

SAMPLE LETTER FOR FAITH-BASED LEADERS TO INCLUDE IN SERMONS AND BULLETINS

To my congregation:

Every February, we observe Black History Month. We celebrate the contributions made by Black leaders, educators and others and we take advantage of this time to focus on our legacy of struggle and sacrifice. This is a good thing; learning about how we got here and where we came from can only make us stronger and wiser as we continue to evolve and grow.

Black History Month is also a time for us to focus on the things that can enrich and strengthen our families and relationships. We already know about eating healthy, exercising, and practicing positive safety behaviors. But we don't always remember to do one of the easiest, most effective things that can save our lives and the lives of our loved ones. We don't always use our seat belts and make sure that children are correctly restrained in the back seat in the correct child safety seat for their age, weight and height.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), seat belt use among African-Americans is at 80 percent. While this is certainly positive, it still means that approximately one out of five African-Americans still does not buckle up on every trip. In fact, in 2002, motor vehicle crashes were the leading cause of death for African-Americans age 3 and ages 5 to 14, and the second leading cause of death for African-Americans age 2 and ages 15 to 29. NHTSA also reports that of the 31,415 passenger vehicle occupants who were killed in crashes in 2005, 55 percent of them weren't wearing seat belts.

As the "caregiver" of this congregation, I remind you parents, grandparents and other caregivers and authority figures to be effective role models by correctly buckling up every time you drive or ride in a motor vehicle. Make sure that every passenger – child or adult – does the same. It is all of our responsibility to educate and inform our loved ones about the importance of seat belt and child safety seat usage in the African-American community. The simple act of encouraging your loved ones and friends to buckle up every time they get into a car, truck, SUV or van can save lives and make the difference of a lifetime.

With this in mind, please remember to:

- Always wear your lap and shoulder belt;
- Place the lap belt low and snug across the hips, and never across the stomach;
- Place the shoulder belt flat across the collarbone and chest;
- Make sure that all children are seated in the correct child safety seat for their size and age;
- And, make sure that all children age 13 and under are riding in the back seat and are properly restrained.

For more information about seat belt and child safety seat use, visit www.nhtsa.dot.gov or www.BoosterSeat.gov.

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