

Announcements and Reminders

September 2020

FOR ELDERS

1. **Handling Private Baptisms:** This updates previous direction provided on handling baptisms locally when a live in-person circuit assembly is canceled. Arrangements should be made for the baptism candidates to view the assembly program via JW Stream. Following the baptism talk and prior to the baptism, an elder should ask the two questions on page 206 of the *Organized* book and give the candidates an opportunity to answer in the affirmative. The elder will then offer a prayer. These steps can be done in person or via videoconference with observers. As an alternative to viewing the baptism talk on JW Stream, a local elder may obtain the baptism talk outline from the circuit overseer and deliver the talk to the candidates.

- (1) **Performing Baptisms:** The elders should make appropriate arrangements for candidates to be immersed locally at a suitable location. (*sfl* chap. 11 pars. 16-17) It is not necessary for the brother performing the baptism to be appointed as an elder or a ministerial servant. However, he should be a mature, baptized brother. It would be improper for a candidate to immerse himself. The elders should report the number baptized to the circuit overseer shortly after the immersion.
- (2) **Safety Precautions:** Those involved in performing baptisms should take necessary precautions to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in accord with guidelines provided by the secular authorities. It may be necessary to postpone a baptism until physical distancing laws are lifted by authorities. A baptism should not be performed if the candidate or the brother performing the baptism is displaying symptoms of COVID-19. Neither should a baptism be performed if during the preceding 14 days the candidate or the brother performing the baptism was in close contact with a person confirmed as having COVID-19 or showing symptoms of it. Where possible, it is preferred that the baptism be performed by a baptized brother living in the same household as the baptism candidate in order to reduce the potential spread of COVID-19.
- (3) It is safer to perform a baptism outdoors if conditions permit. Using good judgment, elders in a few nearby congregations may combine their efforts to hold a joint baptism if it can be done safely. The use of a baptism pool at an Assembly Hall is not approved.
- (4) **Candidates' Dress:** The elders should remind the candidates to dress in a way that is neat, clean, in good taste, and appropriate for the occasion.—*od* p. 207.
- (5) **Observers:** The body of elders should use good judgment and take safety precautions into consideration when they determine who should attend the baptism in person. There is no need for observers to be physically present at a baptism. A baptism is acceptable even if there are only two persons present, namely the candidate and the baptized brother performing the baptism. (Matt. 3:13, 16) Of course, minors getting baptized would be accompanied by at least one parent. A brother performing the baptism would ensure that he is not alone with a sister who is not closely related to him.
- (6) Whether or not the individual's baptism is recorded or streamed to others, such as by means of videoconferencing, is his personal decision. There is no objection to the baptism being streamed live to the congregation, to family members, and to close friends if this is agreeable to the one being baptized. There is no need to or-

ganize large in-person gatherings to view baptisms. All observers should be reminded to respect the dignity of this happy occasion.

2. Kingdom Hall Maintenance: Although most Kingdom Halls are not being used for meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly all Kingdom Halls need some attention. Buildings left empty and not properly maintained will deteriorate. Therefore, while following closely the safety precautions provided by the branch office, please watch for and correct moisture intrusion, mold growth, trash buildup, vandalism, and similar things. If you have questions regarding how to handle a matter, please contact your Local Design/Construction Department maintenance trainer.

3. Local Design/Construction Department Update: A five-minute video entitled *How LDC Supports the Preaching Work* has been prepared to update congregations on the work of Local Design/Construction Departments (LDC) around the world. Although the LDC's activities have been temporarily adjusted and may differ somewhat from what is shown, the video highlights the ongoing need we have for suitable meeting places and how they support our work of preaching the good news. This video, along with an update from our Local Design/Construction in Canada will soon be posted on jw.org. The body of elders should use a future local needs part to play the video.

4. Visual Aids: The appropriate use of visual aids at congregation meetings is outlined in the *Shepherd* book, chapter 20, paragraph 20. Additionally, when a speaker displays an image, he should refer to it and use it to teach. Images should not be displayed merely to add visual interest.—*th* study 9.

5. Worldwide Campaign in November 2020: At the midweek meeting during the week of October 26, 2020, consideration will be given to the part entitled “Special Campaign in November to Publicize God’s Kingdom.” The elder assigned to care for that part should be prepared to outline the local arrangements for carrying out the campaign.

6. Disaster Relief Committees: At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the branch office established five Disaster Relief Committees (DRC) to monitor the needs of our brothers across Canada. The brothers serving on these committees have provided us with valuable information and shown themselves to be “born for times of distress”. (Prov. 17:17) At this time, we are asking DRCs to take on an expanded role.

7. If it becomes necessary to provide financial assistance to our brothers in need, funds will be provided to you by the branch office, through your local DRC, rather than using local congregation funds. This updates the direction provided in paragraph 8 of the *Announcements and Reminders* (S-147) for the month of May 2020. Thus, if your body of elders wishes to make use of this provision, the Congregation Service Committee should write the local disaster relief committee for assistance with obtaining relief funds to support publishers. (Go to LOOKUP > CONTACTS > Category: Disaster Relief Committee.) The document entitled “Direction Related to COVID-19 Pandemic for Bodies of Elders” has been revised accordingly and provides further direction on this matter.

FOR CONGREGATION SERVICE COMMITTEES

1. Reporting Field Service in 15-Minute Increments: If publishers are severely limited in their ability to participate in the field ministry due to the COVID-19 pandemic, please keep in mind that you may grant them approval to report field service in 15-minute increments.—*od* p. 82 par. 29; *sfl* chap. 22 par. 14.

