

# Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



Hse. No. J348/4 - Tema Beach Road - Nungua, Accra  
P. O. Box GP 760, Accra, Ghana Tel. No.: (0302) 712456-8; 7010110 Fax: (0302) 712454

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TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Dear Brothers:

## **Re: Use of Kingdom Hall for Civil Weddings and Marriage Talks**

Recently, adjustments were made regarding the use of Kingdom Halls when conducting Christian weddings. At this time we are happy to provide some principles and guidelines that can be followed when allowing the Kingdom Hall to be used for weddings and marriage talks.

**Use of the Kingdom Hall for a Bible Talk:** When a customary or civil marriage has been performed, couples who qualify and are permitted by the Congregation Service Committee, may use the Kingdom Hall for a Bible talk on marriage. Please note that *any Kingdom Hall* in Ghana may be used for such a Bible talk in line with the directions given in the April 2006 *Our Kingdom Ministry*. If the couple have a specific elder in mind, they can personally ask him to deliver the talk. If the couple have no preference, the body of elders can select one of their number to care for this assignment.

**Use of the Kingdom Hall for Civil Marriage:** At times a couple may desire to perform a *civil marriage* in the Kingdom Hall. **It is important to note that only Kingdom Halls that are gazetted for registering civil marriages can be used for this purpose. In addition to gazetting the hall, the elder who will oversee the legal ceremony should also be gazetted as a marriage officer for that particular Kingdom Hall.** It has come to our attention that some elders who have not been gazetted by the state as marriage officers are officiating at marriages in registered Kingdom Halls. This should be discontinued immediately. Please note from the above information, that while any elder may be asked to give the marriage talk at a civil marriage, only elders who are registered as marriage officers are authorized to sign the marriage certificate.

As you are aware, **the Kingdom Hall cannot be used to conduct a civil marriage ceremony for anyone who has already performed a customary marriage.** Therefore, when request is made to use the Kingdom Hall for a civil wedding, the elders would want to make sure that the couple would not be performing a customary marriage beforehand. When both families of the couple agree that there will be no customary marriage and this is made clear to all others concerned, then the Kingdom Hall can be used for a civil wedding ceremony, since no other type of marriage would have taken place.

**Marriage Talk Outline “Honorable Marriage in God’s Sight” (S-41):** Recently adjusted marriage talk outlines were sent to all congregations that could be used when a couple are already married and desire to have a Bible talk on marriage at the Kingdom Hall. It has now been determined that there is no need for two outlines. All elders presenting a marriage talk should use the outline, **“Honorable Marriage in God’s Sight” (S-41).** We are enclosing two copies of the S-41 for your file. Please destroy any other copies of the outline that were recently sent as S-41a and S-41b. If the talk is being given for a couple who have already performed a customary or civil marriage, the speaker should begin his talk by making the following announcement: **“*This couple are already man and wife by virtue of their customary or civil marriage (whichever marriage they have performed, at home or at the marriage registrar’s office). The following Bible talk therefore, is not a marriage ceremony but a Bible talk which will outline the Scriptural principles that highlight the sacredness of Christian marriage.*”**

In addition, if the couple wish to recite vows during the Bible talk, this should be done in accordance with the instruction found in the October 15, 2006, *Watchtower*, page 20, paragraphs 9 and 10. If the marriage vows have already been said in an earlier marriage ceremony then the vow should be said in the “**past tense**” as follows:

**“I \_\_\_\_\_ have taken you \_\_\_\_\_ to be my wedded wife, to love and to cherish in accordance with the divine law as set forth in the Holy Scriptures for Christian husbands, for as long as we both shall live together on earth according to God’s marital arrangement.”**

**“I \_\_\_\_\_ have taken you \_\_\_\_\_ to be my wedded husband, to love and to cherish and deeply respect, in accordance with the divine law as set forth in the Holy Scriptures for Christian wives, for as long as we both shall live together on earth according to God’s marital arrangement.”**

**Registering the Kingdom Hall:** Bodies of elders who want to register their Kingdom Halls for celebrating civil marriages should note the following:

(1) An application should be made to the Registrar General’s office, Regional Co-ordinating Council, or to the appropriate authority in the district for permission to register civil marriages in their Kingdom Hall. Once the authorities have inspected the hall and are satisfied with arrangements, the Kingdom Hall will be published in the government gazette showing legal approval to use the hall for civil marriages.

