

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



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TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Dear Brothers:

This letter replaces the letter dated June 15, 2004, to all bodies of elders. Thus, that letter should be removed from the congregation permanent file of policy letters and should be destroyed.

As you well know, visits by traveling overseers provide an interchange of encouragement and the congregations are thus made firm in the faith. (Rom. 1:12; Eph. 4:3) Because of their love for Jehovah and their brothers these traveling ministers and their wives, if married, are determined to render their service to the congregations without placing an expensive burden on them. It is good to see that, out of appreciation, our brothers and sisters are also doing all they can to support these faithful brothers and their wives. The purpose of this letter is to commend all elders for taking the lead in caring for the needs of our traveling overseers and their wives, and also to provide further direction on how such needs can be better cared for so that our traveling overseers can remain healthy and continue in this important work.

PROVIDING FOOD AND WATER: The congregation provides meals for the traveling overseer and his wife, if married. Usually this can be best accomplished when individual publishers or families are given the opportunity to invite the traveling overseer to their homes for a meal. When traveling overseers and their wives partake of meals, especially the midday meal, in the homes of the brothers rather than having them delivered at one location, much good can be accomplished since meal times are fine occasions for upbuilding conversations and the forming of close friendships. (Compare Acts 2:42.) For this reason, we urge you to continue encouraging the brothers and sisters to consider it a privilege to invite the circuit overseer and his wife over to their homes especially for the midday meal and, perhaps, some evening meals. While it is good to produce something nice for the traveling overseer, it is not necessary for large groups of publishers to be involved in preparing a simple meal. The emphasis during the special week of activity should be, not upon food, but upon increased field service and spiritual things.—Luke 10:38, 42; Matt. 6:31.

Where practical, the afternoon meeting for field service can be held in or near the home where lunch will be served. The food should be served hot and prepared and presented in a way that is clean and hygienic. It would be a kindness to inquire if the traveling overseer or his wife, because of health reasons, cannot eat certain foods. What about breakfast? While it is appreciated if the congregation provides breakfast in some cases, it may be possible for the traveling overseer and his wife to be given supplies at their accommodations so that they prepare a simple breakfast on their own. This will normally make it easier for them to get to the meeting for field service on time.

To remain healthy, traveling overseers should be provided water that is clean and safe to drink. Water should be brought to the boil and stored in clean containers. If the congregation cannot do this, sachet or bottled water should be purchased for their use.—g03 9/22 p. 12; g97 11/22 p. 12.

ACCOMMODATION: It is important that the traveling overseer and his wife get a good night's sleep. As you can imagine, this can be difficult when they are sleeping on a different bed each week. Accommodation does not have to be grand or luxurious. However, it is appreciated when the elders make it their goal to find the cleanest, most dignified accommodation possible. Elders should ask themselves: "If I was doing the work of the circuit overseer, with his busy schedule, would I be willing to live here for a week?" (Matt. 7:12) It is preferred if the accommodation is in the house of a Witness who is in good standing. They should be concerned about the comfort and well-being of their guests. The room should be cleaned thoroughly ahead of time. The mattress should be clean and fresh. Sheets, blankets, towels, and pillows should be clean. The room should offer a degree of privacy. Bathing and toilet facilities should be convenient and as private as possible. One of the elders should personally inspect the accommodation to see if it is ready for the visitors before they arrive.

In some circuits where it is practical, a centrally located, modest apartment can be made available to accommodate the circuit overseer. From this location, the circuit overseer may be able to serve a number of the congregations in his circuit while commuting. If a traveling overseer resides in an apartment, then at times he will have some meals, such as breakfast and perhaps, supper, at his residence, and this would be understood by the brothers. In these cases reasonable food expenses may be submitted for reimbursement. A traveling overseer would not require the brothers to travel long distances to bring food to him. In most cases, it would therefore be best for him to partake of the midday meal in the territory of the congregation he is serving. In view of distance and other factors, most traveling overseers and their wives may be compelled to change their accommodation each week. This no doubt places extra stress on them. Please, continue to make sure that their accommodation and other legitimate needs are always cared for satisfactorily.—Compare 3 John 5-8.

TRAVELING OVERSEER'S EXPENSES: As a reminder, the coordinator of the body of elders should always take the initiative to approach the circuit overseer sometime toward the end of his visit and offer to cover the expenses incurred in the course of his service according to the ability of the congregation. Since the traveling overseers will not normally take the initiative to submit their expenses, the congregation will want to be conscious of their privilege to assist these devoted elders who serve them wholeheartedly. Note: It is no longer necessary to present a resolution to the congregation to cover these expenses. They may be viewed as a recurring operating expense. Therefore, it would be a loving-kindness on the part of the congregation if the elders arranged to cover the expenses of the traveling overseer before he moves to the next congregation. If, because of unusual circumstances, a congregation is unable to cover all the expenses, the elders can provide what is possible and explain the situation to the traveling overseer who will request supplementary assistance from the branch office. Similarly, assembly overseers should make sure to approach traveling representatives at the end of each assembly and offer to cover their expenses.

Thank you for taking note of these important matters. Please accept our warm Christian love and best wishes.

Yours brothers,

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