



WATCH TOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF BRITAIN

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December 4, 2009

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Foreign-language field

Dear Brothers:

The November 2009 *Our Kingdom Ministry* insert provides fine direction on developing the foreign-language field. As more and more congregations become involved in this aspect of the preaching work, specific questions arise on how to organize it. We hope the following general comments are beneficial as you apply the direction to local circumstances. This letter replaces the letters dated January 1, 1994, April 14, 1994, April 2, 2007, January 1, 2009, July 4, 2009, and August 31, 2009, to all bodies of elders regarding foreign-language matters. These letters should be removed from the congregation permanent file of policy letters and be destroyed.

Can meetings be interpreted for those who do not understand the language of the congregation? A congregation may have one or two deaf publishers or interested persons. The elders may arrange for sign-language interpretation. If possible, select an area where the deaf will be able to see the sign-language interpreter(s) and the main platform in the same line of sight but where the interpreters will not be an inordinate distraction to the hearing audience. More information on sign-language interpretation may be found in the letter March 26, 2010, to all travelling overseers and bodies of elders and “Questions From Readers” in the November 15, 2009, *Watchtower*.

Generally, simultaneous interpretation at the congregation level for languages other than sign language is not recommended. Some who are not fluent in the language of the congregation find it helpful to prepare well for the meetings in their mother tongue to the extent possible before listening to the meetings. Others may appreciate help in locating certain Bible texts. Publishers who know the foreign language may also share the highlights of the meetings at another appropriate time.

However, if the body of elders feels there is merit in having some of the programme interpreted simultaneously, good judgment is essential. It may not be possible to interpret each part. The parts to be interpreted, as well as who will interpret them, should be assigned well in advance. It should not unduly distract others or work a hardship on the interpreters. Interpreters should be exemplary baptized publishers.

Can meetings be periodically held directly in the foreign language before forming a group? Periodically a public talk and/or a *Watchtower* Study may be held to determine the extent of support for meetings in the foreign language. It is preferred that such meetings be held in an auxiliary classroom while the sponsoring congregation is conducting its Public Meeting and *Watchtower* Study. However, if because of serious and unchanging circumstances the elders feel that such is not possible, the periodic Public Meeting and/or *Watchtower* Study may be held on the weekend at a time other than the regularly scheduled meetings of the congregations in the Kingdom Hall.

What are the requirements to form a group? Paragraph 10 of the November 2009 *Our Kingdom Ministry* insert states: “In order for a group in a particular language to be formed, four basic requirements must be met. (1) There should be sufficient interest and potential for growth in a particular language field. (2) A small core group of publishers should know the language or be learning the language. (3) A qualified elder or ministerial servant should be available to take the lead and conduct at least one weekly meeting in that language. (4) A body of elders should be willing to sponsor the group. When these requirements are met to a reasonable degree, then the body of elders will write to the branch office about the particulars of the group and will request formal recognition as a congregation sponsoring a foreign-language group. (See *Organized*, pp. 106-107.) The elder or ministerial servant taking the lead would be considered the ‘group overseer’ or ‘group servant’ responsible for taking care of the group.”

However, the group does not function independently. It works under the oversight of the body of elders. The body of elders determines whether, in addition to the one weekly meeting, other congregation meetings should be added and how often they should be held during the month. The elders also provide balanced direction and show initiative in caring for the group’s needs, including training publishers in the group to take on additional theocratic responsibility. If the group is ever dissolved, the elders should notify the branch office.

What factors should be considered when selecting the sponsoring congregation? Generally, the sponsoring congregation should be conveniently located to the foreign-language community. Such a location enables the publishers to make the most of their field service time and helps interested persons to attend the meetings. Other factors to consider are the location of the publishers, the availability of a suitable Kingdom Hall, and access to public transport. At times, the sponsoring congregation may need to be adjusted. If so, the bodies of elders involved should send a joint letter to the branch office explaining why the change is needed and that the bodies of elders are in agreement with the change.

Should all publishers working with the group move to the sponsoring congregation? Generally, publishers in the group should belong to the sponsoring congregation. However, this may not always be possible. For example, an elder who knows the language may be willing to help the group, but family and other obligations do not permit him to move his family to the sponsoring congregation. If his helping the group does not interfere with his providing for the needs of his family, he may assist the group to the extent possible. (1 Tim. 3:4, 5; 5:8) The elders in both congregations should be reasonable in what they expect of qualified publishers who are willing to expend themselves in the foreign field.

How does a group record its meeting attendance? The attendance of the group’s meetings is included with that of the sponsoring congregation’s in the *Congregation Meeting Attendance Record* (S-88). However, a separate record of the group’s attendance may be kept so that the elders can review its progress.

Congregation Bible Study: The group should gather for this meeting in another area of the Kingdom Hall, such as a secondary classroom, while the sponsoring congregation is conducting its Congregation Bible Study. The group should begin their study with song and prayer in the language of the group. Since in most congregations it is possible to hear the music for the opening song in all parts of the building, those in the auxiliary room could sing to the same accompaniment from songbooks in their own language. In rare instances where the song being sung in the main auditorium is not available in the foreign-language edition of the songbook, it may be possible to turn off the sound from the main auditorium and an

alternate song may be selected and sung in the secondary room, provided it does not cause disturbance for those singing in the main auditorium. A brother in each auditorium could then say an opening prayer in the language of the audience. Then the Congregation Bible Study could commence without having to dismiss the foreign-language group from the main auditorium. The group should follow the weekly meeting schedule for the Congregation Bible Study as outlined in the foreign-language edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry*.

