

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



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May 1, 2013

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Traveling overseer accommodations and financial matters

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Dear Brothers:

1. This letter replaces the April 5, 2000, letter to all bodies of elders in the United States. That letter should be removed from the congregation permanent file of policy letters and be destroyed. The visits of traveling overseers are of great benefit to the brothers worldwide. In this regard, we wish to provide the following information concerning accommodations and financial matters involving their service. These brothers and their wives deeply appreciate your hospitality. Such practical assistance enables the traveling overseers to get the most accomplished and to cultivate a warm relationship with the brothers.—Rom. 12:13; 2 Cor. 8:1-4, 12-15.

2. **Allowance:** Traveling overseers and their wives receive a small monthly allowance from the branch office for personal items. Unlike the allowance for special pioneers, the allowance for traveling overseers does not include a monthly housing allowance. The allowance is adjusted from time to time to reflect changes in living costs. In addition to the monthly allowance, each traveling overseer and his wife receive an annual amount based on the number of years each has been in full-time service. These modest funds, which are made available after January 1 each year, also serve to defray personal expenses they have, such as in connection with traveling back home to visit family members or to purchase necessary items, such as eyeglasses.

3. **Accommodations:** It is the responsibility of the body of elders to ensure that clean and suitable accommodations are arranged for the traveling overseer and his wife, if married, during the week of his visit. Even if an apartment is provided by the circuit, the traveling overseer may need to stay locally instead of commuting to a distant apartment. If he stays in the home of a local brother, please make sure the home provides what is needed for the traveling overseer to have sufficient rest and to do his work. Some brothers have lovingly made their homes available for two or more weeks at a time when circumstances have made this practical. If there is a need to rent a place for the week, please check with the branch office.

4. When you open up your hearts and your homes and provide suitable accommodations for your traveling overseer and his wife during their stay with you, it is deeply appreciated. Although they do not wish to be an expensive burden, traveling overseers do need and appreciate clean places

to stay. Some have allergies or other health problems, and it is the responsibility of the body of elders to inquire of the traveling overseer as to any needs in this regard.

5. It is not easy to live in a different place each week, year after year. However, there are little things we can do that will make the traveling overseer's stay pleasant. (3 John 5, 6) Accommodations in a private home should be selected carefully. The coordinator of the body of elders or another elder designated by him should look at the accommodations to be offered to the traveling overseer to make sure all is in good order and is in accord with what is described in this letter. Traveling overseers have a full week of theocratic activity in each congregation. Careful advance arrangements to provide appropriate accommodations will help them fulfill their responsibilities in a fine way. Homes where there are family problems should not be used. Furthermore, if the host has a serious illness or severe allergies that require special attention, it would be best to avoid using such accommodations.

6. Though all of us enjoy the company of the traveling overseer and his wife and they enjoy ours, they need adequate time to themselves to study, to meditate, and to do necessary work. Sufficient rest is vital if they are to do their assigned work the next day. They follow a schedule that allows them to serve best the spiritual interests of the entire congregation.

7. Arrangements should be made for the traveling overseer and his wife to have a place to hang up their clothes. Clean dresser drawers should be made available if at all possible. A chair, a writing table upon which a computer or typewriter may be placed, and good lighting are helpful. (2 Ki. 4:10) Traveling overseers very much appreciate this.

8. Elaborate meals are not needed. Also, it is left up to the discretion of the traveling overseers whether to accept any invitations to eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner with the brothers. At times they may want to eat their meals alone with their wives, in harmony with the schedule of the visit. (w12 8/15 p. 31) Traveling overseers deeply appreciate your congregation's hospitality and, barring health problems, will gladly eat what is provided. Wholesome, nourishing food enables them to feel well physically and to keep up with their schedule.—g95 3/8 pp. 5-7; g89 12/8 pp. 8-9.

9. A number of thoughtful coordinators of the body of elders have made it a point at the end of the traveling overseer's stay to ask him about the accommodation that had been arranged for him. This is a good practice, and we commend you brothers for showing this extra concern. It is not necessary to have the circuit overseer stay in a different home each time he visits the congregation. For example, if there is only one home that is truly suitable, then it may be best for him to stay there each visit, if the householder is willing and it is convenient, instead of rotating him to different homes where the facilities may be inadequate.—2 Ki. 4:8-11; 3 John 8.

10. If a congregation is unable to provide a room and meals and cannot assist in caring for expenses of accommodations, food, and so forth, the traveling overseer may submit his expenses for these items to the branch office for reimbursement.—See *Instructions for Congregation Accounting* (S-27).

11. **Circuit apartments:** In some metropolitan areas or where congregations are fairly close together, suitable and convenient accommodations may not be available in the homes of the brothers for the traveling overseer and his wife. In these areas the collective body of elders in the

circuit or district may decide that it would be more advantageous for the circuit or district to provide a modest, reasonably-priced apartment for the use of the traveling overseer.

12. It would not be appropriate for a traveling overseer to suggest that the brothers provide an apartment or for him to encourage it. If after prayerfully considering the factors involved the collective body of elders in the circuit or district decides that a rental apartment for the traveling overseer is practical and cost effective, the branch office has no objection if the elders make such arrangements.—See *Instructions for Circuit Accounting* (S-331).

