

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses Congrégation chrétienne des Témoins de Jéhovah



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October 19, 2012

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Sign-language interpretation

Dear Brothers:

This letter replaces the letter dated September 1, 2007, to all traveling overseers and bodies of elders regarding guidelines for sign-language interpretation. That letter should be removed from the congregation permanent file of policy letters and be destroyed.

Jesus instructed Peter to feed his little sheep. (John 21:17) Among the Lord's sheep, there are deaf individuals who, by means of sign language, must also receive timely spiritual food. Traveling overseers and assembly overseers have received updated general direction on simultaneous interpretation at circuit events, including sign-language interpretation. However, the following direction applies to sign-language interpretation at the local congregation level.

Seating area: If possible, select an area where all deaf attendees will be able to see the sign-language interpreter(s) and the main stage in the same line of sight without visual distractions. This is usually at the front of the Kingdom Hall, perhaps on the left or the right side. (*w09* 11/15 pp. 30-32) The seating area should give priority to those dependent on sign language along with their families.

Tactile interpreting may be arranged for deaf-blind attendees. Their interpreters need to be located where they can clearly see the main signer without obstruction. Deaf brothers and sisters often do well at tactile interpreting.

Use of natural sign language: In many countries, sign language is used in two major ways. One form uses signs as a word-for-word transliteration of the spoken language. The other form is generally known as *natural sign language*. It is the form most commonly used by the deaf in their daily conversations. It functions separately from the spoken language and has a different grammar. It tends to put more emphasis on the use of space, facial expressions, and the inflecting of signing motions in order to achieve various shades of meaning. Even though preference for either of these two forms of sign language will vary depending on the deaf individual, the majority of deaf people converse in *natural sign language* and, therefore, understand it best. Thus, where possible, the most proficient signers in the natural sign language should be used for interpreting.

Interpreters need to understand the interpreting process. This does not mean merely matching a sign to a word while following the word order of the spoken language. Interpreting requires comprehension of thoughts. Thus, interpreters should concentrate on what is being said from the platform and endeavor to convey such thoughts clearly, accurately, and completely while keeping up with the speaker. Usually a word-for-word translation fails to convey the

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speaker's thoughts faithfully. Therefore, having many years of experience is not the only qualifying factor; one must have learned the interpreting process.

Attire: The interpreter's appearance should be exemplary, measuring up to the standards set for program participants on the main stage. No distracting jewelry, watches, clothing, or long and brightly painted fingernails should be worn. Solid-colored clothing contrasting with the interpreter's skin tone should be worn. This will help eliminate distractions caused by busy patterns. Also, clothing that clings to the body should be avoided.

Head coverings: A sister's use of a head covering in some circumstances is not necessary, since all in attendance should be able to appreciate that she is not actually conducting the meeting. This would be the case, for example, when she interprets comments from the audience, talks given by sisters, or demonstrations. However, if a well-qualified sister must be used to interpret talks given by brothers, prayers, or songs, she should wear a modest and appropriate head covering as a sign of submission to the theocratic arrangement in the Christian congregation.—1 Tim. 2:11, 12; w09 11/15 pp. 12-13.

An exception to this direction can be made for a sister doing tactile interpreting for one who is both deaf and blind. Such a sister would be seated in the audience, signing into the palm of just one individual. Since she would not be situated prominently as would an interpreter for those who are deaf only, she would not need to use a head covering in this instance.

Songs: When the program calls for a song that is not available in the appropriate sign language, an alternate song that shares a similar theme or sentiment should be carefully chosen. Attention should be given to the timing of the alternate song so that it does not unduly delay the program. If no songs in the appropriate sign language are available, the group should sign the scheduled song through an interpreter, preferably a brother.

We send our warm Christian love.

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.