If because of serious and unchanging circumstances the elders feel that it is impossible to follow the guidelines outlined above, they may request that the branch office give approval to holding this meeting just prior to the start of the Congregation Bible Study of the sponsoring congregation. A less preferred option would be to hold this meeting just prior to or after the Public Meeting and *Watchtower* Study of the sponsoring congregation. Other exceptions are not approved.

Theocratic Ministry School: At the conclusion of the Congregation Bible Study, the group may begin its Theocratic Ministry School if they are able to hold one. If there is not a qualified brother available to present the Bible highlights, then the group may either join the main audience for that part and then return to the secondary location to present the student talks or they may simply remain in the secondary location and listen to the Bible highlights. The group should follow the weekly meeting schedule for the Theocratic Ministry School as outlined in the foreign-language edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry*.

Service Meeting: Foreign-language groups do not present the Service Meeting. Rather, the group should rejoin the sponsoring congregation for the Service Meeting, including the opening and closing songs and the closing prayer.

Public Meeting and/or *Watchtower* Study: If there are sufficient qualified speakers to present a weekly public talk directly in the foreign language, the group should gather for the talk in another area of the Kingdom Hall, such as a secondary classroom, while the sponsoring congregation is holding its Public Meeting. (The procedure for songs and prayers should follow that described previously for the Congregation Bible Study.) If the group is not able to present a weekly public talk but is able to conduct the weekly *Watchtower* Study, the group may listen to the talk in the secondary room, and thereafter conduct the study in the foreign language.

If because of serious and unchanging circumstances the elders feel that it is impossible to follow the guidelines outlined above, they may request that the branch office give approval to holding the Public Meeting and/or *Watchtower* Study on the weekend at a time other than the regularly scheduled meetings of the congregations in the Kingdom Hall.

How can the group locate the foreign community? The search work is often a key to growth. Generally speaking, a group does not receive a territory assignment other than that of its sponsoring congregation. However, it has approval to call on individuals based on *Please Follow Up* (S-43) forms received from the branch office and other congregations. The circuit overseer informs congregations in his circuit of the group's existence and its willingness to preach in their territory. If questions arise over whether the group should preach in a certain area, the bodies of elders and travelling overseer(s) involved can agree to a mutually acceptable arrangement on how to proceed. Love, cooperation, reasonableness, and understanding are vital to the success of such an arrangement. (Phil. 4:5) The language preference of the householder determines which congregation will care for his spiritual needs.

The search work may take considerable time. Carry it out in a systematic manner. Have a definite goal in mind for each day's activity. Some have good results in displaying our literature in the foreign language (including our video publications for the deaf) as they ask others if they know people who speak the language. An open, sincere approach will dispel suspicion of why the enquiry is being made. Tell others that you wish to share the Bible's hope with such ones. Preaching with the group will help the elders determine how the publishers can make the most of their ministry. The group may spend most, if not all, of its time in the foreign-language field. If it is practical to do so, the body of elders may also arrange for the entire congregation to participate in the search work occasionally. Such efforts may be counted as field service time and should be well organized.—Acts 8:26, 27.

Other methods of searching out the foreign community (including the deaf) include enquiring of householders, Bible students, family members, and fellow workmates. The public library may have helpful reference works. Current telephone directories are another valuable source of information. Local shops and businesses may provide services to the foreign-language community or employ such ones. Some bodies of elders may desire to purchase commercial directories or computer programs in order to locate the foreign community. Each body of elders is responsible for such decisions. While the work of the territory servant and others in preparing and maintaining maps and lists is essential, this work is not counted as field service time.

Can the meeting times and the yeartext of the group be posted? Arrangements can be made for a Kingdom Hall sign to be posted in the language of the group if it is determined that the group is well established and that it will continue to hold at least one weekly meeting at the Kingdom Hall. (*km* 1/90 p. 8) If possible, the sign listing the schedule for the meeting times of the congregations may also include the meeting schedule of the group. Further, consideration can be given to putting up the yeartext in that language. There is no special yeartext for the sign-language field.

Can handbills be requested for the group? The sponsoring congregation may request handbills from the branch office in the language of the group to advertise its weekly meeting(s). The group should not make its own posters or flyers for advertising its meetings.

When can a foreign-language congregation be formed? If there are valid reasons, the group may request congregation status even if they have less than the recommended 75 regular publishers. The circuit overseer helps the elders to prepare the necessary paperwork correctly and to verify that it is complete before submitting it to the branch office. The publishers involved must be strong spiritually and able to keep the congregation functioning actively. There is no specific number of elders and ministerial servants needed to form a congregation. However, the appointed brothers must be able to provide the necessary spiritual oversight and to take the lead in the preaching work. Such ones must also work diligently to become conversant in the language of the congregation.

