

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses Congrégation chrétienne des Témoins de Jéhovah



PO Box/C. P. 4100, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 4Y4, Canada
Telephone/Téléphone: 905-873-4100 Fax/Télécopieur: 905-873-4554

August 2, 2008

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Adjustments to congregation meeting schedule

Dear Brothers:

In April 2008, the Governing Body announced that there will be an adjustment to the congregation meeting schedule. Many joyously responded to this change and were encouraged by the Governing Body's expressions of love and concern for the sheep. (Acts 15:30, 31) The adjustments described in this letter take effect the week of Monday, December 29, 2008. This letter replaces the letter to all congregations dated February 14, 2002, regarding highlights of the 2002 Kingdom Ministry School. That letter (not the February 15, 2002, letter to all bodies of elders) should be removed from the congregation's permanent file of policy letters and destroyed.

Evening for personal and family study: The importance of personal and family Bible study cannot be overemphasized. This was a major consideration of the Governing Body in making this adjustment to the congregation meeting schedule. The adjustment to our weekly schedule will provide each of us with an opportunity to fortify the spirituality of our families by scheduling a specific evening each week for Family Worship. Family heads must shoulder their responsibility before Jehovah to ensure that a meaningful, regular family Bible study is conducted. (Deut. 6:6, 7) Single brothers and sisters with no family responsibilities will be able to use this time for personal Bible study. Each elder should set a fine example in this regard and encourage others in the congregation to take this matter seriously. (Heb. 13:7) It is vital for all to 'buy out the opportune time' and strengthen themselves for what will shortly take place. (Eph. 5:15, 16) The day of Jehovah is fast approaching. (Zeph. 1:14; 2 Pet. 3:12) How urgent it is for all of us to use the time remaining to build ourselves up on our "most holy faith"!—Jude 20.

Scheduling: Unless there are extreme extenuating circumstances, the Congregation Bible Study, the Theocratic Ministry School, and the Service Meeting are to be held sometime Monday through Friday and should not be combined with the Public Meeting and *Watchtower* Study, which are to be held on the weekend (Saturday or Sunday). When several congregations meet in one Kingdom Hall, any schedule of meeting times that involves rotation is worked out through the elders in a spirit of mutual concern and brotherly love. (Phil. 2:2-4; 1 Pet. 3:8) When the circuit overseer visits one of the congregations that meets in the Kingdom Hall, the other congregation(s) will adjust their meeting times as needed for that week.—*od* p. 122.

Field service groups: Publishers will be assigned to field service groups. The elder who cares for the group will be termed "group overseer." The number in each group should be kept small, generally around 10 to 15 publishers. The body of elders will decide the number of groups needed in the congregation and who will be used as group overseers and assistants. The Congregation Service Committee is authorized to assign members to field service groups, making sure that each group has several spiritually strong publishers. Groups can be given the responsibility to clean the Kingdom Hall on a rotational basis.

Group overseers: The responsibilities of the group overseer include: (1) taking the lead in evangelizing, (2) assisting all in the group to progress in their ministry, (3) shepherding the group, and (4) assisting in the collection of monthly field service reports. In view of these responsibilities, an elder should be used if available. The body of elders will need to use good judgment in determining which brothers are most qualified to fulfill all the aspects of the assignment.

Group servants: If there are not enough elders in the congregation and a ministerial servant must fill this role, he will be termed “group servant.” Group servants should work closely under the supervision of the elders. They should conduct the meetings for field service, take a zealous lead in the ministry, and help collect the monthly field service reports for the group.

Group assistants: The body of elders assigns one assistant to each group overseer. If there are not enough elders, a ministerial servant may serve as the assistant. If there are not enough ministerial servants, a baptized brother who is a good example in the congregation may be assigned in this role. He would be one who is making good progress toward qualifying as a ministerial servant.

Meetings for field service: These meetings are to be scheduled in convenient locations, usually private homes. The Kingdom Hall may also be used for this purpose. Having smaller groups gather in several locations in the congregation’s territory will make the meetings for service more convenient for the publishers and will facilitate better coverage of the territory. Periodically, the group overseer may assign the assistant and other qualified brothers to conduct the meetings for field service. This will enable him to help those brothers improve in teaching ability and in giving good direction to the publishers.—2 Tim. 2:2.

There are advantages to having each group meet separately for field service. Nonetheless, circumstances may require that more than one group meet together. Where the entire congregation usually has a meeting for field service shortly after the weekend meeting, they may continue with that arrangement. Also, the congregation may find it more convenient to come together at the Kingdom Hall, such as during the visit of the circuit overseer and on worldly holidays. On such occasions, each group overseer or someone assigned by him will be responsible to provide territory and care for the members of his group.

Service overseer’s visit: The service overseer will schedule regular visits to all field service groups, visiting a different group each month. In smaller congregations where there are only a few field service groups, he may arrange to visit each group twice during the year. The group overseer should inform his group of the visit in advance so that as many as possible can benefit from the arrangement.

During his visit, the service overseer will conduct the meetings for field service, work with the group in the ministry, and assist publishers with their return visits and Bible studies. He should discuss the activity of the group with the group overseer and review the arrangements for field service. He will not give a service talk to the group, but during meetings for field service he may offer practical suggestions for improvement in certain features of the ministry. His meetings for field service should be a model for others to follow, in harmony with the instructions on page 72 of *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will*.

