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MEMORANDUM

TO: Pastors and Business Administrators
FROM: Deacon Ron Walker
RE: 15-Passenger Vans
DATE: July 19, 2012

We recently received questions as to whether parishes or schools may or should own or rent 15-passenger vans. I understand that the diocese may have sent information about this topic to the parishes more than 6 or 7 years ago.

If one conducts a search on the Internet about the safety of 15-passenger vans, one will find information from various sources, including the National Transportation Safety Board, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. The consensus of such information indicates:

- (1) 15 passenger vans may have more propensity to rollover in an accident than other types of vehicles;
- (2) educational efforts are effective in reducing the number of accidents involving 15-passenger vans;
- (3) one issue is that the vans' tires are often underinflated leading to potentially diminished driving stability;
- (4) the center of gravity in 15-passenger vans can move (when passengers and cargo are added), which can lead to an increased tendency to roll over or a loss of maneuverability; and
- (5) more than 10 passengers in a 15-passenger van increases the chances of a rollover in an accident.

Neither the authorities nor credible safety organizations have stated that the 15-passenger vans are inherently dangerous. Nonetheless, the published information raises the question of prudence when considering whether to purchase or rent a 15-passenger van.

Schools should note that Texas law imposes certain requirements on schools when transporting school children; which, in part, applies to Catholic schools (14 TAC §14.51-.53 and Chap. 34, Education Code). Schools are encouraged to ensure that their school buses satisfy the standards and requirements for Texas School Bus Specifications.

Based on the foregoing, the Diocese of Austin has the following policy:

- (1) Parishes and schools may not purchase or rent 15-passenger vans.
- (2) Existing 15-passenger vans should eventually be phased out. If a parish or school currently owns a 15-passenger van, it should seek to replace it with another type of vehicle. If this poses a financial hardship or concern, please contact me.
- (3) Alternative vehicles which are considered appropriate for parishes and schools to use for transporting parishioners, youth, or students are passenger vehicles, chartered buses (large or small), multifunction school activity buses, or school buses.

We are available to answer any questions related to this memorandum. A provision will soon be added to the appropriate section of the Pastoral Manual incorporating, in substance, the foregoing. Thank you.