

Rides to Church: a review of Transportation Ministries within Episcopal Churches
in Montgomery County, MD
St. James Potomac, November 17, 2009

Agenda:

Lunch with Blessing by Mary Miers, Senior Warden, St. James, Potomac
Speaker Topic: NonProfit Transportation Options for Older Adults
Speakers: Amy Cole, Manager, Connect-A-Ride, Jewish Council for Aging
Sue Dullins, Senior Connections
Parish-to-Parish Sharing

Attendance:

Christ Church, Kensington:
Frances Brown, Lew Price & Helen Urhquart
Grace, Silver Spring:
Theresa Wheeler
Redeemer, Bethesda:
Jack Hutchings, Moses Middleton
St. James Potomac:
John Miers, Mary Miers, Josephine Shepherd, Mary Shepherd, The Rev. Cindy Baskin, Rector of
St. James & The Rev. Elton
Episcopal Senior Ministries:
Sharnita Farrar, Annie Shaw

Handouts for your church office

“Accessible Transportation Options for People with Disabilities & Senior Citizens”
“Metro Access” guide
Booklet from Senior Connections
Flyers from Connect-A-Ride and Jewish Council on Aging

Connect-A-Ride, a program of the Jewish Council on Aging and funded by Montgomery County, provides support to keep people active. While they are not an on-demand service, they help callers plan their transportation utilizing their data base of public, non-profit or volunteer organizations to get older adults where they need to go. Their primary focus is Montgomery County but can assist callers from the District, Prince George’s County MD and Northern Virginia callers. Some local transportation programs are zip-code based such as Bethesda Help (serving all income levels) and Gaithersburg Help.

DC Cabs just received a huge grant to fund 20 wheelchair accessible cabs.
Amy Cole, Manager, Connect-A-Ride acole@AccessJCA.org or 301-255-4207

Senior Connections is a Faith in Action grantee using congregational volunteers to provide rides to older adults needing transportation. The agency can help solve transportation needs within congregations. Grace Episcopal was one of their founding members. Rides are for folks aged 62 and over regardless of income. Service is based on availability of volunteers to provide medical-escorted transportation, friendly visits, shopping and errands. The unpaid volunteers receive training in listening skills and techniques to safely physically assist riders. Liability is covered by the driver’s own auto insurance as primary coverage with secondary insurance from Senior Connections. Volunteers can choose to serve only their own congregation or neighborhood or as needed. Senior Connections receives 50% funding from Montgomery County. 30% of their riders report they can stay in their own home because of the services of Senior Connections. They have a large repeat customer base. Their only waiver of the 62 age limit is for folks undergoing colonoscopy.

Sue Dollins, Executive Director, Senior Connections suedollins@cs.com or 301-962-0820

Public Resources:

Metro bus and rail (see guide)

Metro Access (see handout)

Regency Cab provides 100 free rides each month to Montgomery County residents over the age of 70 (DC residents can utilize this service as long as their ride ends in Montgomery County)

Montgomery County's bus service Ride On

Parish to Parish Sharing:**Transportation Ministries – Questions Asked**

Does your parish have a “rides to church” program?

How is it structured: Is it official or unofficial?

What has been the experience of your parish with providing rides?

What advice in structuring such a program might you give to another parish based on the experience of your parish?

How do you match drivers with riders?

Christ, Kensington: No formal program, and few ask for rides.

Grace, Silver Spring: Theresa asked the question: why are seniors under pastoral care in so many of these reports? St. James and Redeemer responded that for their parishes, pastoral care served as their InReach Committee providing oversight to all the inner-parish services. A map, using push pins to represent where folks lived, might be useful in reviewing needs.

Grace does have a van but is in the process of evaluating its cost effectiveness. The senior group does utilize it for their trips, but the cost of maintenance and insurance is high. Grace was one of the consortium of churches that collaborated to build Senior Connections.

Redeemer, Bethesda: Our congregation is growing. Jack is now on the vestry and chairs the pastoral care committee with oversight for emergency services, food, home Eucharist, and transportation. The team captains arrange transportation as needed from a list of volunteers. The challenge is scheduling drivers for folks wanting to attend the primary service at 10:30am as the drivers are those involved in the pre and post activities (Adult Forum, Coffee Hour). Some friend to friend rides sharing exists, but there is a larger need. The motivator for many who provide rides is “one day I may need help”.

St. Bartholomew's parish sent an email report that they do not have an official ministry of "rides to church", however the smaller size of the congregation promotes unofficial asking and providing. The church is not handicapped accessible and is near no public transportation options. The assisted living centers near St. Bartholomew's (e.g. Asbury Village) are quite large and have their own Sunday worship services for residents.

St. James' reports that while they have no system the Pastoral Care committee is exploring the possibility. They will consider linking with Senior Connections rather than try to build a new program. They recognize that some potential volunteers are hesitant to drive pending insurance and liability concerns. The other potential barrier is learning how to properly assist frail individuals into and out of a vehicle.

St. Peter's parish, did not attend, but reports that the parish does not need a transportation system.