

# Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



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April 1, 2007

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Re: Undocumented aliens

Dear Brothers:

Each year many immigrants learn the truth through our preaching and disciple-making work. (1 Tim. 2:3, 4) Some of these have either entered the country illegally or have not yet obtained legal status in this country. Just as the apostle Paul rejoiced when the runaway slave Onesimus became a baptized Christian, so we rejoice to see undocumented aliens make spiritual progress, become unbaptized publishers, and eventually get baptized and share in all features of the field ministry. (Philem. 8-19) Because of the uncertain legal status of undocumented aliens, questions often arise as to how the congregation should view them. We trust that the following information, which replaces our letter dated June 15, 1988, to all traveling overseers and bodies of elders, will be helpful in this regard. This letter should be retained in the congregation's permanent file of policy letters, and the June 15, 1988, letter should be destroyed.

The Bible directs Christians to be law-abiding and honest. (Mark 12:17; Heb. 13:18) One who is an undocumented alien may ask the elders for counsel on what he might do to meet the legal requirements for residency in the country in which he now lives. He should be encouraged first to consult Scriptural references, such as those at Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1, and 1 Peter 2:13-17. He can also be directed to do research in the *Watch Tower Publications Index* or the computer program *Watchtower Library* (CD-ROM) to understand further the Bible principles involved. Thereafter, the individual must determine how to apply the Bible's counsel so as to have a good conscience before God and men. Considering the complexity in obtaining legal status, as a practical matter the individual may also decide that he needs to obtain reliable legal assistance from an attorney who specializes in these matters.

All Christians are obligated to obey the laws of the land in which they live and thus give "the superior authorities" their relative subjection. (Rom. 13:1) For this reason, an undocumented alien would not qualify for appointment as an elder, a ministerial servant, or a regular or auxiliary pioneer until he has obtained legal residency or taken genuine steps to procure such. (1 Tim. 3:7, 10) He may not be assigned to oversee any congregation responsibility. Additionally, although he may assist with the cleaning and construction of his own Kingdom Hall and with the cleaning of his own Assembly Hall, he may not work with the Regional Building Committee on other Kingdom Halls or Assembly Halls. However, he may comment at congregation meetings and give student talks on the Theocratic Ministry School. If he is exemplary in every other way he may be granted certain additional privileges, just as Paul used Onesimus to a certain extent. (Col. 4:7-9; Philem. 13) For example, he may be used for demonstrations and other such parts on the Service Meeting. He may be allowed to assist with certain duties in the congregation, such as passing microphones and helping with literature or magazines. If he qualifies in every other respect, a Congregation Book Study could be held in his home, and he may be granted use of the Kingdom Hall for a wedding if he meets the Scriptural and civil marriage requirements.

When an undocumented alien in good faith requests or obtains permission from the proper governmental authority to be in the country, his situation changes, since he is thereby demonstrating more fully his subjection to "the superior authorities." (Rom. 13:1) (Currently in the United States, the Citizenship and Immigration Service [CIS], which is part of the Department of Homeland Security [DHS], handles such requests. While other governmental agencies, both federal and local, may have dealings with undocumented aliens, permission to be in the country has to be sought from the CIS.) He is no

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longer viewed as a fugitive because “Caesar” would be apprised of his name, residence, and any other information deemed necessary. Since he has done what is legally required in filing for residency and the CIS knows about him, he may enjoy privileges of service even if the CIS takes an extended period of time to process his application. Thus, if he is otherwise spiritually qualified, he may serve as an elder, a ministerial servant, or a regular or auxiliary pioneer. Where the person may not have worked out all the details regarding his work status, clarification will be cared for when the CIS processes his application. In the meantime, if he works without resorting to fraudulent means, then, as stated above, he may be considered for privileges of service if he meets the qualifications in every other way. Of course, when recommendations are submitted for such ones to be appointed to these privileges, their situation should be fully explained in correspondence to the branch office.

How can the elders determine whether a publisher has petitioned or is actually petitioning for legal residency? The document(s) he should be able to show include any of the following six: (1) a certificate of naturalization, birth certificate, or U.S. passport showing that he has U.S. citizenship, (2) a *Notice of Action* issued by the CIS indicating approval to work, (3) a *Permanent Resident Card* (“green card”), (4) a stamp in his passport that states he has lawful admission for permanent residence until a certain date, (5) a *Notice of Action* that is marked “Welcome Notice,” or (6) any *Notice of Action* indicating that the publisher is listed as “beneficiary” or “petitioner” on the pending immigration application. Elders may inquire of the branch office if further explanation or direction is needed.

If a publisher makes a request for residency in a country but this is later denied and he remains in the country illegally, he would no longer qualify for privileges of service appointed by the branch office that he may have received in the interim. It is also not honest for a publisher to use falsified documents of any kind or to provide inaccurate information when applying to a government agency for a certain status or privilege. If the government becomes aware of this, the individual may face some sort of sanction on a charge of “fraud” and the congregation may come into disrepute. In such cases, further action on the part of the congregation may be necessary. Before proceeding, elders should write the branch office for direction. Nonetheless, if one applied for or obtained legal status through such means before coming to an accurate knowledge of Scriptural principles, the elders would not make this an issue.—1 Cor. 6:11.

Keep in mind that God’s Word does not charge the Christian congregation, through its overseers, with the obligation to become acquainted with all the details of civil and criminal law so as to enforce these. (Philem. 8-22; w77 pp. 191-2) Normally, the elders *would not take the initiative* to investigate such details unless these become a cause for concern. Nor should the elders, as such, attempt to provide publishers with legal advice or assistance regarding immigration matters, since this is a personal legal matter. It is best for a reputable attorney that specializes in immigration law to answer questions on how an undocumented alien can remain in the country.

May Jehovah bless your efforts to apply this theocratic direction. We take this opportunity to thank you for your self-sacrificing efforts on behalf of the congregation.

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

cc: Traveling overseers