

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses Congrégation chrétienne des Témoins de Jéhovah



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March 26, 2014

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Use of congregation property

Dear Brothers:

Most of us are privileged to attend Christian meetings in a Kingdom Hall that is owned by Jehovah's people. This is truly a blessing, providing us with a secure place for receiving theocratic instruction and for coming together to engage in our public ministry.

Since the Kingdom Hall has been dedicated to Jehovah, it is good to bear in mind the purpose for which congregations own property, namely, to have a suitable location for congregation meetings. Using congregation property for housing or business purposes could jeopardize a congregation's tax-exempt status, create liability problems, or bring other complications.

Therefore, the Governing Body prefers that congregations not own or control property other than what is necessary for congregation meetings. Exceptions are appropriately made for modest dwellings for traveling overseers, special pioneers, or others in special full-time service at the discretion of the Worldwide Order of Special Full-Time Servants of Jehovah's Witnesses. All other property should be sold as soon as is reasonably practical. Before putting these properties on the market though, appropriate approval should be requested from the Local Design/Construction Department at the branch office.

Housing: It would be best if the congregation did not put itself in the position of providing housing for publishers, regular pioneers, elders, caretakers, or those who have come to serve where the need is greater. If any such persons now live on congregation property, they should be kindly asked to relocate as soon as they reasonably can. Occupancy by persons not in special full-time service raises liability concerns and other concerns.

Some congregations may feel that their special circumstances merit an exception to this general policy of not allowing publishers to live on congregation property. If you believe that it is necessary to allow someone to continue residing on your congregation's property, please provide full details to the Local Design/Construction Department.

If a current occupant is entitled to occupy the property for an extended period by virtue of rights given in a legal document (such as a life tenancy or life estate), then please contact the Local Design/Construction Department immediately for further direction.

No written agreement should stipulate a rent payment or a specific donated amount as a condition to living on the property. Acceptance of rent may establish a landlord-tenant relationship that creates legal obligations for the congregation that must be fulfilled. It could also involve the congregation in activities that may require the filing of tax returns or compliance

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with other regulations that could affect the tax-exempt status of the congregation. If there is currently a written lease entitling someone to occupy the congregation's property and to pay rent or make a donation, please contact the Local Design/Construction Department for further direction. Circuits may make contributions to the congregation to offset the expense of maintaining a residence for traveling overseers.

At times property with housing on it may be considered for purchase as a future Kingdom Hall site or for expansion of an existing location. Please contact the Local Design/Construction Department for direction on how to proceed before entering into any binding agreement to purchase such property.

Similarly, congregations should not own or rent out property or facilities that are used for recreational purposes or for social gatherings.

Use of congregation land by other parties: It is best to apply the basic principle that congregation property should be reserved for Christian meeting activities. Allowing others to use congregation property for commercial purposes can create complications and liability for the congregations. If others have been allowed to use congregation property, it will be best to explain tactfully but firmly that the property is no longer available for such activity. A few congregations in larger cities may be renting space in their Kingdom Hall building to a commercial business or as a residence. Those congregations that desire to maintain such an arrangement should contact the Local Design/Construction Department and explain the situation, including any special reasons why the arrangement should continue.

Cellular telephone companies, municipalities, utilities, or public service companies that want to use a small portion of congregation land may approach the congregations. Such entities may ask for a right of way or to lease some portion of the property. Congregations should not get involved with the installation of cell towers, billboards, or advertising signs on congregation property. This will avoid controversies and possible consequences arising from such installations. Congregations should focus on the commission to preach rather than having their attention diverted to such matters. (2 Tim. 4:2) If the bodies of elders of the congregations using a Kingdom Hall believe that their situation merits an exception to this policy, then they may contact the Local Design/Construction Department.

It is generally best to avoid getting into situations where congregations share parking space or driveways with those nearby. However, it may be that such an arrangement is already in place because it is legally required or because it provides real benefit to the congregation. If an arrangement of this type exists that the local elders wish to continue, please prepare a written agreement that clearly outlines the rights and responsibilities of each party, that describes how any disagreements will be handled, and that includes a clause so that the congregation cannot be held liable for the other party's wrongdoing. Please contact the Local Design/Construction Department for assistance.

Gifts of property: On occasion, a congregation is offered a gift of land and/or buildings that will not be needed for a new Kingdom Hall. In such instances the elders should meet with the intended donor to express appreciation for the proposed gift and encourage the intended donor to work directly with the branch office to determine whether there may be ways to fulfill the individual's intention.

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In conclusion, we believe that the above principles and policies will assist congregations to avoid many problems in connection with the use of their property. Reserving dedicated properties for their intended theocratic purpose will help all of us to focus on Kingdom activities. If you have questions about these matters or feel that an exception is needed, please contact the Local Design/Construction Department, and they will be pleased to provide further assistance.

We take this opportunity to convey our Christian love and warm greetings.

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.