

# Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



2821 Route 22, Patterson, NY 12563-2237 Phone: (845) 306-1100

November 24, 2012

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Witnessing in public places

Dear Brothers:

This letter replaces the letter dated November 1, 2003, to all bodies of elders regarding witnessing in public places. That letter should be removed from the congregation permanent file of policy letters and be destroyed.

The Bible indicates that the apostles were zealously preaching both in public places and from house to house. (Acts 5:42; 20:20) In like manner, elders today are to organize the preaching efforts in their local congregation territory so that the publishers share in all aspects of the ministry. While public witnessing should never overshadow the house-to-house work, it has proved to be an increasingly effective means to reach many with the good news of the Kingdom. The body of elders should ensure that any program for organized public witnessing, such as those listed below, is practical and effective for reaching the most people possible with the good news of the Kingdom. Emphasis should be placed on starting Bible studies and following up promptly on interest shown, not just placing literature. This work should be overseen by the service overseer. Periodically analyze the results being obtained to determine if any adjustments are necessary. When the circuit overseer visits your congregation, update him on what is being accomplished and benefit from any practical suggestions he may have. When the territory being worked is held by multiple congregations, such as is the case with foreign-language congregations, the involved bodies of elders and circuit overseers should cooperate together. Publishers who are chosen to participate in this avenue of witnessing should present themselves in a dignified way. Their appearance and dress should be professional, well-arranged, and modest. Helpful suggestions for all aspects of our ministry can be found in *Our Kingdom Ministry*.

**Provide practical training:** Practical training should be given to the publishers to help them handle unique situations they may encounter. For example: **(1) Disruptive ones:** Remain calm and friendly. Do not debate with the person. If near a literature display, step away so others will not be discouraged from approaching. If the person persists in causing a disturbance or becomes irate and threatening, it may be best to leave the area. Help from the local authorities may be requested in extreme situations. **(2) Disfellowshipped ones interested in returning to the congregation:** Obtain the person's name and address. Assure him that you will give the information to the elders in his local area, who will be pleased to visit him in order to explain how he may return to the congregation. **(3) The media:** Explain that we have a wonderful message to share but would like to set up an appointment if an interview is being requested. Ask for a business card and inform the individual that he will be contacted with further information. He can also be directed to the [jw.org](http://jw.org) Web site for additional information about the work of Jehovah's Witnesses.

**Tables and mobile literature displays:** Congregations with territory in major urban areas benefit the most from the use of tables and mobile literature displays. Such tools enable publishers to reach people who might not otherwise be contacted, such as those who live in high-security buildings or who commute to the area for work. In addition, territories with many gated and inaccessible communities may likewise benefit from this form of public witnessing. Of course, all congregations can evaluate their territory's unique makeup to determine to what extent such an ap-

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proach is practical. The service overseer takes the lead in making sure that established witnessing arrangements are well-organized and effective. However, it may prove beneficial for the entire body of elders to discuss at one of their quarterly meetings possible locations to expand public witnessing in their territory by means of a witnessing table or a mobile display.

Possible locations include transportation stations, public squares, parks, busy streets, major shopping malls, college campuses, airports, and locations of annual events. Primary consideration should be given to areas of high pedestrian traffic where the most people can be reached. Some locations, such as a busy sidewalk, may be more conducive to a smaller mobile literature display than a table. There may be other locations, such as parks or public squares, where permission to set up a table is not obtained but a mobile literature display can be used. It has been found that tables set up at shopping malls are more effective than those outside a single large store where individuals are usually focused on their reason for visiting that specific store. The table should be covered by a clean, dignified tablecloth, and the literature display should be simple and have literature in multiple languages as appropriate.

Before setting up a witnessing table, permission should be obtained from the administrator or manager of the facility or from the appropriate secular authority. The service overseer can take the lead in researching potential witnessing locations and learning what is required in the way of permits or permission. He may enlist the assistance of other capable elders, ministerial servants, or pioneers. Any needed permissions or insurance should be obtained in the name of an individual publisher, not in the name of the congregation. However, publishers should carefully review any such applications to see what responsibility they are taking upon themselves with respect to liability. We would have no objection to a publisher paying a nominal administrative fee, as the fee is not paid in order to obtain permission to preach but only for use of the space. Prior to setting up a table at a college or university campus, it is necessary to obtain approval from a school official or the dean of students. Some colleges and universities stipulate that a club or organization representing Jehovah's Witnesses must be formed on campus before we are allowed to engage in any witnessing activities there. If so, it is best not to pursue this method. There is also a need for discernment so that a table is not set up in an area where there are several religious groups. Inside a fair, for example, several religious groups may set up booths, pay the fair fees, and sell their goods. Our sharing in such an arrangement in the same area with them could convey the wrong impression about our ministry.

