

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



The Ridgeway, London, NW7 1RN Telephone: 020 8906 2211

April 10, 2012

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Pornography

Dear Brothers:

This letter replaces the letters dated December 15, 2011, and June 7, 2006, to all bodies of elders. Those letters should be removed from the congregation permanent file of policy letters and be destroyed.

Helping others break free from pornography: When the body of elders learns that a publisher has deliberately viewed pornography, they should assign two elders to meet with him. The assigned elders will need to identify the extent of the problem. If married, the brother should be encouraged to reveal the matter to his wife. After the initial investigation, the assigned elders should provide an update to the body of elders. The body of elders will determine whether the matter needs the attention of a judicial committee. If the publisher is a pioneer, a ministerial servant, or an elder, the body of elders will consider whether they feel he still qualifies to serve.

If the body of elders determines the matter is not judicial, or if it is a case that requires a judicial committee but the individual is repentant, two elders should be assigned to give ongoing assistance. The frequency and nature of the visits with the brother will depend on the extent that he has viewed pornography. If he viewed it only on a few occasions, it may be that a number of brief visits over a period of a few months are all that is needed to help him regain his spiritual balance. (Ps. 73:2, 14) For others, more extensive help with several visits over a longer period of time may be required. There are many Bible-based articles in the *Watch Tower Publications Index* or *Watchtower Library* that can serve as a basis for their discussions with him. Every effort should be made to help him reestablish a good spiritual routine of prayer and personal study. When dealing with a married brother, the elders will need to provide the wife with spiritual assistance and comfort by including her in one or more shepherding visits along with her husband.

When the viewing of pornography becomes judicial in nature: The March 15, 2012, issue of *The Watchtower*, pages 30 and 31, expanded our definition of abhorrent forms of pornography. Thus, the December 15, 2011, letter to all bodies of elders directed that the third bullet point in paragraph 14 of chapter 5 in the *Shepherding* textbook be modified to include the underlined text below:

- **An entrenched practice of viewing, perhaps over a considerable period of time, abhorrent forms of pornography that is sexually degrading.** Such pornography may include homosexuality (sex between those of the same gender), group sex, bestiality, sadistic torture, bondage, gang rape, the brutalizing of women, or child pornography. Brazen conduct would be involved if the offender was promoting such material, such as by inviting others to view it, thus giving evidence of a brazen attitude.—w12 3/15 pp. 30-31; w06 7/15 p. 31.

When an individual (brother or sister) has ‘given himself over’ to this unclean practice, as evidenced by his persistently viewing abhorrent pornography, the matter has escalated to gross uncleanness with greediness and needs to be handled judicially.—Eph. 4:19.

When judging whether a matter is judicial, a key factor for the body of elders to consider is the content of the pornography, and not the gender of the one who viewed it. For example, it is equally wrong for a man or woman to watch two women engaged in sexual activity as it is for a man or woman to watch two men engaged in sexual activity. An entrenched practice of viewing, perhaps over a considerable period of time, abhorrent forms of pornography that is sexually degrading calls for the attention by a judicial committee because it is gross uncleanness. (Gal. 5:19-21) In such a case, the publisher would automatically be disqualified from special privileges of service.

What if a publisher viewed pornography that is not abhorrent? One persisting in this practice would not be considered as exemplary and thus would not qualify for special privileges in the congregation. (For an explanation of special privileges, please see the *Shepherding* textbook, chapter 7, paragraph 19.) However, he would not be dealt with judicially unless he is promoting it or encouraging others to view it with him, as this would give evidence of a brazen attitude characterizing loose conduct. It is important for elders to remember that how they handle each individual case depends on the unique circumstances. Their judgment must be solidly based on God’s Word and the direction provided by the faithful and discreet slave class.—2 Chron. 19:6.

Consideration of qualifications to continue serving in an appointed position: If a pioneer, a ministerial servant, or an elder has deliberately viewed pornography, the two elders assigned to help him will want to obtain the answers to the following questions: (1) Did he come forward voluntarily? (2) Did it consist of a few brief incidents, or was it a practice spanning many months, or even years? (3) What type of pornography was he looking at? (4) Was it accompanied by masturbation? (5) When was the last time he viewed it? (6) Was he ever counseled about viewing pornography? (7) If he is married and his wife is aware of his problem, what effect has this had on her? (8) Who else is aware of the problem? (9) Does he still have their respect? (10) Does he demonstrate an earnest desire to desist from viewing pornography? (11) Does his conscience allow him to continue serving in an appointed position?

The body of elders may determine that the person still qualifies to serve in an appointed position if (1) his involvement consisted of a few brief viewings, (2) he displays a heartfelt desire to desist from looking at pornography in any form, (3) the elders are convinced that he will refrain from viewing it, (4) he retains the respect of others who are aware of what he did, and (5) his conscience allows him to do so. If the body of elders is unsure whether a brother continues to qualify, they should discuss the matter with the circuit overseer at his next visit if the visit is in the near future. Otherwise, they should write the branch office for direction, providing answers to the above questions along with their recommendation.

On the other hand, if a person has developed a pattern of seeking pornography, or on a few occasions has viewed abhorrent forms of pornography, this would disqualify him from serving. Under these circumstances, the body of elders should recommend his removal at their earliest convenience. When writing, they should clearly explain to the branch office the reasons for their recommendation. They should state whether the brother is in agreement with the decision. If he is not, they should ask him to put his reasons in writing and include his letter with their correspondence.—*ks10* chap. 3 par. 25.

Recommending an elder or a ministerial servant to serve again who has been deleted in the past for viewing pornography: Before consideration is given to recommending such a brother for reappointment, he must (1) have demonstrated over a sufficient period of time that he has gained the mastery of the problem and (2) have the respect of the congregation, including his family. If so, and the brother was previously serving as an elder, it must be decided whether to recommend that he first serve as a ministerial servant. An elder may have been deleted because he was involved in viewing pornography, but since he was not entrenched in viewing *abhorrent* pornography, no judicial action was taken. Still, his viewing of pornography for a prolonged period manifests a serious moral weakness. (*ks10* chap. 3 par. 10) Thus, in most cases, it would be best to appoint such a former elder first as a ministerial servant. (Jas. 3:1) Allowing him first to serve again as a ministerial servant for a time will give the elders further assurance that he can be relied upon to set a good example in his conduct and teaching. It also allows more time for the congregation to build up their confidence in the brother once again.

What factors should be considered when deciding whether a former elder could be recommended to serve again *without* having to serve first as a ministerial servant? The body of elders will find it helpful to consider the following questions: (1) Was it only a few brief viewings of pornography? (2) Was his viewing limited to “nonabhorrent” forms of pornography? (3) Did he take the initiative to confess to the elders? If so, the brother may be recommended to serve again as an elder. Consequently, the length of time and the intensity of the practice are key factors for the elders to consider.

There is no need for elders to reopen cases that have already been handled in the past. If you have questions regarding the handling of any of these matters, please write to the branch office with full details so we can assist you.

In view of the foregoing, each elder should make the notation “See letter dated April 10, 2012, to all bodies of elders regarding pornography” in the following areas of the *Shepherding* textbook:

- Next to paragraph 10 in chapter 3
- Next to the subheading “Situations That May Raise Questions About an Appointed Man’s Qualifications” before paragraph 15 in chapter 3
- Next to the third bullet point of paragraph 14 in chapter 5

Please be assured of our many prayers on your behalf as you tenderly care for the flock of God.—1 Pet. 5:2, 3.

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.