

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses

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TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Dear Brothers:

It was a delight for us to meet with you at the Kingdom Ministry School, held in the United States branch territory during November and December of 2001. This letter is to provide you with written direction on various matters that were considered at the school. Please arrange a special meeting of the body of elders to give consideration to the direction contained in this letter, as well as to the February 14, 2002, letter to all congregations in the United States, regarding adjustments that were announced at the Kingdom Ministry School.

Congregation Book Study Overseers: While the Congregation Service Committee is authorized to assign publishers to book study groups, it is the body of elders that makes all assignments of Congregation Book Study overseers. As soon as possible after receiving this letter, the elders should review these assignments to make sure that the most qualified brothers are being used.

The responsibilities of the Congregation Book Study overseer include the following: teaching at the book study, taking the lead in evangelizing, assisting all in the group to progress in their ministry, shepherding the group and assisting those who are weak or inactive, and collecting the monthly field service reports. Because the responsibility of being a Congregation Book Study overseer is a serious one, an elder should be used if available. The body of elders will need to exercise good judgment in deciding which brothers can serve most effectively as Congregation Book Study overseers. If needed, an elder might care for more than one group, doing so at different times during the week. This, however, would depend on his circumstances. If an elder is not available, a capable ministerial servant could be used as a substitute until such time as an elder can take over. (*om 44*) The elders who are *most qualified to fulfill all the aspects of the assignment* should be used. If an elder is a good teacher but is unable or disinclined to fulfill the other aspects of the responsibility, he may not be the most qualified elder to serve in this capacity.

Ministerial servants who are used as substitutes will be termed "Congregation Book Study servants." They should work closely under the supervision of the elders. Though they conduct the weekly book study, take a zealous lead in the field ministry, and collect the monthly field service reports for the group, they should not take it upon themselves to make shepherding calls on those in the group. However, under the direction of the elders, they can make spiritually encouraging visits on certain ones in the book study group, sharing scriptures and information from our publications. Of course, if a matter of a serious nature comes up, they should not try to handle the matter but should refer it to the elders. Likewise, they should work under the direction of the elders in giving assistance to those in their group who are spiritually weak or inactive. The elders need to make sure that ministerial servants who are used as Congregation

Book Study servants understand how they are to work under the direction of the elders in carrying out their responsibilities.

Book Study Assistants: The body of elders also assigns each Congregation Book Study overseer one assistant. The assistant conducts the book study in the overseer's absence and assists him with other aspects of the assignment. As announced at the school, the book study overseer may arrange to observe the assistant conduct the book study *once every two months*. This is in addition to occasions when the assistant might conduct because of the overseer's absence. This new provision will enable the overseer to offer constructive counsel to help the assistant improve in teaching ability. Please note that this arrangement applies only if the brother assigned to conduct the study is an elder and the assistant is a ministerial servant. If an elder is serving as the assistant, it is not necessary for him to conduct the book study once every two months so as to be given counsel and assistance.

It is preferred that the assigned assistant be an elder. If there are not enough elders, a ministerial servant may serve as the assistant. If there are not enough ministerial servants, a baptized brother who is a good example in the congregation, though not an appointed servant, may be assigned as the assistant. He would be one who could be used to present demonstrations on the Service Meeting, who would qualify to auxiliary pioneer if he applied, and who might be assigned to care for certain duties at the Kingdom Hall, such as handling microphones, assisting with literature, or serving as an attendant. He should be one who could conduct the book study adequately in the absence of the assigned overseer. If no baptized brother is available who meets this standard, then a book study group might not have an assigned assistant. In that case, the book study overseer would need to arrange for an elder or ministerial servant to care for the group when he is unable to do so.

Size of Congregation Book Study Groups: Though it was suggested at the Kingdom Ministry School that the size of the group should be kept to approximately 15 persons, we should not make this a hard-and-fast rule. There are other factors and local circumstances that should be taken into consideration. These may include distance, lack of book study locations, transportation available, and a lack of qualified elders or ministerial servants who could be used to care for the group and conduct the study. However, ideally the group should be kept small, as was suggested.—See the April 2001 *Our Kingdom Ministry* Question Box.

