



WATCH TOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF BRITAIN

THE RIDGEWAY LONDON NW7 1RN

TELEPHONE 020 8906 2211

December 9, 2008

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Data protection procedures

Dear Brothers:

This letter replaces the letter dated November 15, 2007, to all bodies of elders regarding congregation files and processing information, especially in relation to data protection procedures. The purpose of this letter is to provide one reference point. What is stated below applies to personal information whether processed electronically or on paper.

General principles for correspondence: So long as our normal procedures are followed, there is no need to withhold necessary information when writing to another body of elders or the branch office about problems or situations. Some, due to an unfounded fear or misunderstanding of the Data Protection Act 1998, are reticent to commit to writing details about individuals or difficulties that may arise in the congregation. (Prov. 15:22) We do not hold back from doing what is necessary to respect Jehovah's standard of righteousness and holiness, and to protect the purity of the Christian congregation. (Acts 15:14; 1 Pet. 1:14-16) Of course, we must use caution along with wisdom and discernment. (Prov. 19:8; Matt. 10:16) Obviously, when conveying information to others we stick to facts and avoid expressing mere judgments, just as we did before data protection legislation. (Eph. 4:25; Rom. 14:10) We always express ourselves with discernment, love, and kindness. (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-15; Col. 4:6) If there are concerns or reservations about a person's attitude these can be carefully expressed. However, we should not hesitate to convey a full and accurate picture to those who need and are authorized to know.

Letters of introduction: For detailed information see our letter to all bodies of elders dated July 1, 2006. In all cases the congregation writing the letter does not keep a copy. Here is a brief outline of procedures for various situations.

1. A brother moves to a congregation abroad: If he has signed a *Congregation's Publisher Record* card as outlined below, follow our normal procedures. If you do not have a signed record card, consult the branch office.
2. An appointed brother moves and *is* recommended to continue serving: The original letter is kept by his new congregation until it is either, (a) submitted to the branch office with a covering letter recommending his immediate appointment (see letter to all bodies of elders dated June 9, 2008), or (b) considered with the circuit overseer at his next visit, after which it is destroyed.
3. An appointed brother moves and *is not* being recommended to continue serving: In addition to the original letter sent to the new congregation the elders writing the letter **must** send a copy to the branch office. The elders of the new congregation read the original letter and destroy it as soon as it is read.
4. None of those moving are appointed as elders or ministerial servants: The elders of the new congregation read the original letter and destroy it.

5. A former child molester moves: Follow the instructions found in our letter to all bodies of elders dated July 1, 2006, page 2. (See also our letter to all bodies of elders dated June 1, 2001, page 1.) A copy of this letter of introduction **must** be sent to the branch office in one of the “Special Blue” envelopes. The elders of the new congregation read the original letter and destroy it.

Congregation’s Publisher Record card (S-21): Once a publisher has signed a card (dated “2/00” or later) this should be kept as a **permanent** record. There is no need to obtain his signature again when you start a new card. Only one signed record card per publisher is necessary. When a publisher moves from your congregation to another it is important that the signed record card is transferred along with any other records and letter of introduction.

When a Publisher Moves Into Your Congregation: When the letter of introduction and record cards are received from the publisher’s previous congregation the secretary checks to make sure that there is a signed record card. If not, the secretary should get him to sign a new card before entering any of his field service activity. This signed card would be treated as above. (Of course, record cards are not made out for an individual until authentic information about him has been received from the previous congregation or the branch office.)

New Unbaptized Publishers: When someone is approved as an unbaptized publisher the secretary should approach him to obtain his necessary details. After filling in the top of the *Congregation’s Publisher Record* card have him sign the card in the space provided.

As mentioned above, the signed record card is kept permanently. The last *Congregation’s Publisher Record* card for each inactive publisher is also kept indefinitely. (See February 15, 2002, letter to all bodies of elders in Britain.) Other cards are retained showing at least the last eight years of activity for each publisher. Older cards may be destroyed apart from the two exceptions mentioned in this paragraph. (Monthly field service records for the congregation and meeting attendance records will be kept at least two years.)