13. A congregation or several congregations may have in mind building a new Kingdom Hall or renovating one, and they may wish to include an apartment that could be used by a traveling overseer. This is a matter for the collective body(ies) of elders using the Kingdom Hall to determine. However, the elders will want to communicate with the assembly overseer(s) as to the need and practicality of such an apartment before pursuing it. They will also need to contact the Regional Building Committee (RBC) regarding the possible construction of an apartment since the RBC has specific direction from the branch office on constructing Kingdom Hall apartments. If all agree that an apartment is practical and feasible, the RBC and body(ies) of elders should clearly outline the proposal in a joint letter to the branch office. This letter should include the purpose of the apartment, the approximate costs, and the estimated date construction would begin. Details should also be included regarding the desirability and safety of the neighborhood and accessibility of the apartment to the area served. The branch office must approve in writing all new Kingdom Hall apartments. While construction expenses would be the responsibility of the congregation(s) directly involved in the project, the circuit or other congregations may assist as outlined in *Instructions for Circuit Accounting*. In any event, no solicitation should be made of other congregations, the circuit, or individuals to fund the construction. Before an apartment for a traveling overseer is included in a project, the congregation(s) using the hall would need to consider this matter by resolution.

14. When a district apartment is being considered, the consensus of the circuit elders can be conveyed through the assembly overseers to the particular assembly overseer in the circuit where the apartment would be located. After the district apartment is in place, it would be the assembly overseer who would make the yearly visual walk-through inspection of the apartment with the traveling overseer to review its condition. This would be in the same manner that assembly overseers perform inspections on the circuit level each year with their circuit overseers.

15. It would not be proper for a traveling overseer to suggest or request that the circuit rent an apartment and thus put an unnecessary financial burden on brothers. This would preclude his suggesting major renovations to an existing apartment or pressuring others to make changes to plans for a proposed apartment. Furthermore, we request that newly appointed traveling overseers not use trailers. However, some traveling overseers who have been in traveling work for a long time have personal trailers that they have obtained with their own funds, and they prefer to live in these. If a traveling overseer and his wife have been serving many years and, after carefully weighing their circumstances, they wish to begin using a trailer, they may write to the branch office about this. If permission is granted, however, all expenses incurred in connection with the purchase of the trailer, insurance, maintenance, towing the trailer, and so forth must be cared for by the traveling overseer himself. It is likewise the responsibility of the traveling overseer to care for all expenses for any tow vehicle. It is not the responsibility of a congregation, circuit, or dis-

trict to share in the burden of trailer expenses, and neither congregation funds nor circuit funds should be used for this purpose. If a brother who has been in the traveling work for many years has a trailer, the circuit may decide to pay for the expense of parking the trailer. This would be the only exception to what is outlined above.

16. **Expenses during the week of the visit:** The coordinator of the body of elders may ask the traveling overseer to submit his expenses for the week. Such expenses may include some food expenses, routine office expenses, transportation expenses that are not covered by the branch office, and certain moderate personal expenses. If the expenses are higher than usual, the traveling overseer could divide them among the congregations or submit them at the circuit assembly or special assembly day rather than asking one congregation to cover them. (See *Instructions for Circuit Accounting* (S-331).) If the congregation is not in a position to cover all or part of the traveling overseer's expenses, he can submit these to the branch office for consideration along with receipts. At no time should the traveling overseer and his wife be a financial burden to any congregation.—2 Cor. 11:9; 1 Thess. 2:9.

17. The traveling overseer should be considerate and discerning in submitting his expenses. Some personal expenses could be covered by the monthly allowance from the branch office or from personal contributions he may have received from individuals in the congregation. Other personal expenses, such as clothing, cosmetics, vitamins, over-the-counter drugs, insurance for personal property, or life insurance, would not be submitted to congregations or circuits for reimbursement. Rather, they should be covered with the traveling overseer's personal funds.

18. If Internet or mobile telephone service is used to communicate with congregations and with the branch office, the expense incurred may be covered by either dividing the cost among the congregations or submitting them at the circuit assembly or special assembly day. If the congregations or circuit are unable to cover the cost of Internet or mobile telephone service, it may be submitted to the branch office for reimbursement. However, any Internet or mobile telephone service *beyond* what is needed to communicate with congregations and the branch office would be a personal expense for the traveling overseer to shoulder. Additional expenses related to Internet or mobile telephone service for the wife of a traveling overseer would also be a personal expense not submitted to congregations or circuits.

19. **Health care and vehicles:** In some lands, the branch office has made arrangements to provide health care and reliable transportation for traveling overseers. These costs are supported by donations made through the congregations.

20. **Proper use of congregation funds and circuit funds:** Congregation and circuit donations are dedicated funds for defraying congregation and circuit expenses. If such funds were used to make money gifts to traveling overseers beyond their actual expenses, this would undoubtedly disturb or stumble some of our brothers. We should rightly be concerned that this does not happen. Money gifts should not be made from congregation or circuit funds. Likewise, it is inappropriate for individuals in a congregation or circuit to solicit money from brothers and sisters and then provide this as a gift to a traveling overseer.—2 Cor. 8:20.

21. Is it in harmony with theocratic principles for individual publishers to give traveling overseers personal gifts? If one is moved by appreciation and has a heart desire to make such a contribution, that is for the individual to decide. Such genuine Christian generosity on the part of

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the giver and acceptance on the part of the traveling overseer are private matters that need not concern others. (Matt. 6:3, 4; w09 2/15 p. 14 par. 20) However, soliciting of funds from others, even on a personal basis, should not be done.

22. It is realized that in many lands resources are limited and the economy may be unstable. Nevertheless, we commend your willing spirit in caring for the needs of our traveling overseers. Please be assured of our warm Christian love and best wishes.

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

cc: Assembly overseers
Assistant assembly overseers
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.