2. **Worldwide Campaign in November 2020:** A sample letter dated November 3, 2020, for use in distributing *The Watchtower* No. 2 2020 to local government officials has been posted on jw.org. Similar wording may be used for letters written to businesses. The date of the letter may be adjusted. The official's office address or the business address should be used to send such correspondence. Publishers should not send the magazine to officials who are actively opposing our activities. (Matt. 10:16, 17) As a reminder, personal letterhead rather than congregation letterhead should be used.

3. Select *well-qualified publishers* to send the magazine to local government officials and businesses. The selected publishers should be able to prepare their own personal letters or e-mails that are professional and dignified in appearance, using the wording in the sample letter as a guide. (Rom. 13:7; 1 Pet. 2:17) Please be sure to provide those who are selected with helpful suggestions on giving an effective witness.

4. As a reminder, if another congregation will be assisting you in covering your territory, the service committees involved should maintain good communication to avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts, especially in multilingual areas.

5. If you become aware of any outstanding experiences related to giving a witness to local government officials or businesses, you may send a brief summary of what occurred to the Service Department.

FOR COORDINATORS OF THE BODIES OF ELDERS

1. **Rating Convention Speakers and Interpreters:** The coordinator of the body of elders, the Life and Ministry Meeting overseer, and the auxiliary counselor (or another respected elder if the auxiliary counselor is the coordinator of the body of elders) should prayerfully review the abilities and the example of each elder who has been approved by the body of elders to give outgoing public talks. The three brothers should follow closely the direction provided in *Instructions for Rating Speakers and Interpreters* (S-315i). The *Speaker and Interpreter Ratings* (S-315) form should be submitted to the circuit overseer—not the branch office—by the date indicated on jw.org.

FOR SECRETARIES

1. **Congregation Information Feature on JW.ORG:** A new feature called Congregation Information has been added to jw.org. This feature allows the secretary to indicate which brothers in the congregation have been assigned certain responsibilities. Please use the feature to indicate who is serving as the service overseer and the brothers who assist in caring for congregation accounts. Please complete this step before October 1, 2020. On the “Congregation” section of the home page that appears after logging in to jw.org, select “Congregation Information.” Revised *Instructions for Congregation Use of JW.ORG* (S-135) will be provided in due course.

2. **Reports Feature on JW.ORG:** Older features on jw.org are in the process of being updated. As a result, the manner in which these features are accessed will gradually change. For example, on the “Congregation” section of the home page that appears after logging in to jw.org, there is now a link to a new Reports feature. The *Congregation Analysis Report* (S-10) for the 2020 service year should be accessed using this link. Starting September 22, 2020, the *Congregation's Field Service and Meeting Attendance Report* (S-1) should be accessed using this link.

3. **Reporting Baptisms:** If you have not done so already, please *immediately* inform your circuit overseer of any baptisms performed in conjunction with the 2020 regional convention as well as any other private baptisms performed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FOR SERVICE OVERSEERS

1. **Literature Inventory:** In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the semiannual congregation literature inventory will be delayed until further notice.

2. **Worldwide Campaign in November 2020:** The brothers assigned to conduct meetings for field service during the month of November may repeat key points from the October and November 2020 *Life and Ministry Meeting Workbooks*. The brothers should give practical reminders that fit local circumstances. This could include reminding the publishers to make contact with interested persons, including relatives, workmates, schoolmates, former Bible students, and other acquaintances.

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FOR CONGREGATIONS

1. **2021 Regional Convention:** Because of the uncertainties of safely holding large gatherings in 2021, direction regarding the arrangements for the regional convention will be provided at a later time.

2. **Life and Ministry Meeting Workbook:** Beginning January 2021, the *Life and Ministry Meeting Workbook* will be published every two months and will contain 16 pages. Although the content will remain basically unchanged, the outline points for the ten-minute talk in the Treasures From God's Word section of the meeting will now appear with the artwork. Revised *Instructions for Our Christian Life and Ministry Meeting* (S-38) will be provided in due course. Those who are able to use an electronic copy of the meeting workbook are encouraged to do so.

3. **Worldwide Campaign in November 2020:** We greatly anticipate the November 2020 campaign to focus attention on God's Kingdom and distribute *The Watchtower* No. 2 2020 to interested persons. This special effort will no doubt bring much comfort and hope to those longing for a better future. Therefore, publishers should plan to do all they can to participate in this exciting campaign. In November, all those serving as auxiliary pioneers may choose a 30- or 50-hour requirement. While it appears that it will not be possible to preach from house-to-house and engage in public witnessing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, publishers should take full advantage of other methods of preaching to share a scripture and to distribute a printed or digital copy of the magazine to those who demonstrate interest. Besides those who live in the congregation's territory, such interested persons could include relatives, workmates, schoolmates, former Bible students, and other acquaintances. Contact could be made by telephone, text messaging, e-mail, or letter writing. As a reminder, publishers should not send text messages or e-mails to individuals with whom they are not personally acquainted. Additionally, the elders will make specific arrangements to send the magazine to local government officials and businesses in the congregation's territory.

4. Once publishers have distributed *The Watchtower* No. 2 2020 to interested persons, any remaining magazines may be included in giving a witness to others by letter writing. At the midweek meeting for the week of October 26, 2020, during the part entitled "Special Campaign in November to Publicize God's Kingdom," more information will be provided on how to carry out the campaign according to local circumstances.