

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



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December 4, 2012

TO ALL CONGREGATION SERVICE COMMITTEES IN THE UNITED STATES BRANCH
TERRITORY

Re: 2013 special conventions

Dear Brothers:

We are pleased to inform you that the Governing Body has approved special conventions in eight countries during the 2013 convention season. Congregations in the following states are being invited to participate: Arizona, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Washington State.

Along with this letter, we have provided an announcement letter that should be read to your congregation during your next Service Meeting and after your next *Watchtower* Study. The announcement letter will inform your congregation as to whether or not it has been invited to attend.

While most congregations have not been invited this year and thus will not need to be familiar with the application process, it is quite possible that a member of your congregation may be specifically invited if he is asked to join a travel group by someone from a congregation in an invited state. Thus, this letter, the *2013 Special Convention Application*, and the *Applicant Instructions* should be retained in your file and be available for prompt follow-through. These documents will also continue to be available on jw.org.

As you will see from the announcement letter to the congregation, arrangements for these special conventions are quite similar to those used last year. Delegates are free to make their own travel arrangements or use a travel agency we have prearranged to assist. Please note the following instructions.

Applicant requirements: We recommend that all the elders in the states invited to participate familiarize themselves with the content of this letter, the announcement letter, the application, and the *Applicant Instructions*. In particular, it will be crucial for the congregation secretary (or another elder assigned to assist) to become very fluent with all aspects of this arrangement. We ask that the elders be very open with those who are not in good health or are dependent on another person to function. If a person has poor health or frailties due to age or some other handicap, it is best to inform him that he should not apply. In the past, applications have been received from individuals with serious sight or hearing limitations not corrected by glasses or hearing aids. Others suffered from severe obesity and could not walk long distances or stand for extended periods of time. In such cases, long trips under difficult physical conditions could prove harmful to the person's health and may also adversely impact the activities of other delegates. Therefore, all applicants are encouraged to give serious and prayerful consideration to their health limitations and personal safety before applying to become a delegate.

After reviewing carefully the criteria for those eligible to apply as found in the *Applicant Instructions*, the secretary will print out a hard copy application for each person who requests one and who qualifies in the categories stipulated. Also, a copy of the *Applicant Instructions* should be provided to each applicant. An application must be submitted for each person. These should be completed and submitted to the Congregation Service Committee as soon as possible, but no later than **January 1, 2013**.

Electronic application entry: Once the Congregation Service Committee has approved an applicant, the secretary will enter the information into an electronic form that is available on the jw.org Web site. After an application has been electronically entered on the site, you will be able to obtain a printout of the information. **Please use this printout to confirm with the applicant that his information is correct.** If any changes are necessary, please enter them immediately. **The secretary should enter all applications by January 15, 2013.** Thereafter, the signed hard copy applications should be kept in the congregation file.

Travel groups: Effort will be made to accommodate the requests of those who wish to attend the same convention with family members or friends. However, the size of the group will be limited to no more than *eight* persons. Generally, groups should be comprised of qualified individuals from invited congregations. Family members or close friends of those in invited congregations and who meet the qualifications may be included in a travel group even if their own congregation is not invited. They should still receive and submit their applications through their own Congregation Service Committee. One member of the group should be designated to serve as the group contact before applications are submitted. Generally a brother will serve as the contact. However, if a group is comprised of sisters only, one of them may act as the group contact. To be linked together, each applicant (including a marriage mate and other family members in the same household) must use the same travel group identification (group ID). The group contact should request a unique group ID from his secretary. The secretary must obtain a unique group ID from the jw.org Web site and provide it to the group contact to include on his application. The group contact is then responsible to provide this unique group ID to all others in his group so that they, too, can enter the group ID on their applications.

Special rooming: Confidentially, we will be asking the host branch office to poll local brothers to determine if some might be able to provide limited rooming provisions in private homes. This information is not to be made known to the applicants in general. However, if the elders are aware of a longtime, faithful servant, perhaps with many years of full-time service, who is not able to fully finance such a trip, he could be encouraged to apply and the secretary can indicate on the electronic jw.org application that this delegate qualifies for the special rooming provision, if available.

