

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



Hse. No. J348/4 - Tema Beach Road - Nungua, Accra
P. O. Box GP 760, Accra, Ghana Tel. No.: (030) 2712456-8; 7010110 Fax: (030) 2712454

November 30, 2012

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Weddings and Funerals

Dear Brothers:

We are writing at this time to share with you some reminders and guidelines regarding the above subjects. This has become necessary because for some time now we have received negative comments and reports about some of the weddings and funerals conducted in some of the congregations.

Wedding and Marriage Ceremonies

The April 2006 *Our Kingdom Ministry* insert provided some very valuable information regarding the proper procedure to follow when performing either civil or customary marriage. It is good to see that in a number of congregations the publishers are making sincere efforts to apply these guidelines. No doubt, this is partly due to the encouragement and constructive counsel you keep giving to the flock on this matter and we commend you for what you are doing in this regard. It has been noted, however, that in some cases when a marriage reception is held following a customary or civil marriage ceremony, proper supervision has been lacking and the choice of entertainment has been in bad taste. Thus there are reported cases of suggestive dancing, loud music, and overindulgence in alcoholic beverages. At times such gatherings have raised questions about our identification as Jehovah's Witnesses.—Compare 1 Corinthians 10:31.

We would like to kindly remind you that it would be wise for any appointed brother who is called upon to assist in organizing any marriage, be it customary or civil, to take time to investigate well to see if the would-be couple are in good standing, and if they are determined to follow the sound Scriptural direction given by the faithful and discreet slave class on their wedding arrangements. (Prov. 22:3) By neglecting to carefully look into these matters, some well-meaning elders could find themselves having officiated, participated or assisted in adulterous marriages, or in wedding celebrations that do not honor Jehovah. This sets a bad example for others in the congregation and may result in a review of the appointed man's qualifications.—*ks10* 12:5.

Funerals

Burial wishes: Although we cannot force all true Christians to write down their personal funeral wishes before they die, it is wise for each one to do so. The example you Christian overseers set in this important matter is well appreciated. Have you taken this step? Once a true Christian has his or her personal instructions put down in writing and attested to by witnesses, unbelieving family members are often compelled to accept it.—See *The Watchtower*, February 15, 2009, page 31.

When others do not agree: When unbelieving family members insist on introducing questionable customs, perhaps failing to respect the personal instructions of the deceased or because the deceased failed to put down his or her wishes in writing, what can be done? We have been advised to conscientiously withdraw completely from the funeral and schedule a simple memorial service at the Kingdom Hall.—*km-GH 7/08* p. 6 par. 17.

Remember, who actually buries the dead has nothing to do with the person's life-record with Jehovah. We want to actively encourage our brothers to use the Kingdom Hall if at all possible, either for a funeral, or a simple memorial service (if relatives refuse to accept the wishes of the believing family). (See also, *The Watchtower June 1, 1978* page 8) Why? Because this highlights to everyone that the event is a religious service. It is conducted by Jehovah's Witnesses in our center of worship, according to our standards and for the purpose of sharing Bible-based truth and hope.—John 5:28-30; Rev. 21:4.

Avoid the appearance of interfaith: Sadly, in their efforts to ensure that the deceased are buried in a dignified manner, a number of appointed brothers have allowed unbelievers to supervise one part of the funeral while the congregation handled the other part. (2 Cor. 6:14) This should be avoided. Why? Because it may give onlookers the impression that we are in agreement with ungodly funeral customs, or are partly sponsoring an unchristian funeral. Kindly encourage our brothers to review the *Our Kingdom Ministry* inserts of May and July to September 2008, whenever these issues arise, so that they will know what to do and what not to do.

Use of the Kingdom Hall and Kingdom Songs: When it comes to the use of the Kingdom Hall for funerals, note this point in the letter to all congregations of April 20, 2009, page 3, paragraph 2: "What should be avoided would be worldly displays of unrestrained wailing, talking to the deceased, dancing around the coffin, bowing the head in greeting to the deceased, and other displays of hopeless mourning. Therefore, if it is so desired, and no unscriptural acts are envisaged, the coffin may be opened briefly in the Kingdom Hall. The entire body of elders is responsible to ensure that nothing detracts from the dignity of the Christian funeral arrangements. It would be wise to explain well in advance, especially to any unbelievers who plan to be present, how things will proceed and what will be permitted in the Kingdom Hall during the Christian funeral. Attendants should be assigned to assist in keeping order throughout the program."

Questions have been asked about the playing of Kingdom songs. Concerning singing, the May 2008 *Our Kingdom Ministry* insert said on page 6, paragraph 15: "What impression may be given, for example, if Witnesses gather in the presence of the corpse the night before the burial and spend many hours singing and praying?" The *Our Kingdom Ministry* of August 2008 insert added on page 4, paragraph 8: "While Kingdom songs may be used to introduce and conclude the funeral talk, it would seem to be imitating Christendom if groups of brothers were to gather and sing for long periods of time before the talk begins." That having been said, there would be nothing wrong with softly playing a few Kingdom songs shortly before and after the program is conducted.

Dress, Grooming and Decorum at Christian Weddings and Funerals

It appears that some are confused as to what dress is appropriate when attending a Christian funeral or wedding at the Kingdom Hall. Since these events are Christian gatherings,

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

November 30, 2012

Page 3

held in Jehovah's house, a Christian would want to always select clothing that honors and dignifies the God we worship. Quite recently, the Governing Body reminded all members of the Bethel family: "In these evil days, we need to pay more than the usual attention to the Scriptures so that we will not be overtaken by the customs and spirit of this wicked system of things. In this regard, our dress and grooming should be modest and reflect the dignity of the God whom we worship. We should wear clothes that befit Christian ministers." Surely this principle would apply when attending any event held in Jehovah's house!—*km-GH 7/08 p. 5 par. 9; km-GH 8/01 p. 3.*

It has been observed that some, even appointed men, do not bring Bibles and songbooks when attending funerals and weddings in the Kingdom Hall. We want to help the brothers to understand that weddings and funeral talks held at the Kingdom Hall are Bible-based events. Jehovah's Witnesses would always want to take their Bibles along so that they can follow along as scriptures are discussed. Witnesses would want to be alert to the opportunity to share their Bible with unbelievers who may be present, thus giving a fine Witness. We appeal to you elders to think seriously about these matters and to do what you can to be a good example to the flock.—Phil. 3:17; 1 Pet. 5:3.

Brothers, as appointed men in the congregation you have been given a great trust. (Luke 12:48) The lives of the brothers can be seriously affected by the decisions you make and the example you set. (Phil. 3:17) We feel confident that you will seriously carry out your responsibility to ensure that any arrangements that are made for funerals and weddings in your congregation "do not go beyond the things that are written." (1 Cor. 4:6) Always follow the guidelines and principles laid down by the faithful slave so that you will be able to say, "In no way are we giving any cause for stumbling, that our ministry might not be found fault with."—2 Cor. 6:3.

Please accept our warm best wishes.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*

c: All Traveling Overseers