

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses

2821 Route 22, Patterson, NY 12563-2237 Phone: (845) 306-1100



January 7, 2006

TO ALL CONGREGATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Re: Disaster relief and displaced individuals

Dear Brothers:

This is to provide an update on the relief situation and further assistance needed to care for individuals displaced by the recent natural disasters in the southeastern United States. As Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma devastated New Orleans, the Gulf Coast region, and south Florida, many of our brothers and sisters had to flee their homes to safer locations. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with all who have had to endure such a stressful and difficult situation. It is truly a time to rely heavily on Jehovah for strength and to trust that he will continue to care for our daily needs. (Matt. 6:11, 33; Phil. 4:13) In addition, we have the opportunity to demonstrate the genuineness of our Christian love by assisting our brothers and sisters who are in need.

Many of you are exerting yourselves vigorously to care for the spiritual and material needs of our brothers. For the first time in the history of the United States branch, four relief committees are operating simultaneously in the following locations: Fort Lauderdale, Florida; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Long Beach, Mississippi; and Houston, Texas. Thus far, 22 main organizational hubs have been established to receive supplies and organize volunteer workers. To date, a total of 6,303 homes have been assessed, and repairs have been made on more than 1,000 of them. At present, 97 Kingdom Halls are in need of repair. Currently there are 3,300 volunteers in the field, with the goal of having 10,000 volunteers in the coming weeks.

The households of our brothers and sisters displaced by the hurricanes include approximately 27,000 individuals, 6,000 of whom were residents of New Orleans. One of our principal goals has been to resettle these families. How encouraging it is to see hundreds of these displaced brothers and sisters working closely with the relief committees and sharing in helping others! When we take care of deserving ones to the extent that our circumstances allow, both the giver and the receiver benefit. (Acts 20:35) Many have already traveled or will yet travel hundreds of miles to the disaster areas to help. We take this opportunity to thank the many volunteers who are demonstrating such a self-sacrificing spirit.

Congregation elders and relief workers are continuing to assist disaster victims with obtaining government and insurance assistance where available. While this process can be overwhelming, resources are often available to help those who qualify. In order for all things to take place "decently and by arrangement," it is necessary to locate all the brothers and sisters who were displaced by the storms. (1 Cor. 14:40) Therefore, we are asking all those who had to flee the disaster area to immediately approach the elders in the congregation where they are currently attending. They should give the elders their current address and telephone number where they can be reached. The elders will then promptly convey this information to the relief committee in Houston, Texas.

Many have offered their homes to those who are displaced and have provided assistance until a more permanent arrangement can be secured. (Mark 10:29, 30) It warms our hearts to see such expressions of love in this time of distress. May Jehovah continue to bless the fine efforts that all the volunteers have put forth to care for the needs of our displaced brothers and sisters. Please support those who are directly involved in assisting with the relief efforts, as they too are in need of encouragement. Such efforts are an integral part of true Christianity. During this critical time in human history, how appropriate the words of our 2005 yeartext have been:

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January 7, 2006

Page 2

“My help is from Jehovah.” (Ps. 121:2) We pray that Jehovah will continue to bless the whole-souled efforts you display in caring for the spiritual and material needs of one another.

Your brothers,
*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*

cc: Traveling overseers

PS to the Congregation Service Committee:

This letter should be read to the congregation at the first meeting after its receipt. It should be read again at the following meeting, whether it is the *Watchtower* Study or the Service Meeting. There is no need for it to be posted on the information board.

Disasters of this magnitude disrupt the theocratic schedules of everyone in their path. Congregation elders are doing much to assist our brothers and sisters to resume their daily spiritual activities, including personal and family Bible study, congregation meetings, and field service. (Ezek. 34:11, 12) If any baptized or unbaptized publishers and their minor children who evacuated the Gulf Coast area are now associating with your congregation, you should obtain the following information: 1) their full legal names, 2) the name of the congregation with which they were formerly associated and the names of any of the elders there, 3) their spiritual and physical needs, and 4) comments on any plans that they may have to either return to their homes in the affected areas or to permanently relocate. After collecting this information, please contact the relief committee in Houston, Texas. You may telephone them at **(713) 334-1914** or send them an E-mail message at the following address: **houston@jwrelief2005.org**.

The elders in some congregations have asked how to handle field service reports that have been submitted by displaced publishers from the Gulf Coast. If a displaced publisher will be with your congregation for an indefinite period of time, the congregation secretary should start a *Congregation's Publisher Record* (S-21) card for him, marking the top of the card “Temporary.” In due course, the relief committee may be able to supply you with the names of elders in the publisher's former congregation, along with information on how to contact them. The elders of the displaced publisher's former congregation may be able to locate the original *Congregation's Publisher Record* card and forward it to you so that it can be brought up to date. At the same time, they may be able to provide you with a letter of introduction, informing you about the publisher's spiritual condition and privileges along with any recommendations.

If the congregation secretary has not done so already, he should include the field service activity of all such displaced publishers in the congregation's monthly field service report, following the direction provided in the January 15, 1998, letter to all bodies of elders in the United States regarding late reports.

No doubt your assistance in this important matter will help provide spiritual stability to a number of brothers and sisters who have suffered losses in many ways during these turbulent times. In order to cope with the devastating effects of these disasters, they will need to continue receiving regular shepherding visits from you. Elders will also need to support each other during these trying times. We appreciate your efforts to “shepherd the flock of God in your care,” and may Jehovah continue to bless your labors of love.—1 Pet. 5:2.

PS to the circuit overseer:

As soon as possible, please contact all the presiding overseers in your circuit to inquire whether they have followed through as directed above or are in need of further assistance. We appreciate your help in caring for this urgent matter.