



WATCH TOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF BRITAIN

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November 14, 2003

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Dear Brothers:

You may recall that in the November 2002 edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry*, on page 2, we drew attention to the increasing problem of caring for displaced persons and refugees. Our love for people moves us to help such ones. However, caution must be shown.

A number of asylum seekers come to Britain claiming to be Jehovah's Witnesses or, after arriving, appear to show an interest in studying the Bible. Of course, some are genuine. We want to help people. (Galatians 6:10) If the person really is one of our brothers, or has a genuine interest in studying the Bible, we obviously want to provide spiritual assistance.

Sadly though, we receive many reports of individuals who attach themselves to a congregation, seemingly showing genuine interest, solely to obtain a testimonial to support their asylum claim. Even though we stated in *Our Kingdom Ministry* for November 2002, that "it is unwise to make statements to the authorities on behalf of refugees until their status has been verified," we still hear of cases where elders unwisely provide letters of support for asylum seekers claiming to be Jehovah's Witnesses, and yet the elders have received no confirmation from the person's former congregation. Sometimes, an elder has expressed his opinion that a person studying the Bible "seems genuine," when actually he has no solid basis for such an opinion.

We understand that lawyers representing asylum seekers may use very persuasive reasoning to obtain such letters of support, and tribunals may place much reliance on them. If it turns out that the asylum seeker was not genuine the authorities could get the impression that Jehovah's Witnesses are too eager to give testimonials to help someone stay in the country. Would this not detract from our real objective, that of spreading the good news? Might it not also cause the authorities to be dismissive of any genuine ones who might merit our wholehearted support in future?

On the other hand, some asylum seekers have claimed that our elders have been instructed never to write such a letter, even for those believed to be genuine. This is not an accurate representation of our position, as although elders are not obliged to provide a letter of support for anyone, they have the discretion to do so. On rare occasions elders have been prepared to write, stating how long the individual has attended meetings, how regular he is in attendance, whether or not he is pursuing a course of personal Bible study provided for prospective members of the congregation, whether or not he has come with an introduction from a previous congregation and (if so) whether or not he is active in our public ministry. Any enquiry on this subject that is addressed to the congregation should be considered by the service committee. Of course, the elders should have a sound basis for anything they put in writing and should be prepared to give reasons for their comments if questioned, or summoned to give evidence. They could include a disclaimer such as: 'such meetings and personal Bible

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study provisions are open to the public free of charge and attendance or acceptance does not constitute an individual a member of this congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.'

In circumstances where an asylum seeker's application has already been rejected by the authorities we should urge the individual to work in harmony with the Bible's commands found at Matthew 22:21 and Romans 13:1.

Certainly, we should be keen to give spiritual help to all, including asylum seekers. However, it is good for elders to bear the above comments in mind when asked to provide support for a person's claim of asylum. If a publisher approaches an elder because he has been asked to provide a testimonial, the elder does well to pass on these cautions.—Compare Matthew 10:16.

We hope these comments prove helpful to you. We take this occasion to send you our warm Christian love and greetings.

Your brothers,

Watch Tower B. & J. Society
OF BRITAIN