



WATCHTOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

BOX 280, INGLEBURN, NSW 1890 AUSTRALIA

ABN 42 002 861 225

PHONE: (02) 9829 5600

FAX: (02) 9829 3616

August 28, 2002

TO ALL CONGREGATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

Dear Brothers:

At Psalm 144:15 we read: “Happy is the people whose God is Jehovah!” We see the truthfulness of this inspired statement when we associate with our brothers and sisters at conventions, assemblies, and congregation meetings. We enjoy a warm atmosphere of peace while we benefit from fine spiritual encouragement from Jehovah and his organization. (Psalm 29:11) What a contrast to those of the world who lack true spiritual guidance and a solid hope for the future!—Isaiah 65:13.

What enables us to maintain our happy spirit? For one thing, we fear Jehovah and we deeply respect the admonition in His Word, including what the Bible says on sexual matters. (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Hebrews 13:4) At first, it was not easy for some of us to bring our lives into harmony with Jehovah’s elevated standards. We had to make significant changes in our lifestyle before we could qualify for membership in Jehovah’s clean, spirit-directed organization. Was it worth the effort? Absolutely! How happy we are to be living in harmony with God’s righteous requirements!

In recent weeks, the media in this country has focused attention on the way accusations of child abuse are handled by various religious organizations. Such reports may cause some sincere individuals to ask about the procedures followed by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Therefore, we believe that it will be beneficial to review with you our Bible-based position, so that you will “know how you ought to give an answer” to any who may inquire.—Colossians 4:6.

Simply stated, we abhor the sexual abuse of children and will not protect any perpetrator of such repugnant acts from the consequences of his gross sin. (**Romans 12:9**) We expect the elders to investigate every allegation of child abuse. Even one abused child is one too many. However, in evaluating the evidence, they must bear in mind the Bible’s clear direction: “No single witness should rise up against a man respecting any error or any sin At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses the matter should stand good.” (Deuteronomy 19:15) Later, this requirement to consider testimony of two or three witnesses was confirmed by Jesus. (**Matthew 18:16**) Thus, although they investigate every allegation, the elders are not authorized by the Scriptures to take congregational action unless there is a confession or there are two credible witnesses. However, if two persons are witnesses to separate incidents of the same kind of wrongdoing, their testimony can be deemed sufficient to take action.—1 Timothy 5:19, 24, 25.

What if someone is a proven child molester? The article “Let Us Abhor What is Wicked!” published in the January 1, 1997, issue of *The Watchtower*, had this to say on page 29: “For the protection of our children, a man known to have been a child molester does not qualify for a responsible position in the congregation. Moreover, he cannot be a pioneer or serve in any other special, full-time service.” We take such decisive action because we are concerned with maintaining Bible standards and protecting our children. (**1 Timothy 3:2, 9, 10**) Everyone in the

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organization is expected to meet the same requirements, namely, to be clean physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually.—1 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 4:17-19; **1 Thessalonians 2:4.**

We have long instructed elders to report allegations of child abuse to the authorities where required by law to do so, even where there is only one witness. (Romans 13:1) In any case, the elders know that if the victim wishes to make a report, it is his or her absolute right to do so.—Galatians 6:5.

At least since 1981, articles have been published in our journals, *The Watchtower* and *Awake!*, with a view to educating Jehovah's people and the public on the need to protect children from child abuse. Besides the above-quoted article, there was the article "Help For the Victims of Incest," which appeared in the October 1, 1983, *Watchtower. Awake!* has featured such articles as "Your Child is in Danger!," "How Can We Protect Our Children?," and "Prevention in the Home" (October 8, 1993) as well as "Child Molesting—Every Mother's Nightmare," in its January 22, 1985 issue.

We believe that we have a strong, Bible-based policy on child abuse. Over the years, as we have noted areas where our policy could be strengthened, we have not hesitated to follow through. At Kingdom Ministry Schools the elders receive ongoing reminders regarding this policy and related matters. And we continue to urge the elders to follow closely the procedures that we have established.

The moral cleanness of the congregation continues to be of vital concern to the "faithful and discreet slave." (Matthew 24:45) As we keep applying Scriptural principles in our lives, our happiness will increase. We trust that these reminders will be helpful to you as you share the Kingdom hope with right-hearted ones. We have much to look forward to in the way of spiritual refreshment as we attend the "Zealous Kingdom Proclaimers" District Conventions. What a happy prospect! Yes, there is no doubt about it: "Happy is the people whose God is Jehovah!"—Psalm 144:15.

Your brothers,

Watchtower B. & J. Society
OF AUSTRALIA

Note to the presiding overseer: Please have this letter read at the first Service Meeting following its receipt. The letter should be read by one of the elders. All Scriptures shown in bold type should be read.