The table should be positioned where it is most visible in accordance with established regulations. If possible, there is advantage in having the table set up in the same location, on the same days, and at the same times. The display should be neat and dignified. Experience has shown that a simple, eye-appealing arrangement of literature is best. Use literature that will be most effective in your territory. Depending on the nature of your territory, it may be appropriate to display literature in more than one language. Bibles should not be distributed indiscriminately. However, if someone requests a Bible or demonstrates sincere interest in the truth, then a Bible may be offered to the person. In this setting, publishers should not mention the donation arrangement. If visitors inquire about how our work is funded, the publisher may explain that donations can be sent to the address listed in the literature. Contribution boxes should not be set up; neither should publishers personally accept any donations.

If allowed, the use of posters or banners may be effective. We are pleased to inform you that special files for making displays of *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines and the *Bible Teach* book have been prepared specifically for use in this form of public witnessing. Additional files may also be made available at times, such as for the Memorial invitation campaign. The PDF files are now available for download on the jw.org Web site in the "Forms" section under the "Documents" tab and can be used locally to produce displays that give a dignified and unified appearance. Individual publishers may decide to cover the costs for producing these displays, or the congregation may decide to do so.

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The files are formatted to be printed in 18 x 24 inch sizes, which have proved to be an effective size for table displays. Some have used simple easels, stands, or frames to display these posters. Attached are sample pictures of tables and mobile displays that reflect an effective and dignified appearance. These pictures are simply guides. Do not feel that you have to replicate exactly what is shown. (In due course, in the "Supplier Arrangements" section of [jw.org](http://jw.org), we hope to provide further options for the obtaining of mobile literature displays and for the mounting of artwork.) Whatever displays are chosen, they should always be of high quality and should reflect favorably on Jehovah's name and organization. The service overseer should ensure that this is the case.

Every effort should be made to obtain contact information and to follow up quickly on interest shown. If the person lives outside of the congregation's assigned territory, a *Please Follow Up* (S-43) form should be given to the congregation secretary, who will promptly forward it to the appropriate congregation. If he does not know which congregation or group should receive the form or does not have the mailing address, he should submit the *Please Follow Up* request using [jw.org](http://jw.org). If this is not possible, he should send the paper form to the branch office. When possible, the publisher may continue to cultivate the interest through the telephone or e-mail until the individual is contacted by a local publisher.

**Special Metropolitan Public Witnessing Program:** At times, the branch office may initiate a Special Metropolitan Public Witnessing Program that involves pioneers from several surrounding circuits near a major metropolitan area. At such a time, additional information will be provided to the local circuit overseers and congregations so that all may work together in an orderly and organized manner.—1 Cor. 14:40.

**Nursing homes:** Some publishers have had good success in reaching this elderly population by approaching the activities director of the facility and volunteering their help in meeting the spiritual need of the residents. It may be explained that volunteers from the congregation would be pleased to conduct a free weekly Bible study with anyone who wishes to attend. Oftentimes, the staff, family members, visitors, and volunteers will join in the study.

**Jails and penitentiaries:** See *Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders* (S-22).

**Harbor witnessing:** Harbor witnessing is a specialized ministry that requires specific direction as to how it should be done and who should participate. If there is a major harbor within your congregation's territory and you have not yet received specific direction from the branch office on harbor witnessing, please *write* to the branch office for further instruction, including the name, location, and size of the port. If you have a program in place to do harbor witnessing and have not yet contacted the branch office, please write and tell us what harbor is being worked, what is being done, and who has oversight of the arrangement.

We are confident Jehovah will bless your efforts to reach all honesthearted ones with the good news. (Eccl. 11:6; 1 Cor. 3:6-9) Please accept an expression of 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.