Recommending appointments and deletions of elders or ministerial servants: Follow the direction provided in our letter to all bodies of elders dated June 9, 2008. Do not make any copies of letters to the branch office concerning appointments and deletions.

Changes in coordinator of the body of elders and/or secretary: A *Change of Address* (S-29) form dated “1/05” or later is completed by closely following the instructions on the form. The **new** coordinator of the body of elders and/or the **new** secretary must be among those signing the form.

Elders meetings: Agendas should be a simple list of items to discuss. If an individual is to be discussed show either his name or the problem, but not both. All copies of the agenda should be destroyed after the meeting. Minutes should be a simple record of decisions taken and no more. Only the original minutes sheet is retained and it is kept in the congregation’s file.

Disfellowshippings and disassociations: The directives set out in *Pay Attention to Yourselves and to All the Flock* should be followed closely. When reporting a disfellowshipping or disassociation, carefully follow the instructions on the reverse side of the latest S-77 form (dated “1/05” or later). If you use old forms you may follow instructions that

have been superseded. This will result in unnecessary and avoidable work, both for the branch office and the judicial committee.

When filling in S-77 forms, answer all questions on the form. If the committee feels that an explanation of one or more of the answers is needed, this can be included on the S-77a Summation form. However, **do not write any additional comments on the S-77 Notification (checkbox-style) form.** The purpose of the form's design is to avoid extra remarks.

When the branch office returns two copies of the processed S-77 form to the congregation, a set of one blank S-77 form, one blank S-77a form, and one special blue envelope will be included. This will keep the congregation's supply replenished. If more forms are needed **do not make photocopies.** Either borrow some from a nearby congregation or request a reasonable supply from the branch office.

Generally, only the S-77 copies returned by the branch office are retained in the congregation's confidential file in a sealed envelope. (There are no written reports for judicial reproofs.) When a disfellowshipped or disassociated person dies or is reinstated the secretary will follow the instructions on the reverse side of the S-77 form. Five years after reinstatement, the correspondence can be destroyed, if the judicial committee feels there is no longer any need to retain the material. (See the letter December 5, 2008, for more information.) 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.

Specialized Shepherding list: Each congregation has a list entitled "Specialized Shepherding—Isaiah 32:1, 2." This shows all cases of disfellowshipping, disassociation, judicial reproof, alleged wrongdoing investigated but held in abeyance (*Pay Attention to Yourselves and to All the Flock* p. 100, pars. 2, 3), reinstatement, reinstatement hearings, and unbaptized publishers dealt with in line with pages 98 and 99 of *Pay Attention to Yourselves and to All the Flock*.

There are five columns with the headings "Name of individual," "Date of action," "Members of Committee(s) or Elders Handling Matter," "Date Reinstated/Deceased," "Action Taken." Where a committee is shown indicate who served as chairman. The "Action Taken" column may contain only one of the following expressions per case: "Disfellowshipped," "Disassociated," "Reproved," "Appeal Upheld," "Reinstatement Hearing," "Investigated and Handled," "In Abeyance," "Unbaptized Publisher Reproved," "Unbaptized Publisher Removed." *No other information should appear on this sheet.* Do not retain personal notes of any hearing. Five years after reinstatement, the disfellowshipping or disassociation entry on the *Specialized Shepherding* list can be deleted, unless there is currently an issue involved. The same applies to records involving judicial reproof and those relating to unbaptized publishers. For cases of adulterous marriage, follow the principle stated above.

Cases of child molestation: Each congregation has a list entitled "Child Protection—Psalm 127:3." The list should have six columns headed "Name of Individual," "Identity of Victims or Alleged Victims," "Date," "Elders Handling Matter," "Court Action," and "Congregation Action." This list should be formed even if there have been no cases of child abuse in your congregation. The *Child Protection* list should be kept safely and securely in the congregation's file.