Meeting schedule for foreign-language congregations: Generally, the meeting schedule for the Congregation Bible Study, the Theocratic Ministry School, and the Service Meeting is outlined in the foreign-language edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry*. However, there will be occasions when foreign-language congregations must adjust the Service Meeting schedule. For example, the foreign-language edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry* may carry an article that applies exclusively to the congregations serving under the translating branch office, such as an article regarding a special preaching campaign for that branch territory. In that case, the article should not be considered. The body of elders should select an appropri-

ate part from the Service Meeting schedule in the Britain English edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry* for consideration. A summary of the article, not a word-for-word translation, could be presented.

The coordinator of the body of elders should examine the Britain English edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry* each month to make sure that direction applying to all congregations in the branch territory is followed. For example, the annual branch letter, articles dealing with district conventions, and certain announcements should be considered at the Service Meeting. The local needs part could be used to cover such material, or it may be necessary to replace a part on the Service Meeting scheduled in the foreign-language edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry*.

Service campaigns: Generally, foreign-language congregations should follow the service campaign offers as they are outlined in the foreign-language edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry*.

What help can be given to a publisher desiring to learn another language and support a foreign-language congregation or group? Assist him to count the cost by making good use of the article “Serving With a Foreign-Language Congregation” in the March 15, 2006, *Watchtower*. (Luke 14:28) Keep the conversation positive and upbuilding. Usually it is helpful to speak with the elders in the foreign-language congregation or group before the publisher moves. If it is evident that it would be premature for him to move to the sponsoring congregation, the elders in both congregations can work together in offering him suggestions and encouragement.—*od* p. 112.

It may require considerable time for a publisher to become conversant in the new language. Most will progress if they are fully absorbed in congregation activities. They should be encouraged to enrol in the Theocratic Ministry School and to participate in the meetings as soon as possible. The elders may consider organizing a special reading class. (*be* p. 285) If appropriate, arrange for qualified publishers who know the language well to work in the ministry with the language learners. Use a simple vocabulary and speak clearly in your conversations with them. Commend their efforts to progress in the language.—*w08* 8/15 pp. 22-25.

Our publications provide excellent suggestions that can help immigrant parents in teaching their mother tongue to their children. (*w02* 10/15 pp. 22-26) At times, our children may feel caught between cultures. (*g07* 09 pp. 18-20) Reassure them that Jehovah loves them for who they are and that they are needed in the congregation. Train them to take on congregation responsibility. (*ks91* pp. 23-24) Commend them for using their knowledge and experience to help others of similar ethnic background to learn about Jehovah. Doing so will give such young ones a meaningful purpose in life and make them genuinely happy.—Acts 20:35.

A publisher who has already moved to the foreign-language congregation may need personal assistance if his struggle with the language is impeding his spiritual progress. Is the publisher beginning to comprehend the congregation meetings? Does he participate at the meetings, making brief comments? Does he give understandable presentations in the ministry? Is he staying strong spiritually, cultivating the fruitage of the spirit, and working for the peace of the congregation? The answers to such questions will guide the elders in determining what may need to be recommended to the publisher so that he maintains strong spirituality.

What factors should be considered if two or more different-language congregations work the same territory? Congregation territory assignments in multilingual areas are made according to language. The direction on pages 107-108 of the *Organized* book should be followed in working the territory. Obviously at times there will be some overlapping of our efforts. For example, family members of the same household may speak different languages. However, as the March 1984 *Our Kingdom Ministry* (April 1984 for the Britain edition), page 8, observed: “It is good to keep foremost in mind that as we preach, our purpose is to make disciples—to teach the truth. (Matt. 28:19, 20) Teaching should be done in the language people understand best. (1 Cor. 14:9).” By concentrating our ministry on people who best understand or prefer the language of the congregation we attend, much good can be accomplished.—*km* 6/08 p. 4; *km* 7/03 p. 4.

Keep supporting theocratic direction: Jehovah has kindly strengthened and united his people by means of loving theocratic direction worldwide. The book *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* highlights the benefits of implementing such direction on page 220: “It is obvious that if teachings, standards of conduct, and organizational or witnessing procedures could be decided on locally, the organization would soon lose its identity and unity. The brothers could easily be divided by social, cultural, and national differences. Theocratic direction, on the other hand, would assure that benefits from spiritual progress would reach out to all the congregations worldwide without hindrance.”

Truly, Jehovah God is not partial. He allows all language groups to know and serve him. May we rejoice, as did the prophet, and say: “You have added to the nation; O Jehovah, . . . you have glorified yourself. You have extended afar all the borders of the land.” (Isa. 26:15) Rest assured of our Christian love and appreciation for your self-sacrificing efforts.

Your brothers,

Watch Tower B. & J. Society
OF BRITAIN

cc: Travelling overseers

PS to the coordinator of the body of elders and secretary:

This letter and the letter dated December 5, 2009, to publishers learning another language to advance the good news should be retained in the congregation permanent file of policy letters. Please make a copy of the December 5 letter for any publishers in your congregation who would benefit from it. If in the future publishers decide to expand their ministry in this way, a copy should be made for them as well.