Use of jw.org Web site: A “Convention” tab is available on the jw.org Web site. If the secretary (or other elder assigned to assist) does not have the “Convention” role, one of the local domain administrators for your congregation should add this role for him. This section will be the primary tool for the electronic entry of applications and for our later posting of selection results. The secretary should plan to check this site on at least a weekly basis as additional announcements may be posted.

Delegate selection: Once submitted electronically via the jw.org Web site, the applications will be reviewed by the branch office. By means of the “Convention” section of the site, the secretary will be notified if individuals in your congregation have been selected to attend one of the conventions. The secretary should then notify the selected delegate and provide him with the “Convention Selection Summary” page that will be printable from the site. Also, an *Approved Hotel List* for the convention city will be provided with instructions regarding how to reserve hotel accommodations. Other information will be included, such as the exact dates of the convention and what is expected of the delegate. Also, the contact information of a prearranged travel agency will be supplied in case the delegate chooses to make use of its services. It is not necessary to contact the branch office by telephone or letter to determine if a person has been selected or not. If the “Status Summary” information on the Web site indicates “Applied,” the individual has not yet been selected.

Change of status: If an applicant or selected delegate is no longer participating at any time, please immediately cancel their application on the jw.org Web site. Or, if an applicant or selected delegate changes congregations, please use the “Congregation Transfer” feature of the Web site to move their application to the new congregation. This will keep our records up-to-date. (In addition, please send a copy of the publisher’s hard copy application to his new congregation.) If a group contact is canceling, the congregation secretary must click on the “Group ID” number and then select someone else to be the group contact *before* he can mark the group contact’s application as “Canceled.” If the entire group is canceling, the congregation secretary should mark all of the other applications as “Canceled” *before* he handles the group contact. After that, he can mark the contact’s application as “Canceled.” In other words, the system will not allow the secretary to cancel the group contact until someone else is assigned as the contact or all other members of the group have been removed.

If an individual selected to attend a special convention loses his exemplary status and is no longer qualified to attend, the delegate should be thoroughly informed of the reason for your decision. Such a person would be fully responsible for any financial loss associated with his abrupt disqualification as a delegate, even up to the time he was supposed to depart.

“Confirmed” delegates: A selected delegate will not be considered to be a “confirmed” delegate until he has purchased his air tickets or has paid a deposit with a travel agent. Thus, the secretary should maintain regular communication with all selected delegates to determine such. He should immediately update the jw.org Web site to reflect this “confirmed” status. When the secretary notifies the branch office via the Web site that the delegate has acquired his tickets or has paid a deposit with a travel agent and is thus confirmed, the host branch office will correspond directly with the delegate to ascertain in which hotel he reserved a room and to inquire as to the delegate’s preferences regarding activities with the local brothers and the days these can be scheduled. Thus, it is in the selected delegate’s best interests to secure air tickets as early as possible in the process, thus confirming his status as a delegate and that he will indeed be attending.

Questions: As questions arise throughout the duration of this project, a *Frequently Asked Questions* document will be provided on the jw.org Web site and updated regularly. In addition, the following e-mail address is being provided for the **secretary** to submit questions not answered in *Frequently Asked Questions*: InternationalConventions@jw.org. Such inquiries will be answered in a timely manner. Therefore, it may not be necessary to phone the branch office.

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However, if an urgent matter arises, needing immediate attention, the following telephone number may be used: (845) 306-3815. **Before calling or e-mailing, please consult *Frequently Asked Questions* for the latest updates on any recent questions.**

It is hoped that the above information will be helpful to you while you render assistance to publishers in your congregation who show interest in attending one of the 2013 special conventions. We pray for Jehovah's rich blessings upon all these arrangements. Please accept an expression of our warm love and best wishes.

Your brothers,
*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*

cc: Traveling overseers

PS to coordinator of the body of elders:

If your congregation is in one of the states invited to participate, please make sure that each member of the Congregation Service Committee has a copy of this letter, the announcement letter, the application, and the *Applicant Instructions*. In particular, the secretary should become very fluent with all details so as to properly direct the applicants and regularly track and communicate the status of the applicant or selected delegate.