

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



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August 15, 2009

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS AND TRAVELING OVERSEERS

Re: Reviewing qualifications of those pursuing higher education

Dear Brothers:

Recently the worldwide brotherhood has received timely warnings from “the faithful and discreet slave” regarding the dangers of pursuing higher education. Satan’s world associates advanced secular education with success. However, Jehovah’s people measure success in terms of spirituality and displaying aspects of the fruitage of the spirit. As individuals and as an organization, we are “no part of the world,” and thus we have different goals, values, and aspirations from those around us.—Matt. 24:45; John 17:14.

These warnings from the “slave” are wise and necessary. Those pursuing years of extra education in worldly environments expose themselves to so many dangers! There are the dangers of exposure to worldly philosophies and the world’s materialistic spirit, which is what drives many to seek higher education at any cost. (Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:20, 21) It is common knowledge that institutions of higher learning are dangerous hotbeds of immorality, false religious teachings and bad associations. (Prov. 7:4-27; 1 Cor. 15:33) Then there is the element of time. Twice the Scriptures urge us to ‘buy out the time,’ emphasizing that the “days are wicked.” (Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5) God’s servants are urged to have plenty to do in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor is not in vain. (1 Cor. 15:58) However, in pursuit of secular qualifications in schools of higher education young Witnesses may sacrifice years of their youthful vigor which could, and should, have been devoted to serving their Grand Creator more fully. Sadly at times, the sacrifices that are made for higher education result in our youths struggling to maintain their spirituality and to keep following Jesus’ direction to “seek first the kingdom.”—1 Tim. 4:15, 16; 1 Cor. 2:12; Eph. 2:1, 2; Eccl. 12:1; Matt. 6:33.

Not long ago, when circuit overseers met with elders during their visits to the congregations, the following question was raised: **“Would an appointed brother continue to qualify for privileges in the congregation if he, his wife, or his children pursue higher education?”** By asking this question the ‘faithful slave’ was indicating that this matter should be taken seriously. In this regard, any who are presently serving as appointed men in the congregation must honestly examine themselves to ensure that they are irreprehensible, “holding the sacred secret of the faith with a clear conscience.” (1 Tim. 3:9) Also, when considering those who are pursuing higher education for additional privileges of service, elders would want to exercise caution. It could be damaging to the spirit of the congregation if they were to ‘lay hands hastily’ on someone who might be seen by the brothers as one who is ignoring the advice of the “faithful and discreet slave.”—1 Tim. 5:22.

The questions below are provided to assist elders and traveling overseers to evaluate the qualifications of ministerial servants and elders, as well as regular pioneers, who may be pursuing higher education or whose children may be doing so. As circumstances differ, it is not possible to make blanket rules to cover all situations. Rather, what is needed is discernment. (Prov. 2:10, 11; 20:5) Elders would rightly be concerned about the impact on the individual’s spirituality and how the person’s course may affect others. (Matt. 18:6) Heavenly wisdom should guide the elders in properly and impartially evaluating these questions that could affect an appointed brother’s privileges of service. (Jas. 3:17) When this is done, all will be united in consistently applying the fine

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counsel of the “faithful and discreet slave” and our brothers will have reason to have confidence in those who are viewed as “exemplary” in the congregation.—1 Pet. 5:2, 3.

“Would an appointed brother continue to qualify for privileges in the congregation if he, his wife, or his children pursue higher education?”

- Prayerfully consider the following:

- **Does his life pattern show that he puts Kingdom interests first in his life?—Matt. 6:33.**

- **If he has a family, does he teach his family members to put Kingdom interests first?**

- **Does he respect what has been published by the faithful slave on the dangers of higher education?—3 John 9.**

- **Do his speech and conduct reveal that he is a spiritual person?—Ps 1:2, 3; 1 Cor. 2:13-16.**

- For example: What of the environment in which he chooses to live? Is he at home or in a campus or hostel accommodation? Does this needlessly expose him to immoral, false religious or otherwise spiritually damaging activities and beliefs even though he claims to keep himself separate? Is this a potential stumbling block to himself or others? (Prov. 5:8; 6:27-28; 1 Cor. 15:33; Rev. 18:4.) (Note: These questions may also be applied to any appointed men or pioneers who are sponsoring or supporting their children who attend university away from home. They should also be considered when assessing the qualifications of others, who are not necessarily pursuing “higher education,” but, who, just for the sake of education, are subjecting themselves to the degraded living environment in some polytechnics and training colleges.) We do not recommend for privileges of service those whose spirituality and soundness of mind may be questioned because of the unwise situation they put themselves or their children in. Neither do we appoint those who, because of these decisions, may be setting a poor example for others.—1 Pet. 4:7; Titus 2:6, 7; 1 Tim. 3:2.

