



Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses

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July 6, 2006

TO ALL CONGREGATIONS

Re: Disaster preparedness

Dear Brothers:

As part of the sign of the last days, Jesus indicated that the number of disasters would increase. (Matt. 24:7, 8; Luke 21:11) It is therefore the course of wisdom for each congregation to plan accordingly. (Prov. 21:5; *km* 2/97 Question Box) In this way, if a disaster strikes in your area, the needs of the brothers will be cared for and neighborly love may be shown. (Luke 10:27b; Gal. 6:10) The following instructions will help you in this regard.

Prepare in advance: The congregation secretary is responsible to maintain an up-to-date list containing the home address and telephone numbers (including cell-phone numbers) for each publisher. If your home address or telephone numbers change, please promptly inform the secretary. He will work closely with the Congregation Book Study overseers in making sure that the contact information for the book study groups is current. A copy of this list will be given to each elder. If a ministerial servant serves as a book study servant, he also may receive a copy. This list is to be kept confidential.

The body of elders should determine whether the congregation is in a disaster-prone area. If so, they will request that each publisher provides their Congregation Book Study overseer with a telephone contact for someone who knows the publisher but lives out of the vicinity. The book study overseer will give this information to the secretary, who will maintain this secondary list and distribute a copy to each elder. The reason for this is that many times it is possible to call an emergency contact outside the disaster area. This will allow the book study overseer and the publisher to make contact following a disaster.

The body of elders in disaster-prone areas should also develop a contingency plan. The plan should contain the following: 1) a basic checklist of emergency supplies that each household is to have on hand; 2) evacuation arrangements, which should include the elderly, the infirm, and any with special needs; 3) instructions regarding how the book study overseers will communicate with one another and with the publishers before, during, and after a disaster; and 4) what precautions will be taken to preserve the congregation's records. Other instructions as required by the circumstances of the local area may also be included. The plan should be kept simple and practical. A copy of the plan along with any publisher listings will be sent to the circuit overseer. As necessary, the elders may decide to use a local needs part on the Service Meeting to discuss the contingency plan. In this way, all members of the congregation will be aware of what local arrangements have been established.

Disaster warnings: When the public is advised in advance of danger, each book study overseer should check on the welfare of the publishers assigned to his group and be sure that they are prepared. He should provide a brief report to the presiding overseer, who is responsible to coordinate the congregation's preparation and disaster response. This is the general procedure

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that should be followed in any type of disaster. How much is done will obviously depend on the amount of time that is available and the local circumstances.

In the event of a hurricane watch, each book study overseer will contact the members of his group. He is to do the following: 1) verify the accuracy of telephone numbers and contact information, 2) make sure that the publishers have basic supplies for three to five days, and 3) if evacuation becomes necessary, confirm how the publishers will evacuate the area. (Where each family will evacuate to is a personal decision, but the book study overseer should get the name, address, and telephone number of where they will be staying, if that becomes necessary.) If possible, a personal visit by the book study overseer would allow him to determine whether any special help is needed, such as preparing the home and providing comforting spiritual thoughts and prayer.

In the event that a hurricane warning is posted and the local governmental authority has issued an evacuation order that affects the congregation territory, the arrangements that the congregation has made for evacuation should be implemented. As necessary, the secretary should see that the congregation's records are kept in a safe, dry place. The presiding overseer should contact the Kingdom Hall Operating Committee to make sure that the Kingdom Hall is prepared for weathering the storm. Each book study overseer should once again contact everyone in his book study group and determine whether they need assistance to prepare their home for the disaster or to secure sufficient supplies for three to five days. At this time he will also verify the contact information. Thereafter, he will report his findings to the presiding overseer, including any updated contact information. The presiding overseer will then alert the circuit overseer about the congregation's preparedness for the potential disaster.

If a disaster strikes in your area: Christian qualities should readily come to the fore, moving you to care for your family's immediate physical needs. (John 13:35) Help any others who are in distress. As soon as possible, try to establish contact with your book study overseer or, if he is not available, another congregation elder. Explain your circumstances and present location.

As a first step to disaster relief, the book study overseer will attempt to contact each family in his group, preferably in person. He should assess the damage and determine what help is needed. Afterward, he should inform the presiding overseer of the situation of each household. If someone has been injured, the book study overseer should provide whatever assistance he can under the circumstances. Perhaps he can help them get to a medical facility for treatment, or there may be a brother or sister in the area with some medical background who can offer some emergency care. The presiding overseer and book study overseers will cooperate together to care for the publishers and to be sure that they have the food, clothing, shelter, and household supplies that are needed.

On behalf of the body of elders, the presiding overseer will take the lead in communicating with the circuit overseer. He will apprise the circuit overseer of any injuries, any damage to the Kingdom Hall or to the homes of the brothers, and any special needs. He will also coordinate the efforts of the local elders to give spiritual and emotional support to the congregation. The elders should arrange to resume congregation meetings as soon as possible.

