



WATCHTOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.

CABLE WATCHTOWER

25 COLUMBIA HEIGHTS, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11201, U.S.A. PHONE (212) 625-3600

December 1, 1981

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Dear Brothers:

Reports have come in from all over the country telling of the good work brothers are doing in contacting prisoners in various jails and penitentiaries, helping some to rehabilitate their lives spiritually. In a number of penal institutions regular meetings are being held and several prisoners have studied to the point of dedication and baptism. Their changed pattern of life has been in itself a tremendous witness to others.

In some cases prisoners have been helped by brothers who have corresponded with them over a period of time. However, there have also developed a number of serious situations in this regard in which brothers, and sisters in particular, have had prisoners take advantage of their loving concern and hospitality. This has worked out to the injury of some. For this reason it seems appropriate to caution congregations concerning the danger. Some prisoners are willing to carry on correspondence, feigning interest over long periods of time simply for their own selfish advantage. As reported by one brother who is himself a prisoner, "These men in here have nothing better to do than just sit around and think up ways to con people out of their money. Some may spend months just setting up a person for the kill, so to speak. They are quite good at deceiving our sisters and brothers."

There have been a few cases in which sisters have become emotionally or romantically involved with prisoners through corresponding with them. Some have suffered spiritually and otherwise. Others have sent money to the prisoners who use this money to pay for cigarettes, narcotics and even sexual favors from other inmates, while pretending to be interested in becoming Christians. Sadly enough, some who became emotionally involved allowed themselves to be so thoroughly deceived that they rejected warnings from the elders and believed wicked deceivers instead. Therefore, if correspondence is carried on with a prisoner it would not be good to begin sending money or material things at the prisoner's request. Rather, the giving of spiritual information and encouragement to apply Bible principles in their lives should be the reason for writing.--Prov. 14:15.

We do not recommend that sisters carry on correspondence with male prisoners. Rather, it would be well for such to be done by qualified, mature brothers. It is also ill-advised to invite indiscriminately members of the congregation to visit the prison

and have close association with inmates. In some areas large gatherings have been held inside the prison with numerous members of the congregation being allowed to mix freely with the inmates. Special events have been arranged in connection with the baptism of inmates and on some occasions circuit assembly programs have been presented in part for the inmates, with brothers and sisters from the congregations attending. This has proved to be very unwise and should not be done for reasons indicated above.

Where interest is shown by prisoners it is good to give the names and addresses of such ones to the congregation nearest the prison and let the brothers there who are qualified to visit the prison contact these prisoners and arrange to study with them if possible. Usually these brothers know how to properly handle the various problems that may arise and have special permission to enter prison facilities. It is not objectionable for these brothers to hold meetings with prisoners so that several may study at one time, but rather than arranging for any form of special events, we believe that the most good can be accomplished by just holding regular weekly meetings where they are permitted by the prison officials. Thus, dedicated or interested inmates will be receiving the same spiritual feeding that Jehovah's people on the outside are receiving.

Some of the information contained in this letter is being published in Our Kingdom Ministry for February, 1982. Please be sure that what is published there is covered thoroughly with the brothers as it is scheduled for the regular service meeting. It will not be necessary for you to incorporate information from this letter in considering the article, but it seems appropriate to provide this background information for the elders in the event a particular situation should develop locally where counsel needs to be given to individuals that may become involved with writing to prisoners.

Certainly we want to be of help to all persons who are hungering and thirsting for the truth, but caution must be exercised when dealing with those whose wrongdoing has caused them to be confined in prison. We appreciate the cooperation of you brothers in this regard. Please accept along with this letter our expression of Christian love and best wishes. Be assured that we are happy to be working with you as overseers of the congregation of God.

Your brothers,

Watchtower B. & F. Society

OF NEW YORK, INC.