



WATCH TOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF BRITAIN

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December 5, 2008

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: *Index to Letters* and congregation's file

Dear Brothers:

We trust the following direction will be helpful to you in finding published direction to all bodies of elders as well as in organizing the congregation's file.

Index to Letters: Along with this letter, we are providing a new tool for your use as elders, namely, *Index to Letters—For Bodies of Elders (S-22)*. A list of letters comprising the congregation's permanent file of policy letters is provided at the end of the index. Each letter in that list should be sorted in date order in the congregation's file. Those letters should be kept separate from other items in the congregation's file. Most congregations will find it helpful to keep a separate binder of those letters with the *Index to Letters* at the front of the binder. As those letters are replaced or as new ones are added in the future, direction will be given to update the congregation's permanent file of policy letters. You will likely find it helpful to update your copy of *Index to Letters* at that time as well. For the initial organization of your files, we suggest you follow the steps outlined on the enclosed sheet entitled, "Organizing the Congregation's Files." Once your files have been arranged in order, this sheet can be discarded.

We wish to offer the following caution. There are many older letters that are referred to in *Index to Letters*. In some cases those older letters contain just one or two policy matters that currently apply. The other points in the letter may have been revised. Thus, while researching a specific point in one of the older letters, you may notice other policy matters that may or may not still apply. Therefore, exercise care in using that older direction. If those points of policy are not referred to in *Index to Letters*, it is likely because the matter has been addressed in more recent correspondence.

Missing correspondence: Upon receipt of *Index to Letters*, you may find that some letters are missing from the congregation's permanent file of policy letters. If the letter cannot be located after making a thorough search of the rest of the congregation's file and after enquiring of each elder, you may contact another body of elders meeting in your Kingdom Hall and request to make a copy of the letter in question. Or, if the visit of the circuit overseer is in the near future, you may request to make a copy of the letter from his files. If your congregation is the only congregation using the Kingdom Hall and if the visit of the circuit overseer is not in the near future, you may send a letter to the Service Department requesting a copy of the missing letter. The congregation secretary should diligently file such correspondence in harmony with the direction in the letter dated December 4, 2008, to all bodies of elders regarding handling correspondence from the branch office. Doing so will maintain the confidentiality of important policy letters, will enable the elders to quickly find published direction, and will limit the extra workload on the branch office.

Congregation's file categories: Besides correspondence to be retained in the congregation's permanent file of policy letters, the branch office sends annual correspondence (such as

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district convention instructions, guidelines for visitors to Bethel, and pioneer encouragement letters and outlines). At times, letters are sent to inform the elders or the congregation of a specific problem or temporary need. Additionally, the congregation may have paperwork regarding ownership of the Kingdom Hall, instructions for congregation accounting, and direction on requesting literature and magazines. If the branch office does not specifically direct that the correspondence should be retained in the congregation's permanent file of policy letters, it will be up to the elders to determine how to file such material. If the branch office does not specifically direct how long a piece of correspondence or documentation should be retained, the elders may make the decision based on local laws and circumstances. Pay close attention to make sure that files are handled according to the direction found in our letter to all bodies of elders dated December 9, 2008. For example, note what is said there about minutes of elders meetings, letters of introduction, correspondence relating to individuals, and so forth. The attached list suggests some categories that may be useful in filing material *other* than items to be retained in the congregation's permanent file of policy letters. Additional categories may be used as needed.

- Accounts
 - Assemblies/Conventions
 - Bethel visitors information
 - Charity matters/Business meetings
 - Child protection/*Child Protection* list
 - Circuit overseer's report on visit
 - Confidential matters/*Specialized Shepherding* list (sealed envelopes)
 - Elders and ministerial servants
 - Field service reports
 - Forms
 - Hospital Liaison Committee/*Advance Decision* documents
 - jw.org website
 - Kingdom Hall
 - Letters of introduction *
 - Literature/Magazines
 - Miscellaneous
 - Multi-language field
 - Minutes from elders' meetings
 - Pioneers
 - Regional Building Committee
 - Talk outlines
 - Territory/Field service
- * Only relating to appointments and not retained after the visit of the circuit overseer. See December 9, 2008, letter.

