



WATCH TOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF BRITAIN

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June 5, 2008

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Dear Brothers:

Our Christian meetings are occasions for great joy and bring many spiritual benefits. At times, though, severe illness or other factors may isolate a fellow worshipper so that he or she cannot attend a meeting with us in person. In such circumstances, some have found ways in which they can still draw encouragement from hearing the meetings. As indicated in *The Watchtower* of June 1, 1987, pages 10-11, paragraph 12, links over a telephone network are an acceptable way of transmitting meetings to infirm or isolated individuals. As technology advances, additional options have become available for transmitting meetings to isolated individuals. We would like to provide guidelines on the use of such provisions.

Telephone Conferencing

Some companies offer a service that uses Voiceover Internet Protocol (VoIP) as a means of providing a conference call hub to which isolated individuals can dial to listen to a meeting. The congregation connects the meeting programme via a telephone line to the teleconferencing centre. Then approved listeners are able to phone in to a designated number, enter a pin number provided to them individually by the body of elders, and then listen to the programme. There is no need to publicize the special telephone number and pin number(s). These should be supplied as needed on a case-by-case basis and should remain confidential. Such a teleconferencing arrangement requires no Internet connection at the Kingdom Hall. The congregation is charged a monthly rate for the service. Some have reported that because such a system reduces the need for multiple phone lines and the associated costs, it is simpler and more economical. In each case, the elders would have to evaluate whether telephone conferencing is truly cost effective for their congregation. The Governing Body does not endorse any commercial enterprise or company. What congregations opt to do with regard to making the meetings available on a telephone tie-line is for the body of elders to decide in harmony with Bible principles.

Some tie-lines allow for two-way conversation, making it possible for those listening in to offer comments. Yet brothers conducting meetings should not allow those tied-in to monopolize the commenting privileges to the exclusion of many who are actually present at the Kingdom Hall. Those commenting by phone should ensure that private conversation or sounds of other activities are not also transmitted over the congregation's sound system. Attendants should strive to record accurately the number of those listening to the meeting and should count those on the tie-line as meeting attenders.

Video Tie-ins

Some have asked about placing video cameras in the auditorium of the Kingdom Hall for the purpose of making meetings accessible via the Internet. A video tie-in over the Internet is neither a wise idea nor the best use of dedicated funds. Providing simultaneous video transmission of our meetings might suggest that people could more easily watch the programme from their homes and thereby hinder actual meeting attendance. It could also increase the potential that the information, available to all on the worldwide web, could be

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misused. Moreover, knowledge that their every word and action at meetings could be captured on camera and viewed worldwide could also stifle free expression and participation in our meetings, particularly by those who are newer or more timid. Therefore, the telephone connection seems to be sufficient.

Mobile Telephones

Mobile telephones should not be used to transmit the meetings. As stated, simultaneous transmission of the meetings is allowed by the telephone-tie line to the Kingdom Hall for those who have been approved by the elders. This arrangement should not be circumvented by means of a connection to an individual mobile phone. It is understood that some may need to carry mobile telephones in case of pending or potential emergencies. Yet appreciation for the sacredness of our meetings should move us to set mobile phones and two-way pagers so that they do not distract us or others attending the meeting. If an urgent matter requires our immediate attention, we should attend to it outside the place of meeting.—*Our Kingdom Ministry*, July 2002, page 3, “Question Box.”

In the Bible, gatherings for pure worship are seen as personal association with fellow believers. Such association required travel to a designated place. Jehovah promised his ancient servants that no one would pillage their land while they were physically separated from their property in order to attend the festivals. (Ex. 34:24) Paul spoke of times when “the whole congregation comes together to one place.” (1 Cor. 14:23) James describes Christian gatherings held in places into which people enter, where others observe them, and where they take seats or remain standing. (Jas. 2:1-4) The aged apostle John, though having another means of communication, preferred a face-to-face interchange with the congregation. (2 John 12) Clearly, what is being encouraged in the Scriptures is regular personal contact with our brothers and sisters. Any means of simulating such an experience by modern communication technologies is inferior and should be considered as a temporary measure until personal association is possible. Hence, care should be exercised that none of the technologies discussed herein should become a convenient substitute for personal attendance at the meetings.

We are grateful to Jehovah that you are using every suitable occasion to incite one another to love and fine works and to exhort one another to remain firm in the faith. (Heb. 3:13, 14; 10:24, 25) May Jehovah bless you richly as you keep serving him loyally and faithfully.

Your brothers,

Watch Tower B. & J. Society
OF BRITAIN