

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses

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

June 7, 2006

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Pornography

Dear Brothers:

You are to be commended for your diligence in caring for many family and congregation responsibilities. Be assured of Jehovah's blessing as he observes your efforts to strengthen and protect those he has entrusted to your care.—John 21:15-17.

The subject of pornography was considered at the 2006 Kingdom Ministry School. We are now providing additional guidelines to help you care for matters of this nature.

Helping others break free from pornography: When the body of elders becomes aware that a brother has deliberately viewed pornography, two elders should be assigned to share with him Scriptural counsel. (Gal. 6:1) Timely information should also be considered from articles such as: "The Bible's Viewpoint: Is It Possible To Overcome Bad Habits?" in the April 8, 2004, *Awake!*; "The Harm Pornography Causes" in the July 22, 2003, *Awake!*; "The Bible's Viewpoint: Pornography—Is It Just a Harmless Diversion?" in the July 8, 2002, *Awake!*; and the series of articles "Internet Pornography—What Harm Can It Do?" in the June 8, 2000, *Awake!*

After the initial visit, one of the assigned elders should periodically check with the brother to see how he is doing, giving him any further encouragement that may be necessary. Since he has been involved in unclean conduct, it is important that he get the help he needs to overcome this weakness and serve Jehovah with a clean conscience once again.

Does he still qualify to serve?: If an appointed servant inadvertently comes across a pornographic image while on the Internet, or in some other way, and he reports this to an elder, such matters can generally be handled according to the direction in the Kingdom Ministry School textbook, page 97, paragraphs 4-7. There is no need to evaluate his qualifications.

However, if an elder or ministerial servant deliberately views pornography, the body of elders will need to give the matter careful and prayerful consideration. First, two elders should be assigned to meet with the brother and obtain the answers to the following questions: Did he voluntarily come forward? Did it consist of a few brief incidents, or was it a consistent practice spanning many months, or years? What type of pornography was he looking at? Was it accompanied by masturbation? When was his last instance of viewing pornography? If married, and his wife is aware of his problem, what effect has this had on her? Who else is aware of the problem? Does he still have their respect? Has he demonstrated a sincere desire to desist from viewing pornography? Does his own conscience allow him to continue serving in an appointed position?

Next, the body of elders should determine whether the brother still qualifies to serve. He may continue to serve if his involvement consisted of (1) a few brief viewings, (2) he displays a heartfelt desire to desist from looking at pornography in any form, (3) the elders are *convinced* that he will refrain from viewing pornography, (4) he continues to retain the respect of others who are aware of what he did, and (5) his conscience allows him to do so. Nonetheless, if the

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body of elders is unsure whether a brother continues to qualify, they should discuss the matter with the circuit overseer at his next visit, if the visit is only a few weeks away. Otherwise, they should write the branch office for direction, providing answers to the above questions, along with their recommendation.

On the other hand, if (1) he has developed a pattern of seeking pornography, or (2) on several occasions has viewed abhorrent forms of pornography that are sexually degrading, which might include child pornography, sadistic torture, bondage, gang rape, or the brutalizing of women, this would disqualify him from serving. (Titus 2:11-14; w89 6/1 pp. 15-16 pars. 2-5) Under these circumstances, the elders should recommend his removal at their earliest convenience.

When writing, the elders should clearly explain to the branch office the reasons for their recommendation. They should state whether he is in agreement with the decision. If he is not, they should ask him to put his reasons in writing and include his letter with their correspondence.

When viewing pornography constitutes “gross uncleanness”: The Kingdom Ministry School presentation “Use Discernment When Dealing With Cases of Wrongdoing” cited two examples of publishers viewing pornography. In the first example, “a publisher confesses that on several occasions he has viewed so-called ‘soft-core’ pornography on the Internet. On a few occasions, he even masturbated while viewing the pornography. He is ashamed of himself, confesses to an elder, and is determined not to repeat this conduct.” Commenting on this, the presentation went on to say: “This type of uncleanness would require sound Scriptural counsel, and, perhaps, follow-up help from the elders, but no judicial action would be warranted.”

Thus, when the elders learn that a publisher has made a practice of viewing soft-core pornography, sound Scriptural counsel and encouragement should be given. Generally speaking, one persisting in this practice would not be viewed as exemplary and thus would not qualify for special privileges in the congregation. However, at this stage he would not be dealt with judicially unless he is also promoting it or encouraging others to view it with him. This would give evidence of a brazen attitude characterizing loose conduct.

In the second example, a publisher for “many years secretly viewed abhorrent pornography that is sexually degrading.” This would include child pornography, sadistic torture, bondage, gang rape, or the brutalizing of women. In such cases, “a judicial committee would be formed because of the gross uncleanness involved.”

Therefore, viewing pornography escalates to gross uncleanness if the type of pornography viewed was abhorrent or sexually degrading in nature, as described in the second example above. An additional factor to be considered would be if it were a practice for “many years.” As a general principle, when these elements are present, a judicial committee would need to handle the matter. At Ephesians 4:19 Paul stated: “Having come to be past all moral sense, they gave themselves over to loose conduct to work uncleanness of every sort with greediness.” (Gal. 5:19; w83 3/15 p. 31 par. 3) When an individual has ‘given himself over’ to this unclean practice as evidenced by his repeatedly viewing abhorrent pornography, the matter has escalated to gross uncleanness and needs to be handled judicially.—w06 7/15 pp. 29-31.

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Further, viewing hetero-oral or anal sex (on a video or computer), while certainly unclean, is not to be considered “gross” or “judicial,” though it may lead to removal as an elder, a ministerial servant, or a pioneer depending on the frequency and when it last occurred. With regard to viewing oral (or anal) sex of a homosexual or group nature, this is more serious. However, it would still not be considered uncleanness of a “gross” nature meriting judicial action, but likely would result in removal from an appointed privilege of service.

The direction regarding “gross uncleanness” is not retroactive. So there is no need for elders to reopen cases that have already been handled in the past prior to the Kingdom Ministry School. Additionally, if following the Kingdom Ministry School the elders judicially reprovved a brother for viewing forms of pornography that may not have merited judicial action, the decision should stand. However, they should make arrangements to help the brother make a spiritual recovery. It may be that judicial restrictions could soon be removed. As he makes spiritual progress, the elders may decide that he can be given privileges in the congregation. After a time, he may also qualify to serve once again in an appointed position. If you have questions regarding the handling of these matters, please write with full details and we will be happy to assist you.

You can be confident of the organization’s full support as you tenderly care for the sheep. (1 Pet. 2:25) May Jehovah bless your faithful work.

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

cc: Traveling overseers

PS to the presiding overseer:

You should schedule a meeting of the elders within the next few weeks to read and discuss this letter. Thereafter, this letter should be retained in the congregation’s permanent file of policy letters.