Confidentiality and security: The congregation's files and records should be kept locked in a safe and secure place, preferably at the Kingdom Hall. However, if the Kingdom Hall is in any way vulnerable, then such records may be kept in the home of a responsible elder, such as the secretary, under lock and key to prevent unauthorized entry. Although the secretary is primarily responsible for the organization of the congregation's file, each elder should be able to access it when he needs to. Whether or not each elder is given a key to the congregation's file is a matter for the body of elders to decide.

Field service and meeting attendance records: The *Congregation's Publisher Record* (S-21) cards should be retained showing at least the last eight years of activity for each publisher. The card that has been signed by the publisher should be kept as a **permanent** record. Other cards from more than eight years ago may be destroyed. At least the last 12 months of activity should be retained in the current file of cards. The last card of an inactive publisher should be retained in the current file indefinitely. The current file of cards should be divided into two sections—"Active" and "Inactive." The section for active publishers should be arranged alphabetically, with the cards subdivided into sections for regular and special pioneers, baptized publishers, and unbaptized publishers. Monthly *Field Service Report* (S-4) slips, after being tabulated and copied on the *Congregation's Publisher Record* cards, should not be retained. A record card should be filled in for the monthly totals of all publishers, auxiliary pi-

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oneers, and regular and special pioneers. Such cards, as well as meeting attendance records for the congregation, will be kept at least two years.

Appointment and deletion of elders and ministerial servants: Recommendations forms (S-2) and appointments letters (S-52) related to the appointment and deletion of elders and ministerial servants should be kept indefinitely.

Judicial files: After a duly appointed judicial committee has met with an individual and decided to disfellowship him, to reprove him, or to dismiss the case because of a lack of evidence, an entry is made on the *Specialized Shepherding* list. (The same is true of a committee handling a request for disassociation or two brothers handling wrongdoing involving an unbaptized publisher.) For cases of disfellowshipping and disassociation two copies of the *Notification of Disfellowshipping or Disassociation* (S-77) form are returned by the branch office. These should be placed in a sealed envelope. (See letter to all bodies of elders dated December 9, 2008.) On the front of the envelope should be listed the name of the individual, the action taken, the date of the action, and the names of the elders who handled the matter. The sealed envelope should be placed in the congregation's file by the secretary. If there is a need to open these files in the future, such as in connection with a plea for reinstatement, this should be done only by the elders who are assigned by the body to handle the matter. In cases of reinstatement, the reinstatement date should appear on the outside of the sealed envelope along with the names of those serving on the reinstatement committee. The date all restrictions are removed after reinstatement should also be noted on the outside of the sealed envelope. (For reproofs, this date can be recorded by making an entry on the *Specialized Shepherding* list.) No judicial information should be posted on *Congregation's Publisher Record* (S-21) cards. For other correspondence or records relating to judicial action or child abuse see our December 9, 2008, letter.

After a disfellowshipped or disassociated person has been reinstated a full five years, if the judicial committee feels there is no longer any need to retain the file material, it can be destroyed and the corresponding entry(ies) on the *Specialized Shepherding* list can be deleted. (The same applies to records on the *Specialized Shepherding* list involving judicial reproof.) If these brothers are not available or qualified, the determination may be made by the Congregation Service Committee or qualified elders designated by them. If there is some reason why the committee feels that it would be better to retain the material longer, it can be kept as long as necessary. If a man or a woman has entered into an adulterous marriage, the file should be kept for five years after reinstatement and thereafter at least until the death or remarriage of the innocent mate. Material involving child abuse should be handled in line with our December 9, 2008, letter and the annual *Checklist for Audit of Files. Notification of Disfellowshipping or Disassociation* forms on individuals who have not been reinstated should also be kept indefinitely.

We trust this direction will be helpful to you as you seek to imitate our orderly God, Jehovah. (1 Cor. 14:33) Please accept an expression of our warm Christian love.

Your brothers,

Watch Tower B. & J. Society
OF BRITAIN

c: Travelling overseers

PS to the secretary: This letter should be retained in the congregation's permanent file of policy letters. Additionally, one copy of *Index to Letters* may be provided to any elder who requests it.