



WATCHTOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.

CABLE WATCHTOWER

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TO ALL CIRCUIT AND DISTRICT OVERSEERS

Dear Brothers:

We know that you and your wives benefitted greatly from the "Divine Love" District Conventions. They impressively brought to our attention why love is the most beneficial quality that we can develop. (1 Cor. 13:13) Love enables us to remain united in spite of the limitations and shortcomings we manifest. --Col. 3:12-14.

You can be sure that by your loving example, the brothers you serve will be uplifted and strengthened in the faith. We have received a number of letters informing us of the love you brothers and your wives have displayed. One body of elders wrote concerning their circuit overseer: "(He) is truly devoted to do Jehovah's will . . . being of spiritual assistance to all . . . approachable in discussing any matter. (He) has a listening ear, showing empathy for the brothers. Such brothers we can rely upon when future problems we know will come, set in."

You can be confident that the brothers treasure your friendship, association and love when you 'genuinely care for the things pertaining to them.' (Phil. 2:19-23, 29) Therefore, continue exerting yourselves to deal lovingly with them. Never pressure them or scold them. Lead them, work hard with them, exhort them in accord with their needs. Be patient if their progress appears slow. Such loving, patient treatment will refresh the brothers.--Matt. 11:28-30.

PROTECTING THE FLOCK

A major responsibility of an overseer as he 'shepherds the flock of God in his care' is to protect it from dangers. (Acts 20:28) Acts 20:29, 30 indicates that one of those dangers can be men who apostatize. There is a fine study of this subject in the August 1, 1980, Watchtower. All of you want to get thoroughly familiar with the contents of the study articles. Encourage all of the elders and ministerial servants, especially, to do likewise. Include key points in your "Continue in the Things You Have Learned" program.

Help the elders discern between one who is a trouble-making apostate and a Christian who becomes weak in faith and has doubts. (2 Peter 2; Jude 22, 23) The former one should be dealt with decisively after extended efforts have been put forth to readjust him. (2 John 7-10) On the other hand, one weak in faith should be patiently and lovingly assisted to get the accurate knowledge that will solidify his faith.

Keep in mind that to be disfellowshipped, an apostate does not have to be a promoter of apostate views. As mentioned in paragraph two, page 17 of the August 1, 1980, Watchtower, "The word 'apostasy' comes from a Greek term that means 'a standing away from,' 'a falling away, defection,' 'rebellion, abandonment. Therefore, if a baptized Christian abandons the teachings of Jehovah, as presented by the faithful and discreet slave, and persists in believing other doctrine despite Scriptural reproof, then he is apostatizing. Extended, kindly efforts should be put forth to readjust his thinking. However, if, after such extended efforts have been put forth to readjust his thinking, he continues to believe the apostate ideas and rejects what he has been provided through the 'slave class, then appropriate judicial action should be taken.

This is not to say that you or the elders should go on 'witch hunts,' as it were, inquiring into the personal beliefs of your brothers. Rather, if something reasonably substantial comes to the attention of the elders along this line, it would be appropriate to make a kindly, discreet inquiry so as to protect the flock. We cannot overemphasize the need to be cautious, discreet and kindly as such situations are dealt with.--James 1:19, 20.

COOPERATION BETWEEN BODIES OF ELDERS

In some of our larger cities it has been noticed that, at times, when wrongdoing is uncovered, several congregations may be involved. There is a need for full cooperation between the bodies of elders of these congregations. The elders should be alert to the need to quickly pass on to the bodies of elders of other congregations any information about publishers in their congregations that may necessitate an investigation. Any who have indiscreetly gotten themselves involved in wrong conduct need to be assisted right away. Any who have allowed themselves to become hardened in sin need to be severely reproofed and if unresponsive to this, expelled from the congregation. It would be good for you to alert the bodies of elders in your circuit to the material that was presented to you in your seminar in the fall of 1979 in outline #13 under the heading "Elders Still Need Assistance in Handling Intercongregational Problems." Whatever information is needed and available should be passed on quickly to the elders of the congregation involved.

You want to help elders feel keenly the obligation before God to prevent wrongdoing from infiltrating and spreading within the congregation. (1 Cor. 5:6-8) The judicial committee should make great effort to see if the individual is genuinely repentant before extending forgiveness to him for the bad name that he has given to the congregation. Usually a person who is truly repentant can point to some "fruit that befits repentance." (Matt 3:8) We want to have in mind that no matter how good the counsel or reproof, if the person's heart is unresponsive, given the same circumstances he will repeat the sin. To protect the flock the elders must be willing to take decisive action in such cases.