

RELIGIOUS ISSUES INVOLVING SCHOOLCHILDREN

1. Elders should be alert to assist the parents of a child who is threatened with or who experiences suspension or expulsion from school because of the child's conscientious stand on issues involving religious practices or Christian neutrality. The guidelines provided below are based on the Scriptural principles of being reasonable, attempting to settle disputes out of court, and parents taking the lead in making decisions about their children's schooling. The direction to parents in this document also applies to the legal guardians of children.—Prov. 1:8; 6:20; Luke 12:58; Phil. 4:5.

2. If a student has been suspended (even for a brief time) or expelled from school, two elders should immediately call the Legal Department before recommending or taking any further steps. When calling the Legal Department, the elders should be prepared to describe the spiritual standing of the student and his parents.

3. If a student is experiencing a problem with teachers or school administrators because of issues involving religious practices or Christian neutrality but has not yet been suspended or expelled from school, the body of elders should assign one or two elders to meet with the parents to review the following points with them.

4. Remind the parents of the importance of visiting their child's teachers and school administrator to help such ones understand the views and beliefs of both the parents and the student. Parents should make good use of the brochure *Jehovah's Witnesses and Education* when making such visits. Whether or not the parents have visited their child's teachers or school administrator before the problem arose, the parents should make such a visit now with a prayerful and helpful attitude. It may be that there was simply a lack of communication or some misunderstanding.

5. Following the visit, the parents would do well to send a letter to the school clearly and respectfully stating their position as parents, *based on their own Bible-trained consciences*. The letter should thank the teachers and school administrator for their understanding during the visit. Such a letter will provide a written record of the position taken by the parents with regard to their child's participation in religious ceremonies or nationalistic activities. Parents should keep a copy of this letter. Taking these steps can often help prevent further problems from arising.

6. If the problem continues and the parents anticipate the situation becoming worse, they should immediately inform the elders. The assigned elder(s) should direct the parents to prepare a letter addressed to the branch office that contains the following information:

- (1) The name, age, school, and class of the child
- (2) A description of the problem that has arisen, including any actions taken against the child or that are threatened
- (3) A description of the steps the parents have already taken to resolve the matter.
- (4) If a lawyer who is one of Jehovah's Witnesses is already assisting the parents, include his name and congregation.
- (5) Enclose copies of any letters written or received in connection with the problem.

7. The elders should forward the parents' letter to the Legal Department along with a letter describing the spiritual standing of the child and his parents and any recommendations the elders may have. After the Legal Department receives the letters from the elders and parents, it will be determined what additional assistance can be provided.

8. Although it is the family head's decision to make, it is generally not advisable to withdraw a child from school because of the problem that has arisen. The child should continue to go to school until he is formally suspended or expelled in writing. However, if the parents choose to withdraw the child,

they should do so formally, in writing. This written evidence of expulsion or withdrawal could prove useful in the future. If the parents decide to transfer the student to another school, they should obtain a transfer certificate from the school from which the child was expelled or withdrawn. The parents are entitled to such a certificate, although the reason for the expulsion might be indicated on the certificate.