SUCCESSFUL AUTO MINISTRY

1. Delivery of an Automobile

When a qualified recipient picks up the vehicle, make sure they are aware of the conditions on which they are receiving the car. Recipients should be made aware of any up-front costs due at vehicle delivery. Also, any maintenance issues should be discussed at this time. Some ministries will support or warranty the vehicle for up to a year, while others deliver the car “as is”. Will the ministry offer lifetime or limited time oil changes on the vehicles? This gives an opportunity to advise the recipient through quick inspections during oil changes.

If the ministry gives them the car, is it immediately titled in their name? If so, fees associated with the process of titling the car will have to be paid by the church or the new owner. This may be dependent on the financial condition of the recipient.

Inspect the car thoroughly if possible. Willow Creek C.A.R.S. Ministry has a checklist used for vehicle inspections before giveaway. The vehicle should also be road tested for drivability issues that may not be detectable in a shop environment. Whether or not non-necessities like air condition and radio functions need to be addressed depends on your time and geographical location.

Clean up the car for the recipient. If it looks good, the gift will be well received. A quick wash and vacuum can make all the difference to the recipient who knows they are receiving a used car. Treat them as if they are buying a used car from your dealership. It should be clean and in good operating condition.

Consider educating the recipient about basic automotive if necessary. Someone in the church or the ministry might be interested in a short class regarding maintenance. This could be optional or a mandatory class for all recipients. At a minimum, verify that vehicle recipients know when the next oil change is due. Make sure the recipient also knows how to use the functions of their vehicle. Many donated vehicles do not come with an owner’s manual, so answer any questions the recipient may have during delivery. If the recipient is a new driver, more time should be taken with them.

2. Follow Up with Qualified Recipients

After a qualified recipient receives a car, will the ministry do any follow up? Will recipients be able to return to the ministry for oil changes or other standard maintenance? Will they need to be qualified again or will their vehicle be covered under a specific warranty or some kind? There are important questions that will need to be addressed by the ministry before vehicles are given away. Some recipients will view the ministry staff and volunteers as their personal mechanics after they receive the vehicle and must be instructed otherwise. Rules must be in place to guide decisions about the vehicles after they are distributed or sold.

Willow Creek’s C.A.R.S. Ministry issues a 30 day full warranty on any car given away, with all additional repairs requiring qualification through the church benevolence program. Free oil changes are offered on many vehicles to the lowest income individuals.

Verify the effectiveness of the ministry by following up with recipients 6 months to a year later. Find out if the car assisted them in their circumstances. Perhaps they have a new job that depends on the reliability of that vehicle. Following up with recipients will help the ministry make wiser decisions in the future. Qualification programs are regularly modified to accommodate new recipients or to better shepherd those in need.

Get feedback from recipients on the qualification process and the delivery process. Fine tune the ministry processes to best serve the beneficiaries of the ministry!

3. Value Ministry Volunteers

Volunteers make the ministry happen. Staff of an auto ministry usually cannot cover all the functions of an auto ministry. It takes many knowledgeable volunteers to make the ministry successful. How will they be thanked?

Keep volunteers happy and interested. Ask them regularly for feedback on the ministry and its processes. Ask for their input on improving the ministry. Keep volunteers informed – if they know more about the ministry, they’ll stay more intimately involved. Do this through ministry meetings or leadership quarterly updates.

Hold training sessions for volunteers who may not know how to use various tools in the shop. This will enable them to do more and reduce liability for the ministry. Many volunteers will be eager to learn more through the ministry.

Cater to the spiritual health of ministry volunteers with retreats or events. Consider a one day retreat or a weekend event; attend a conference together, etc. Consider a nice Christmas party for the volunteers, T-shirts with the ministry logo or name on them, pizza parties during serving times, or other fun events sponsored by the ministry.

4. Shop Inventory and Office Supplies

Shop tools and consumables are an important part of the operation of the ministry. Designate a staff person or volunteer who will regularly check tools and consumables. Unfortunately, tools will be broken or lost, so someone will have to check the tools monthly.

Some larger shop equipment that is beneficial to obtain includes:

- *Tire machine*
- *Wheel balancer*
- *Brake lathe*
- *Vehicle lift*
- *Air compressor*
- *Spring compressor*
- *Torch*

If the ministry will be regularly cleaning the vehicles before delivery, consider these items:

- *Pressure washer*
- *Buffer or orbiter*
- *Industrial vacuum*

Tool supplies will grow as the ministry grows and requirements change. Tool companies will sometimes donate tools or a tool box to help launch the ministry. Obtain quality tools with replacement warranty when possible, as the tools will see frequent use.

Consumable items such as brake fluid, oil, antifreeze, transmission fluid, power steering fluid, brake cleaner, electrical contact cleaner, wax, and many more should be regularly inventoried. A busy automotive ministry can easily consume a 55 gallon drum of oil without realizing the need for another. Again, someone who checks these items monthly can keep the ministry from running out of vital fluids when they are needed.

Office supplies, besides the forms mentioned earlier, include paper, computer(s), printer(s), fax machine, desk(s), file cabinets, phones and table(s). A quiet work area is important for interaction with donors both on the phone and in person. Shop noise should be kept to a minimum when interacting with donors or clients, so a separate office with a door is desirable. Access to a mapping program (CD software or internet site) is also beneficial for towing or picking up vehicles from donors' homes. Internet access is a requirement for access to online auto repair instructions, mapping directions, and email inquiries regarding the ministry.

5. Further Information

For further information call or e-mail the C.A.R.S. Ministry staff at (847) 765-5000, cars@willowcreek.org

