



Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses

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March 6, 2012

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Reminders from Kingdom Ministry School held during 2011 service year

Dear Brothers:

Much of the Kingdom Ministry School held during the 2011 service year focused on the portions of the *Shepherding* textbook that deal with shepherding, unity among the body of elders, and judicial matters. We encourage you to take time to review those parts of the textbook from time to time. Perhaps pertinent portions could be discussed during your quarterly elders' meetings. That will serve to reinforce those points in your mind and heart so that you can be of even greater service to the brothers. By means of this letter, we also wish to provide you with helpful reminders on a few additional matters that were discussed at the school.

Pursue divine education: Some of our brothers are pursuing higher education, feeling that they can acquire a measure of financial security. As you are aware, the educational system varies from country to country. In the United States, for example, public schools offer 12 years of basic education. Thereafter, students may choose to attend university for four or more years, leading to a bachelor's degree or to postgraduate studies for careers in medicine, law, engineering, and so forth. Such university education is what we mean when the term "higher education" is used.—*w05* 10/1 pp. 26-31.

Of course, education is an essential part of Christian life, and we highly value it. Education equips us to care for our responsibilities, both material and spiritual. (1 Tim. 5:8) However, Satan, the master of deception, has made the pursuit of higher education dangerous for a Christian. (2 Cor. 11:14) Many of our young people have been misled from the faith or have become involved in immorality as a result of pursuing higher education. The "fight for the faith" is especially challenging when one leaves the good influence of his home and congregation and places himself in the university environment. (Jude 3) Besides involving bad associations, higher education often erodes faith in Jehovah God and in the Bible. All must weigh carefully the disadvantages and any perceived advantages of pursuing higher education before determining what they will do. Christians must remember that the purpose of any supplementary education should be to praise Jehovah and serve him as much and as effectively as possible, while providing for material needs.—Eccl. 12:13.

Appointed men must be exemplary in heeding the warnings given by the faithful slave and its Governing Body when it comes to education. (Matt. 24:45-47) Would an elder, a ministerial servant, or a pioneer continue to qualify to serve as such if he, his wife, or his children pursue higher education? Much depends on the circumstances and how he is viewed. When such a situation arises, the body of elders should consider the following questions and scriptures:

- Does he show that he puts Kingdom interests first? (Matt. 6:33)
- Does he teach his family 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)

- How is he viewed by the congregation?
- Why is he or his family pursuing higher education?
- Does the family have theocratic goals? (Phil. 3:8)
- Does the pursuit of higher education interfere with regular meeting attendance, meaningful participation in field service, or other theocratic activities?

As the body of elders prayerfully and carefully considers the matter, it may be readily apparent that the brother has a positive attitude about what the organization has published regarding higher education and still retains the respect of others in the congregation. They may also observe that he and his family are keeping Kingdom interests first if the education does not interfere with meetings and the ministry. In such a case, the elders may determine that he could continue serving.—1 Tim. 3:2, 4-6; Heb. 13:7.

On the other hand, if the brother is promoting higher education to others for the material advantages or the status it may bring, he is calling into question his qualifications to serve the congregation because of the effect on his and his fellow appointed brothers' freeness of speech. (1 Tim. 3:13; Titus 1:9) The body of elders may therefore determine that the brother no longer qualifies to serve. In most cases, however, such a determination should be made in conjunction with the visit of the circuit overseer. If the brother does not agree with the decision, he may be invited to express his reasons in writing, and this should be sent along with the circuit overseer's report.

In view of the foregoing, each elder should make the following notation next to the subheading "Situations That May Raise Questions About an Appointed Man's Qualifications" before paragraph 15, chapter 3, in the *Shepherding* textbook: "See letter dated March 6, 2012, to all bodies elders for direction on considering the qualifications of appointed men in connection with higher education."—For additional information see our letter on higher education dated August 15, 2009.

What is *porneia*? The definition of *porneia* is outlined in paragraph 5, chapter 5, of the *Shepherding* textbook. Therein, three expressions are highlighted: "immoral use of," "lewd intent," and "manipulation." At the Kingdom Ministry School, these expressions were elaborated on as follows:

- "Immoral use of" conveys the thought not just of touching but of operating, manipulating, or employing something. For example, it is one thing to touch a musical instrument; it is something different to make "use of" a musical instrument.
- "Lewd intent" identifies the motive. For example, a doctor may need to manipulate the genitals in examining a patient. A veterinarian, farmer, or rancher may do something similar to an animal. However, the intent is not sexual gratification.
- "Manipulation" conveys the idea of operating something, whether by use of the hands or some other means, and does not require skin-to-skin contact. Momentary touching of another's genitals, even if intentional, would generally not be considered *porneia*.

It is the responsibility of the judicial committee to use the Scriptures to weigh carefully the facts in each case and to determine whether *porneia* is involved. This responsibility is especially serious when it involves the Scriptural freedom to remarry. (Mal. 2:16a) In situations where the elders are uncertain or divided on their conclusions, it is best to write the branch office.

In view of the foregoing, each elder should make the following notation next to paragraph 5, chapter 5, in the *Shepherding* textbook: "See letter dated March 6, 2012, to all bodies of elders for further comments on the definition of *porneia*."

Set a fine example as a family: A family united in worship of Jehovah is a fine example and an asset to the congregation. The majority of families of elders and ministerial servants are exemplary, but sadly a number of appointed servants become disqualified because of poor examples set by their wives and children. Help your family to develop a good schedule for the ministry, and encourage them to prepare for and participate in meetings. (w95 10/1 p. 14 pars. 6-7; w94 7/15 pp. 17-19) Remember, too, that a key to your family's success is regularity in family worship. To accomplish this, you may have to reschedule or reduce the time you devote to other matters. You may need to decline certain privileges on occasion. (w96 10/15 pp. 21-23) As an appointed servant, work hard for the salvation of your household.

Encourage young men to reach out: As the organization continues to grow, there is an increasing need for all of us to help young men reach out for greater responsibility in the congregation. (Acts 16:1-5) From time to time during your quarterly elders' meetings, consider how young men could be encouraged to reach out and what specific help could be given to assist them to make progress. If the congregation has a good number of elders and ministerial servants, do not feel that there is no urgency in helping others make progress. As you train young men, be generous in giving commendation; it is a powerful force that often helps brothers to continue progressing. (1 Cor. 11:2) Help them to set theocratic goals and 'make their advancement manifest to all.'—1 Tim. 4:15.

We hope these few reminders will be helpful to you as you 'shepherd the flock in your care.' (1 Pet. 5:2) Please accept our warm Christian love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*

cc: Traveling overseers

PS to secretary:

This letter should be retained in the congregation permanent file of policy letters. You may wish to update the congregation copy of *Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders* (S-22) at this time as well.