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The circuit overseer will maintain good communication with the presiding overseers so as to determine what is being done to help the brothers. He is responsible to telephone the branch office with a report of the local situation and to convey any special instructions back to the elders.

The branch office will coordinate any large-scale relief measures that may be needed. After a proper assessment has been made, the branch office will determine whether a relief committee should be formed. If one is formed, the responsible brothers will be notified.—*ju* p. 310.

You can see from the foregoing that the book study overseers, the presiding overseer, the circuit overseer, and the branch office are instrumental in caring for the safety and welfare of the congregation. All of us should cooperate fully with them. This will contribute toward good communication and will result in needed assistance being rendered as soon as possible.

If a disaster strikes elsewhere: Never underestimate the good effect your prayers can have on the brothers in an area that has been struck by a disaster. (2 Cor. 1:8-11) You may also feel motivated to express your concern through a donation. In this connection, the November 2005 issue of *Our Kingdom Ministry*, page 3, stated: “It is recommended that donations for humanitarian and relief assistance be made to the worldwide work. This fund is used for relief efforts as well as for advancing the spiritual needs of the Christian brotherhood. If, for some reason, a person wishes to make a relief donation separate from contributions to the worldwide work, it will still be accepted and used wherever there is a need for relief assistance. However, it would be appreciated if such donations are made without restrictions as to where and how the funds may be used.”

Some may be interested in sending materials or supplies to the disaster area. Please do not do so unless this has been specifically requested by the brothers in charge. This will ensure an orderly relief effort and the proper distribution of goods. It would also be appreciated if you did not telephone the branch office unnecessarily, as this can tie up telephone lines that are needed to handle incoming calls from the disaster area. Depending on the needs and circumstances, the branch office will initiate communication with the congregations regarding what relief assistance is needed.

In the event of a disaster, you can be assured of Jehovah’s support and comfort. Let us put our full trust in him as our refuge. (Ps. 62:8) Please be assured of our continued prayers and our warm Christian love and greetings.

Your brothers,
Christian Congregation
of Jehovah’s Witnesses

cc: Traveling overseers

PS to body of elders:

The February 1997 *Our Kingdom Ministry* Question Box makes this point: “The elders and ministerial servants play a crucial role in providing relief assistance. If advance warning of a

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disaster is given, as with some major storms, these brothers should ensure that everyone is in a safe location, and if time permits, should obtain and distribute supplies that may be needed.”

Experience shows that when the elders prepare far enough in advance, all the brothers and sisters can be assisted to find lodging that is suitable and far enough away from any immediate danger. In this way, for example in the case of a hurricane, when the storm passes, the brothers will have basic needs, such as water, food, bathing facilities, and appropriate places to sleep. Please note that Kingdom Halls should only be used as a last resort, since they do not offer such needs. Also, if a number of people are using the Kingdom Hall as a place to live, this makes it very difficult to use the building for its intended purpose. Of course, if a situation becomes desperate and time runs out to find such accommodations, we would never want to allow our brothers to be put in harm’s way by refusing them protection at the Kingdom Hall. Still, any arrangements of this nature should be for last-minute emergency situations only, and the brothers should be relocated as quickly as possible to accommodations better suited to care for their needs.

This letter should be read to the congregation at the first Service Meeting after its receipt. The elders should then meet to consider this postscript. Thereafter, the letter should be retained in the congregation’s permanent file of policy letters. *It should not be posted on the information board.* In disaster-prone areas, these instructions should be reviewed each year. For example, in areas prone to hurricanes, this should be done each year prior to the start of the hurricane season.

PS to circuit overseer:

We appreciate all that you do in behalf of the congregations in your circuit and especially your efforts to care for the brothers in times of disaster. Since good communication within the first few hours of a disaster is critical to effective disaster response, you should make a preliminary report to the branch office within 24 hours following a disaster. Additionally, maintain good communication with the branch office as disaster relief continues to be administered.

If you serve in a disaster-prone area, it may be helpful for you to be aware of those in your circuit who have some medical background, such as doctors, nurses, paramedics, and emergency medical technicians. In the event of a major disaster, these brothers and sisters can be called upon to provide assistance if needed.

In certain areas, such as those prone to earthquakes, hurricanes, and tornadoes, you will be given a copy of the current telephone numbers and contact information for each publisher at the time of your visit. The elders will also share their contingency plan with you. If you do not receive such, please request this from the elders. As you can appreciate, having good communication with each presiding overseer in your circuit is imperative. Therefore, you may also wish to provide each presiding overseer with contact information of someone who lives outside the area so that you may be contacted in the event communication is interrupted. Please be assured of our warm love and affection along with our appreciation for the fine example you set.—Phil. 2:29.