

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses

2821 Route 22, Patterson, NY 12563-2237 Phone: (845) 306-1100



October 3, 2008

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Re: Communication with immigration agencies

Dear Brothers:

In the letter dated September 8, 2008, to all bodies of elders in the United States, updated direction was provided concerning how to assist publishers seeking citizenship. At this time, we are supplying instructions about other immigration-related requests that the body of elders might receive.

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 disbanded the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and created three new agencies to replace the functions cared for by the INS. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) handles the traditional immigration functions, including adjudication of applications for immigration benefits such as visa petitions, applications to adjust or change status, and naturalization petitions. The United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is responsible for the enforcement and investigation of all laws concerning federal protection and customs services. The United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) now includes border patrol officers and customs inspectors.

Because of the large number of foreign nationals who have entered the country, it is inevitable that some publishers will have legitimate reasons to have contact with these government agencies. (Rom. 13:4) For the most part, publishers handle many routine matters without the need for involving congregation elders. However, under limited circumstances, a publisher may request assistance and may need to have the support of the body of elders. Likewise, the CIS or ICE may want to validate important information about the function of the Christian congregation or the status of an individual publisher. An agency may want validation that the publisher is one of Jehovah's Witnesses or want an explanation of our religious beliefs and practices. This letter is designed to assist you in handling such requests from the CIS or ICE.

In dealing with immigration matters, the body of elders should bear in mind Scriptural principles that are applicable, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

As world conditions continue to deteriorate, it is understandable that some in the Christian congregation begin to consider migration as a means to alleviate physical hardship. When publishers seek advice concerning immigration laws, it is good to remember that an elder's comments should be limited to spiritual issues.—*g94 2/22 pp. 25-27; g93 4/22 pp. 17-19; g92 5/8 pp. 3-12.*

From time to time, the branch office receives inquiries from publishers in the United States who are considering naturalization. Whether one should apply for United States citizenship or not is entirely a personal decision. Each individual must make his or her own final decision. A factor to consider is whether the naturalization law may require one to violate his conscience or Bible principles. The organization's publications in the past have commented on the general topics of oaths and citizenship. Sufficient information to assist one who is making a decision on citizenship is provided by examining those topics in the *Watch Tower Publications Index*.—*g75 7/22 pp. 27-28; w73 1/15 pp. 62-63.*

If publishers approach you with questions regarding immigration and naturalization, you may inform them that this is entirely a personal matter that does not involve the organization or

Re: Communication with immigration agencies

October 3, 2008

Page 2

the local congregation. When you are questioned or your assistance is requested in this purely personal matter, it is best to suggest that the individual seek an attorney that specializes in immigration matters. You may help the publisher to realize that it is not necessary to be a citizen to be baptized or to preach the good news of the Kingdom. Publishers can be helped to see that regardless of the nation in which Jehovah's Witnesses are citizens or the part of the earth in which they happen to live, Jehovah is capable of protecting all those who serve him.

At times, members of the congregation who are pursuing citizenship may be asked by the CIS to have their local congregation provide a letter confirming their status as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. As explained in the letter dated September 8, 2008, whether a body of elders will provide such a letter of good standing is left to the discretion of each body of elders handling the matter.

Recently, many individuals who are living and working in the United States without proper documentation have been arrested by ICE agents. Therefore, the possibility exists that our brothers or Bible students may also be included in these arrests. While in custody, these individuals may ask for leave from the detention facilities in order to attend Christian meetings. If such a request is made, the government will contact local congregations to find out whether a publisher or a Bible student is known to the congregation and to request the time schedule for the congregation's meetings. In some circumstances, the officials may want to have your comments on an individual's character and reputation. Under these circumstances, each body of elders must decide whether it is appropriate to provide the requested documentation. When making this determination, good judgment must be exercised, taking into consideration all the circumstances. For instance, is the individual an active member of the congregation or a progressive Bible student? Does he regularly attend congregation meetings? If you decide to provide a response, the enclosed sample letter will assist you in replying to this request. The letter should be prepared on congregation letterhead and include the appropriate information. The signer should sign before a notary public.

When publishers or Bible students are detained by the ICE, that agency has procedures for caring for the detainee's minor children when no related adult is able to offer proper care and custody. From time to time, individual publishers offer to assume legal responsibility for the care and custody of the minor children. That is a personal decision to be left with the individual publishers. The congregation lacks the legal status to assume responsibility for the custody of minor children. Individual publishers who offer shelter to the children of detained individuals must carefully count the cost of assuming those responsibilities. The prospective caretakers will want to communicate with the authorities to fully understand their rights and duties, as well as any potential legal liabilities.

We trust the above information clarifies this matter. Please accept a warm expression of our Christian love and appreciation for the work you are accomplishing in behalf of our brothers.

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

Enclosure

cc: Traveling overseers

PS to secretary:

This letter and the enclosed sample letter should be retained in the congregation's permanent file of policy letters together with the letter dated September 8, 2008, and its sample letter.