Field Service Reports and Records: The new provision for publishers to submit field service time in increments of 15 minutes is for those who are *very limited* because of advanced age or because of being shut-ins, confined to nursing homes, or incapacitated. It is also for those who are temporarily limited, perhaps being unable to move about during a month because of serious illness or injury. The Congregation Service Committee will determine which publishers qualify for this arrangement. The secretary should keep track of fractions of hours that are submitted and carry them over to the following month if they total less than an hour. Whenever the sum of these fractions adds up to a full hour, the secretary should include that hour with the congregation's total that is reported to the branch office on the Congregation Report (S-1) form. However, an infirm brother is counted as a publisher in the congregation report each month that he reports at least 15 minutes of field service.

Inactive publishers are part of the congregation and need help. (Psalm 119:176) Such inactive ones should be assigned to book study groups. To enable the elders and the circuit overseer to give adequate attention to such ones, the last Congregation's Publisher Record card for each inactive publisher should be kept indefinitely. The file of Congregation's Publisher Record cards should be divided into two sections—"Active" and "Inactive." The section for active publishers should be arranged alphabetically, with the cards subdivided into sections for regular pioneers, baptized publishers, and unbaptized publishers.

The box at the Kingdom Hall for collecting field service reports will continue to be used. It may be useful to the secretary in gathering the field service reports collected by the book study overseers. Individual publishers may put their reports in the box at the Kingdom Hall if they desire or are otherwise unable to give them to their book study overseer.

Shepherding: When making shepherding calls on publishers, there is no need to tell them specifically, "This is a shepherding call" or, "We will be making a shepherding call on you." When you are checking with publishers to see whether they are going to be at home on the day you intend to visit, simply let them know that you have in mind stopping by to visit them. While the body of elders may indicate who needs a visit, there is no need to make shepherding calls on fellow elders or publishers who are spiritually strong. However, making a brief visit and encouraging them for their faithfulness and zeal would be in order. Of course, if an elder or a publisher becomes spiritually weak or in special need, then other elders may call upon him to assist and give encouragement. Elders should concentrate on helping those who are weak, those irregular in meeting attendance or field activity, and those who are ill or depressed and in need of spiritual encouragement. (Romans 15:1, 2; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; James 5:13, 14) There is more than enough to do in giving personal attention to members of the flock who are in spiritual need.—See *Our Ministry*, page 45, paragraph 2.

Cautions Regarding Shepherding of Sisters: *Elders and ministerial servants must never meet alone with a sister to whom they are not closely related*, regardless of whether the meeting is for the purpose of shepherding, sharing Bible advice, or simply giving encouragement. (Of course, this does not mean that it would be inappropriate for an elder to talk with a sister while in the full view of others at congregation meetings or in field service.) It is especially important never to meet with a sister alone when the sister being assisted has been a victim of abuse, suffers from depression, or for any other reason is in a delicate emotional state. A woman in such an emotional state may be more vulnerable and may be prone to develop improper feelings toward an elder meeting with her. A situation can develop in which a woman, who should love her husband, parent, or child, transfers her feelings to her counselor because he is the only person she views as treating her with love, care, and concern. In a congregation setting, a married sister may wish that her husband would treat her as considerately as a certain elder does. Such circumstances could pose a danger for the elder, particularly if he keeps seeing that same sister, week after week, in continued shepherding sessions. She could develop romantic feelings for the elder. So that this does not occur, it is the course of wisdom to have different pairs of elders involved in shepherding such a sister. This would serve as a protection for the elders, as well as for the sister, because it is possible for an elder to develop improper feelings for a sister he is comforting or counseling.—Jeremiah 17:9.

Caution must also be exercised when talking to sisters on the telephone. It is extremely important that elders not permit telephone calls to develop into personal conversations of consolation that could lead to improper consequences, expectations, or dependency. If a sister starts calling you—especially a single or unhappily married sister—indicate that the matter needs the attention of at least two brothers and that both of you need to hear her concerns in an appropriate setting. Be courteous and considerate but lovingly firm about the need to include another elder in dealing with the matters at hand.

Assisting Those With Marital Problems: Since marriage is an arrangement of divine origin, elders take seriously reports that a marriage is in danger. Yet elders realize that they may not know all the circumstances. The ultimate responsibility for a decision to separate from or divorce one's mate rests with those who have taken the marriage vows—not with the elders. Elders should show loving concern and help such ones to reason on Scriptural principles by referring them to the Bible and Bible-based publications. They can also explain the consequences that may occur in the congregation if an individual contemplates action that is clearly contrary to Scriptural principles. (w88 11/1 21, par. 7) But they should never say: "Your situation doesn't meet the criteria for separation. You have no grounds. Therefore, you *can't* leave him or her!" Nor should they ever tell a person: "You *should* leave your mate." Such statements assume authority over a person's right and obligation to carry his or her own load. (Galatians 6:5) They go beyond what is written and authorized for elders. The *Family Happiness* book, page 151, states: "Well-meaning friends, relatives, or Christian elders may wish to offer help and counsel, but they should not put pressure on a victim to take any particular course of action. That is his or her own decision to make."