- **Why is he or his family pursuing higher learning? Do they have theocratic goals?—Phil. 3:8.**

- **Does the pursuit of higher learning interfere with regular meeting attendance, meaningful participation in field service or other theocratic activities of the congregation with which he is a publisher?**

- Note: Some may feel that if a person is pursuing higher education then he has an excuse for missing meetings, or attending meetings with different congregations to allow for his lecture or study schedule. Doing so amounts to an attempt to fit our worship of the Most High around arrangements for higher learning. What would that indicate about what a person considers more important? (Phil 1:10, 11) Where one chooses to go for meetings may be a private matter, but we

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would not recommend for privileges of service any who are not fully supporting their own congregation and its schedule of activities, thus keeping secular matters in their proper place. Also, a congregation should not make special arrangements and adjustments in its theocratic activities to suit those who are pursuing higher secular education.

THOSE ALREADY APPOINTED

There may be brothers who are pursuing higher education who are already serving as appointed men in the congregation. Or perhaps their children are doing so. Their qualifications should be prayerfully reviewed in the light of the above questions to see if they still qualify to serve. Also elders would consider two other very important Scriptural qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3:13 and Titus 1:9. There we read that those who serve as appointed men must have **“freeness of speech”** and be **“holding firmly to the faithful word as respects his art of teaching.”** It is vital that elders and servants live up to these two qualifications in order to maintain Jehovah’s high standards and to ensure that the entire body of appointed men are serving as a good example. Anyone in this situation should prayerfully ask himself: “With all that has been said and written about the dangers of pursuing higher education, do I have ‘freeness of speech’ in the congregation? Can the brothers look at me as one who is ‘holding firmly to the faithful word’?”

REGULAR PIONEERS

It is always encouraging to see our brothers seeking to increase their service by enrolling as regular pioneers. However, regular pioneer service should not be used as a cover to legitimize the pursuit of higher education. If an applicant is presently in a course of higher education, elders should indicate this when they send the application form to the office. In a brief letter they should also assure the office that the above questions have been considered in the case of the applicant and provide their reasons for recommending the person for this privilege of service.

If a regular pioneer who is pursuing higher education is not meeting the hour requirements, the elders should provide loving counsel and assistance, just as they do with any pioneer who is not making their time. It may be necessary to help the pioneers to make appropriate adjustments in their schedule so as to meet the hour requirements and to have a productive ministry—not just putting in time. If such ones consistently fail to make their monthly hour requirement, the elders should review their qualifications and recommend their removal from the pioneer list. We do not make special concessions in the hour requirement for regular pioneers who are pursuing courses of higher learning.—See also letter To All Bodies of Elders dated November 1, 2001.

CONCLUSIONS

From now on, this letter is to be used as a reference point as you consider whether any who are pursuing higher education should be “tested as to fitness first” or later recommended for privileges in the congregation. (1 Tim. 3:10) We are asking the circuit overseers to review this information with each body of elders during their next round of visits. When questions arise over the qualifications of a brother who is already serving, please respectfully consider the counsel of the circuit overseer. If a situation appears complicated or there is a need for clarification, this may be referred to the branch office for further direction. All concerned would then need to cooperate with the decision made.—Heb. 13:17.

In the past, some may have reasoned that a young witness will be more useful at a branch office or Bethel home if they pursue a college course or acquire university education. The organiza-

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tion does not encourage young people to learn any profession or skill so that they can serve at Bethel. This is made very clear in the outline that is considered at Bethel meetings at district conventions. The physician Luke did not encourage Christians to follow his example in becoming a doctor. Evidently, Luke became a physician before he learned about Christ. The apostle Paul had been educated at the feet of Gamaliel, but he never encouraged Christians to follow him in that course. Rather, he wrote: "Become imitators of me, even as I am of Christ." (1 Cor. 11:1) Paul looked upon his former pursuits as "a lot of refuse." (Phil. 3:8) Hence, the Bible places the greatest importance, not on pursuing advanced secular education, but on acquiring knowledge of God and of Christ. Spirituality is the greatest qualification for any young man or woman who wishes to expand their service at Bethel, or in other forms of service. We do well to adopt this superior point of view.—John 17:3; Col. 2:2-4.

As shepherds and teachers of the flock, elders have a responsibility to help the brothers to understand and apply the counsel received from the 'faithful slave.' These are the "last days" and emphasis must be placed ever more clearly on separateness from the world, and "seeking first the Kingdom and his righteousness." Elders, ministerial servants, and pioneers are rightly expected to be 'examples to the flock' and all should understand that with these privileges come added responsibility and accountability. (Luke 12:48b) It is a privilege to work together with you in supporting the watchman class as they sound clear warnings about the spiritually dangerous times in which we live. (1 Cor. 14:8) As we all share in sounding a clear "trumpet call" within the congregations, we can be confident that Jehovah and Jesus know what is best for us; that they have put their trust in the "slave" and that the "slave" has always proven itself to be "faithful and discreet."—w97 8/15 p.15 par. 14; w09 2/15 pp. 24-27.

Please be assured of our warm Christian love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*