In the appropriate columns show the name of the molester or alleged molester, the date the matter came to light, and the names of all the elders who were involved in some way or another. Only enter the name(s) of the victim(s) or alleged victim(s) and the relationship of the offender to the victim(s) if secular authorities handled the allegation. In the "Court Action" column enter only one of the following two expressions: "convicted" or "alleged." "Convicted" refers to those who were found guilty of child molestation by a secular court. "Alleged" is the term to be used for all other cases. If there has been congregation action tick the "Congregation Action" column and make an entry on the *Specialized Shepherding* list as described above. Where the principle in 1 Timothy 5:19 cannot be satisfied enter "None" in the "Congregation Action" column. For further information as to who should appear on the list see our letter to all bodies of elders dated June 1, 2001.

Correspondence relating to a case of child molestation case should be sent to the branch office in one of our special blue envelopes with a covering letter of explanation. Material should be retained by the congregation **only** if directed by the branch office.

Information concerning difficult individuals: Handle matters verbally where possible. When writing to an individual, negative statements about other third parties should not be made. Letters to and from the individual that do not concern child abuse may be retained if necessary, but only for as long as needed. (See above for correspondence involving child abuse.) Do not keep notes, either personally or in the congregation's file about the person. Do not keep letters between bodies of elders, or between the body of elders and the branch office, unless specifically advised to do so by the branch office. With especially difficult situations, if it is deemed necessary, a simple record showing the dates of shepherding visits or occasions of help or counsel given, and the names of the elders involved in giving assistance, may be kept. No exceptions should be made to this policy except on the explicit recommendation of the branch office.

Field ministry: All lists of territory, not-at-homes and do-not-calls should not show any personal information such as a person's language, religion, or ethnic background.

Annual audit of files: Each year we will provide a checklist-style worksheet to help service committees accomplish the audit of files. This audit should be completed before December 31 of each year. The circuit overseer will ask to see this checklist to make sure the audit has been carried out effectively. Your close attention to this will help ensure that your files are in good condition.

Formal request from an individual to see written information you may hold concerning him: If you ever receive a "Data Protection Subject Access Enquiry," either verbally or in writing you should telephone the branch office Legal Department immediately and **BEFORE** responding. (The same principle applies to requests from secular bodies for personal information or documents.) It is important that elders do not delay in contacting the branch office in such circumstances so that advice can be given on how to comply with the request in harmony with the legislation.

All other correspondence concerning individuals: Copies of letters written by the congregation, responses received from the branch office or from elsewhere, and any other correspondence should be kept *only* as long as needed. Once the subject of the correspondence has been dealt with, letters should not be retained. Correspondence more than

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six months old should not be kept unless you have obtained specific direction from the branch office. *All* correspondence in the congregation's files should be available for inspection by the circuit overseer during his visits.

Storing files: See the letter December 5, 2008, to all bodies of elders.

How long to keep other records: Congregation records dealing with finances are kept seven years. (See *Instructions for Congregation Accounting*.) Financial records on building a Kingdom Hall, major repairs to the Kingdom Hall, and other similar financial records that may be needed or useful beyond seven years may be kept indefinitely. Literature, handbill and magazine order forms, auxiliary pioneer applications, and similar items may be destroyed after one year. Circuit overseers' reports (S-303) on the last two visits to the congregation are retained. S-2 forms and S-52 letters relating to the appointment of elders and ministerial servants should be kept indefinitely.

It can be a challenge for elders to keep up to date with these necessary matters. We know that many situations only occur every now and then. Elders cannot be expected to remember each procedure. Therefore, when situations arise take time to consult *Index to Letters—For Bodies of Elders*. When completing forms, carefully read the instructions on the form and follow them closely. When you receive an updated form, destroy all existing older blank forms in your files. This will prevent you from following outdated procedures and will avoid unnecessary and often time-consuming correspondence. Feel free to write to the branch office promptly for advice when needed.

We hope that setting out these clarifications is both helpful and reassuring to you. We all seek to render quality shepherding care of the congregation while rendering "Caesar's things to Caesar." (Matt. 22:21) We keep in mind all the hard work you do and once again express our appreciation. (Heb. 6:10) Please be assured of our warm brotherly love and best wishes.

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.