Reminders Regarding the Handling of Cases Involving Child Abuse: (1) As directed in the July 1, 1989, letter to all bodies of elders, you should immediately call the Legal Department for direction if you learn of a case of child abuse. Child abuse would include sexual abuse, self-evident physical abuse, and extreme neglect involving a minor. (2) If the alleged victim is now an adult but was a minor at the time of the abuse, please call the Legal Department. (3) If you become aware of a past case of child abuse and you are not certain whether the elders involved at the time called the Legal Department for direction, please call the Legal Department for assistance as soon as possible. (4) Child abuse is a crime. Never suggest to anyone that they should not report an allegation of child abuse to the police or other authorities. If you are asked, make it clear that whether to report the matter to the authorities or not is a personal decision for each individual to make and that there are no congregation sanctions for either decision. That is, no elder will criticize anyone who reports such an allegation to the authorities.

Judicial Announcements and Restrictions: When a judicial committee decides to reprove a repentant wrongdoer, they should consider very carefully whether to announce the reproof to the congregation. (ks91 123) While there are many situations in which it would be wise to announce the reproof to the congregation, two were specifically mentioned at the Kingdom Ministry School: (1) If the offense was adultery and the innocent mate has not yet forgiven the guilty one, a Scriptural divorce and remarriage(s) could still occur. It is therefore possible that the act of adultery will become public knowledge. As long as that potential exists, a decision to announce the judicial reproof would be appropriate. (2) If the offense involved the

sexual molestation of a child, an announced reproof would serve to protect the congregation, indicating that not all is well with the repentant wrongdoer.

Restrictions are always imposed when a person is reproofed judicially or reinstated. When a reproof is announced, the judicial committee decides whether the restrictions should also be announced. (w81 9/1 27, par. 29) When a reinstatement is announced, however, the restrictions should always be announced.—See *Our Ministry*, page 149, paragraph 3.

It is not necessary to involve the entire body of elders in the removal of restrictions except in an unusual case. If the wrongdoer is still associated with the congregation that took the action, the original judicial committee will remove the restrictions as warranted and advise the body of elders. If any of those brothers no longer serve, the body of elders will select replacements. If the wrongdoer moves to a new congregation while under restrictions, the body of elders of the new congregation should be informed of the restrictions and of what spiritual progress the individual has made. This will enable them to continue supervising the restoration of his privileges. (ks91 124, pars. 7-8, and 131, par. 4) The new body of elders may select two or three elders to care for this responsibility.

Caution Regarding Photocopiers: Some photocopiers keep an electronic copy of whatever is copied. To ensure confidentiality, elders should never use commercial photocopiers to make copies of documents that contain confidential congregation information, such as the S-77 form. Even when using photocopiers at their workplace, elders must be extremely careful to avoid any breach of confidentiality.

Appointed Brothers Who Move: Elders and ministerial servants who move to a new congregation *with a favorable letter of recommendation and who have a favorable recommendation from the elders of the new congregation* but who have not yet been officially reappointed may be used to handle instruction talks, parts on the Service Meeting, public talks, and so forth, according to their qualifications. Of course, elders who move do not function in an official capacity as elders (such as by serving on judicial committees or attending meetings of the body of elders) until they are appointed in the new congregation. However, appointed brothers who move with a favorable recommendation are permitted to attend the following spiritual programs: (1) They may attend the meeting the circuit overseer conducts with the elders and ministerial servants during the week of his visit but only the portion during which the circuit overseer considers the outline from the branch office. Thus, generally, these brothers will leave at the same time as the ministerial servants. However, if the outline includes additional information for the elders only, brothers who were serving as elders may stay for that material as well. But they are not to be present when recommendations and local congregation needs are discussed. (2) They may attend the meeting the district and circuit overseers hold with the elders (and, at times, the ministerial servants) during the week of a circuit assembly, but they should not attend the circuit elders' business meeting, which is often held in conjunction with that meeting. (3) They may attend the Kingdom Ministry School, if one is held before they can be reappointed. Please note that if a brother who has moved to a new congregation is not recommended for reappointment when the circuit overseer visits the congregation, he would not be eligible to attend the spiritual programs mentioned above on subsequent occasions.