(2) An application should be made to the same authority for the appointment of **marriage officers**. Names of selected, qualified elders should be provided to the authorities. These will be trained by the government agency and their names will be gazetted to show that any one of them can officiate at a civil marriage. It is only such gazetted persons who can sign the marriage certificate as ministers. Elders registered as marriage officers are only authorized to officiate at the Kingdom Hall they are registered with. Elders volunteering for this should be willing and able to take the time needed to be present during the actual wedding that they are officiating.

At this time we are requesting that any body of elders that have a Kingdom Hall that is currently being used to register civil marriages should write to the branch office providing the following: (a) Is the Kingdom Hall gazetted for civil marriages? If yes, please enclose a copy of the publication. (b) Are any brothers serving as marriage officers for the Kingdom Hall? If yes, are they gazetted? Please send us a copy of the publication. If your Kingdom Hall is gazetted for civil marriages but brothers who supervise the marriage ceremony are not, then please immediately contact the authorities to have them gazetted.

Please note that in the future congregations that want to use their Kingdom Hall for civil marriages should arrange to have the Kingdom Hall and names of the selected elders who will serve as marriage officers gazetted first. Thereafter, they should send copies of the published gazette to the branch office for our records. In the meantime, we look forward to receiving the requested information from congregations whose Kingdom Halls are currently used to celebrate civil marriages.

**Arrangements That Are Dignified and Respectful:** The entire body of elders should be concerned about how the Kingdom Hall is used in connection with wedding arrangements. It should be remembered that if such arrangements conducted at the Kingdom Hall demonstrate a spirit of immodesty, disrespect, or a “showy display of ones means of life,” it would not reflect well on the Christian congregation. In one Kingdom Hall for example, the year text was removed and a large banner was hung on the platform bearing the names of the bride and groom. We must keep in mind that the Kingdom Hall is a place of worship where God’s people come to be instructed. Therefore, any arrangements made should be dignified, respectful and focus on the spiritual aspects of the marriage.

It is reasonable to expect that any arrangements for a Kingdom Hall wedding or Bible talk on marriage should start on time and close on time, so that the hall could be used for other theocratic activities during the day. It has been noticed that some have adopted the worldly standard that the bride and groom arrive late for their wedding. This '*intentional lateness*' has now also been observed even when a simple Bible talk on marriage is to be delivered at the hall. However, such intentional lateness would be inconsiderate and show a lack of love. Therefore, whether the hall is used for a wedding ceremony or a Bible talk on marriage, arrangements should reflect good judgment and Christian balance.

Couples wishing to use the hall should understand and agree with the guidelines outlined for Christian weddings in *The Watchtower* of October 15, 2006. On page 30, paragraph 1, it suggests that the elders ask the couple "whether the attire they have in mind would be modest enough to wear at a Christian meeting." The *Watchtower* adds: "Granted, the style of clothing might be different from regular meeting attire, and what is worn for the wedding may reflect local custom, but the level of modesty should accord with dignified Christian standards." This means that if a wedding is to take place, the clothing worn, not only by the bride and groom, but also by anyone else connected with the proceedings, should be in accord with dignified Christian standards of modesty and good taste.

What about when a Bible talk on marriage is given after the couple have already performed a customary or civil marriage elsewhere? While we do not want to make many rules as to what people should wear or how they should behave, it would be good to keep in mind the principle mentioned in the April 2006 *Our Kingdom Ministry*, page 4, paragraph 6. There it states: "**Arrangements connected with the talk should not create the impression that a second wedding is taking place.**" How can this principle be applied? Help the couple to realize that the Scriptural talk should be seen as a spiritual highlight to their marriage. The couple should be encouraged to come with their Bibles, ready to listen carefully to the fine counsel that will be given. They should dress and act in a way that would be appropriate for the occasion. Since the marriage ceremony has already taken place, whether according to custom, or at the office of the marriage registrar, it would not be in order for the couple to conduct themselves as if they were re-enacting or performing a civil wedding ceremony. This would only confuse those in attendance who know that the couple have already performed their marriage ceremony. While it is impossible to cover every situation, we are confident that the elders can apply the above principles in a balanced and reasonable manner.

Weddings are indeed special occasions for God's people. As elders, let us take the lead in making arrangements that are dignified, modest, respectful, and spiritual in nature. By doing this, we will be keeping the spiritual significance of marriage high in the minds of the brothers.

Please accept our warm Christian love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation  
of Jehovah's Witnesses*