Shepherding: Every elder has the responsibility to shepherd the congregation. (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2, 3) Nonetheless, the group overseer should take a special interest in the members assigned to his group and should arrange for all to receive regular shepherding visits. (Note: Unless there is a specific need, shepherding visits are not made on fellow elders.) He should concentrate on assisting those who are weak, those who are irregular in meeting attendance or field activity, and those who are ill or depressed. Inactive publishers should also be assigned to field service groups and receive periodic shepherding visits. (John 21:15-17) The group overseer and the group assistant should discuss the needs of the publishers in the group. Shepherding visits by either an elder accompanied by a qualified ministerial servant or, when sensitive matters are likely to be discussed, by two elders, should impart spiritual encouragement and commendation. It may be advantageous to offer helpful suggestions on making the most of the weekly time set aside for personal and family study. Even if kind Scriptural counsel or a suggestion for improvement is offered, the publisher should feel refreshed and upbuilt. Under the direction of the elders, a group servant along with another qualified ministerial servant can also make spiritually encouraging visits on certain ones in the group by sharing scriptures and information from the publications. However, if a matter of a serious nature arises, they should refer it to the elders rather than to try to handle the matter themselves.

Congregation Bible Study: The body of elders should determine which elders are qualified to conduct this meeting. (Congregations with only two or three elders may use qualified ministerial servants as needed.) Those approved should be able to preside in a meaningful way so as to keep the study on time, emphasize key scriptures, see that proper application of such texts is made, and assist everyone to appreciate the practical value of the points covered. They will find it helpful to review the principles in the letter dated April 3, 2007, to all bodies of elders regarding guidelines for *Watchtower* Study conductors. Elders who are not initially used could be encouraged to progress in their teaching ability so as to eventually qualify. The body of elders will also decide whether any brothers in addition to those approved as readers at the *Watchtower* Study qualify to serve as readers at the Congregation Bible Study. The presiding overseer will assign a different elder to conduct and a different brother to read each week. Such assignments should be made several weeks in advance with a schedule posted on the information board. No designation will be used for brothers who conduct the Congregation Bible Study.

Visit of the circuit overseer: The circuit overseer's weekly schedule will not be adjusted. On Tuesday, the Theocratic Ministry School and Service Meeting will be held for one hour. (The Service Meeting will be reduced to 30 minutes by eliminating the announcements.) After a song, the circuit overseer will present a 30-minute service talk. Total time for the meeting, including opening and closing songs and prayers, will be one hour and 45 minutes. On Thursday or Friday evening, the congregation will have a 25-minute Congregation Bible Study followed by a song. Afterward, the circuit overseer will give a 40-minute service talk. Total time for the meeting, including opening and closing songs and prayers, will be one hour and 20 minutes.

Week of district convention, circuit assembly, and special assembly day: During the weeks of the district convention, circuit assembly, and special assembly day, the congregation will not have the Congregation Bible Study, the Theocratic Ministry School, and the Service Meeting. Encourage the brothers to consider the material for these three meetings on a personal basis, such as during their Family Worship Evening. If you are the host congregation for the *circuit assembly*, the congregation should meet for a 25-minute Congregation Bible Study

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followed by a song and the district overseer's 40-minute service talk. The entire program should last no longer than one hour and 20 minutes, including the opening and closing songs and prayers. If you are the host congregation for the *special assembly day*, the congregation should meet on Tuesday for a 25-minute Congregation Bible Study followed by a song. Afterward, the circuit overseer, or the district overseer if he is the visiting speaker, will give a 40-minute service talk. Total time for the meeting, including opening and closing songs and prayers, will be one hour and 20 minutes.

Foreign-language groups: Generally, one of the first meetings that a foreign-language group will hold each week is the Congregation Bible Study. In such cases, the group should gather for this meeting in another area of the Kingdom Hall, such as a secondary classroom. If there are enough qualified brothers to handle the Bible highlights in the foreign language, the group may remain in their location for the entire Theocratic Ministry School. If, though, there is not a qualified brother to present the Bible highlights, then the group may rejoin the host congregation for that part. (Elders may make some other practical arrangement.) The group would adjourn again to their secondary location to present their own student talks. Thereafter, they would rejoin the host congregation for the Service Meeting.

We are delighted to be working with you as we strive to 'fully accomplish our ministry.' (2 Tim. 4:5) May Jehovah's blessing be upon all of you as you prove yourselves to be loving shepherds of the flock.—Isa. 32:1, 2.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*

cc: Traveling overseers

PS to presiding overseer and secretary:

Please provide each elder with a copy of this letter. At the next scheduled elders' meeting (but not the one held during the week of the visit of your circuit overseer) please arrange to discuss it. The elders should determine (1) the number of field service groups needed, (2) who will serve as group overseers and assistants, and (3) which brothers will be used to conduct and read at the Congregation Bible Study. Once the letter has been discussed, the photocopies should be destroyed. The publishers should be informed of any adjustments in meetings for field service as well as to which field service group they will be assigned no later than December 15, 2008.

This letter should be retained in the congregation's permanent file of policy letters.