New Appointments of Elders and Ministerial Servants: When the body of elders receives notice from the branch office that a brother has been appointed as an elder or a ministerial servant in the congregation, the presiding overseer should assign two elders to meet with the brother before the appointment is announced. The atmosphere during the discussion should emphasize the seriousness of the matter. *It should not be handled in a hurried or casual manner.* In every case, the elders must ask the following questions: Is there anything from your past or in your personal or family life that disqualifies you or that would prevent you from accepting this appointment? Is there any reason why your appointment should not be announced to the congregation? If the brother reveals that there is, do not announce the appointment. Return the S-2 form or S-52 appointment letter to the branch office, and provide a complete explanation as to why the appointment should be annulled. If the brother accepts the appointment, the elders might direct his attention to information provided by the faithful and discreet slave class that will help him fulfill his new privilege of service.—Matthew 24:45.

Reviewing the Qualifications of Appointed Brothers: If an elder's wife or child (either a minor child or an older child living under his roof) is involved in serious wrongdoing, the body of elders should review the brother's qualifications and determine whether he qualifies to continue serving. (w96 10/15 21, par. 7; w88 3/1 24, par. 5; w84 5/15 30-1; w78 2/1 31-2; w72 126) The elders should meet as a body, with the brother in question present, to consider the matter, using the following procedure: (1) Make sure all the facts are presented. Maintain an atmosphere that is conducive to such a discussion. (2) Allow the brother adequate time to express his feelings and to answer any questions. Ask him for his view of the matters being discussed regarding his qualifications. (3) Ask the brother to leave the room while the elders continue their discussion and make a decision on what they will recommend. (4) Invite the brother back into the room. Inform him of the decision and the Scriptural reasons for the decision. (5) Give the brother the opportunity to comment on the decision. This allows the elders to hear the brother's defense of himself if he chooses to make a defense. Thereafter, they can make the *final* decision, having heard his side of the matter. (6) If the elders decide to recommend his deletion and the brother disagrees with that recommendation, he may submit a letter stating why he does not accept the recommendation. His letter would be included with the elders' letter of explanation to the branch office.

If the qualifications of a ministerial servant are being reviewed, the same basic procedure is followed except that rather than having the brother present during the meeting of the body of elders, it would usually be sufficient for two elders to speak with him in advance to hear him out. They would meet with him again afterwards to inform him of the decision and to give him the opportunity to express himself. If he disagrees with the elders' decision, he may submit a letter stating why he does not accept the recommendation.

New Textbook for the Theocratic Ministry School: *Benefit From Theocratic Ministry School Education* will not be featured in the school curriculum until January 2003. Until then, Theocratic Ministry School overseers should refrain from using it when publicly counseling students. Counsel should continue to be given from the *Theocratic Ministry School Guidebook*, and the current Speech Counsel slips should continue to be used until the adjusted format for the Theocratic Ministry School goes into effect in 2003. Elders can take advantage of the months ahead to read the book and become familiar with it.

Continue Progressing as Spiritual Men: The key factor that will determine the success of all these new arrangements for the congregation will be the continuing progress of the elders as spiritual men. A spiritual man is God-oriented. He endeavors to see things from “the standpoint of our God” and goes on “perceiving what the will of Jehovah is.” (James 1:27; Ephesians 5:17) As we keep heart and mind “on the things unseen,” we grow in spiritual discernment and insight. (2 Corinthians 4:18) It was David’s spiritual outlook that enabled him to see beyond the physical man Goliath and know that the unseen heavens would give him the victory.

What is the lesson for elders? Ask yourself: ‘Do my decisions reflect my implicit trust in Jehovah and reveal my conviction about unseen realities? Although I had spirituality when I was appointed, am I continuing to demonstrate that I am convinced of invisible realities? Have I continued growing as a spiritual man?’ Several weeks have now passed since the elders attended the Kingdom Ministry School. Would it not be a good time now to analyze personally whether there is still a need to refine your schedule for Bible reading, personal study, and meditation? Is your family benefiting as you continue to progress as a spiritual man? Many brothers will feel spiritually benefited as they contemplate and imitate your fine example.

Please be assured of our continual prayers in your behalf as you carry out your weighty responsibility to shepherd the flock of God entrusted to your care.—1 Peter 5:2, 3.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*

