

Church Van Crashes, Leaving One Girl Dead, Others Injured

A church van carrying 12 people from Destiny Church (Assemblies of God) in Columbia, Tenn., crashed off Interstate 40 Thursday morning around 9 a.m.

Investigators say the driver, 24-year-old youth pastor Bobby Sasser, apparently lost control of the vehicle near exit ramp 143 to Highway 13 when the van ran off the road, struck a pole, flipped over and landed on its roof.

A 14-year-old girl, Mackenzie Turner, was killed in the crash. She was an only child.

Three others were critically injured in the accident—12-year-old Shelby Hopkins, 13-year-old Sebastian Kerr and 15-year-old Sidney Massey—and were airlifted to Monroe Carroll Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville.

A hospital spokeswoman says all three have been upgraded from critical to stable condition.

Sasser, along with 16-year-olds Austyn Kelley and Travis Ingram; 15-year-olds Joseph Penrod, David Andrews and Brooke Yokley; 13-year-old Thomas Morgan; and 12-year-old Carleigh Yokley; were transported to Three Rivers Hospital with non-critical injuries.

Officials say Sasser and two others were the only ones wearing seatbelts.

The van was one of three church vans returning from a concert and overnight youth "lock-in" at a church in Munford, a retreat where youth members typically stay up all night.

Destiny Church was founded in 2007 by current pastor Steven

Morgan. The church began holding services in a home and is now located on the square downtown Columbia, averaging 300 members.

This was not the first fatal accident that has occurred within the Destiny Church youth group in the last few weeks. In June, 17-year-old church member Sarah Graham and another youth, 16-year-old Kyle Tate, was killed in a vehicle accident in Mt. Pleasant, Tenn.

Church Board Member Bradd Kimes addressed the media at the church in Columbia, saying this is a difficult time for the church. "We're sad. ... We just ask that you pray for us and pray for these parents that are dealing with this." He added: "They are a special group of kids."