

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses

1 Kingdom Way, West Hanningfield, Chelmsford CM2 8FW



17th June, 2021

Mr Sean McGovern
HM Coroner for Warwickshire
Warwickshire Justice Centre
Newbold Terrace
LEAMINGTON SPA
CV32 4EL

Re: Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths - Anne Mowbray

Dear Mr McGovern:

I am writing on behalf of Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Britain in response to your *Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths* of 30th April, 2021, concerning Mrs Anne Mowbray.

Jehovah's Witnesses have for many years had a long-standing religious practice, set out in their religious publications, with respect to vulnerable adults. The following summarises that religious practice.

At the outset, it is important to keep in mind that Jehovah's Witnesses endeavour to base their beliefs, practices and everyday way of life on Bible principles and "the law of the Christ." (Galatians 6:2) Consequently, Jehovah's Witnesses feel a deep sense of moral obligation to observe Jesus' command to 'love their neighbour as themselves.'—Matthew 22:38, 39.

There are no closer neighbours than members of our own family. Therefore, understandably, the Bible places the primary responsibility of caring for the elderly on family members, especially adult children.¹ In his first letter to Timothy, chapter 5, verse 4, the Bible writer, Paul, said: "If any widow has children or grandchildren, let these learn first to practice godly devotion in their own household and to repay their parents and grandparents what is due them, for this is acceptable in God's sight."

However, where an elderly person has no children, or where responsible adult children need and are happy to receive help in caring for their parents, individuals within congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses are moved by love of neighbour to offer necessary support and assistance. The same principle would apply to any vulnerable adult.

The Bible exhorts Christians to 'look out for the interests of others,' especially those who are weak, vulnerable or disadvantaged. (Philippians 2:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:14) For example, the Bible states: "The form of worship that is clean and undefiled from the standpoint of our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their tribulation." (James 1:27) Such 'looking after' involves not simply offering emotional support and words of comfort, but also practical assistance whenever needed.

The 15th March, 2014, edition of *The Watchtower*, pages 21-29,² published by Jehovah's Witnesses, included two articles for congregation study on the subject of caring for vulnerable adults, particularly the elderly. Those articles included religious guidance on the following subjects:

¹ [What Does the Bible Say About Caregiving for Elderly Parents? Help for Caregivers \(jw.org\)](http://www.jw.org)

² [The Watchtower—Study Edition, March 15, 2014 \(jw.org\)](http://www.jw.org)

- The responsibility of the family in providing care for the elderly (pages 21-22)
- Circumstances when the congregation would assist the elderly (pages 22-23)
- Assisting and referring the elderly to governmental and social programmes (page 23-24)
- Providing pastoral support and emotional encouragement to the elderly (pages 24-25)
- Religious guidance on providing care for the elderly (pages 25-29)

Additional guidance has also been provided in *The Watchtower* of 15th July, 1988, which states on page 22:³ “The elders might determine just what is required. Does the elderly one need help shopping? Is he lonely or in need of encouragement? ... It may take several visits and chats before the full picture emerges... Once the needs of an elderly person are known, specific arrangements can be made.” *The Watchtower* of 15th August, 2008, page 19, adds:⁴ “In many congregations, the elderly are being cared for in an exemplary manner. Loving brothers and sisters help them with shopping, cooking, and cleaning... Whenever possible, elders make sure that practical arrangements are implemented in order to meet the needs of older ones in the congregation.”

In making such practical arrangements, the congregation does not replace or substitute for those who have the primary responsibility to provide care to an elderly or vulnerable person. Rather, the congregation is available to complement and support the efforts of those with the primary caregiving responsibilities.⁵ Any arrangements involving the congregation are subject to the full cooperation of those receiving care, their families and primary caregivers. In accord with the Bible’s injunction to “show honour” to the elderly, help is offered in a way that allows individuals to retain their dignity and control how they choose to live.⁶—Leviticus 19:32.

Determining what is required in helping an elderly or vulnerable person includes being alert to signs of decline and to taking reasonable steps to prevent harm and reduce the risk of abuse or neglect.⁷ Where such a risk may exist, Christian love would move the individuals involved to alert those in positions of responsibility, such as family members, caregivers or relevant authorities.

Unlike some other religions, congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses do not carry out any activities that formally bring vulnerable adults into their care. For example, our congregations do not operate or sponsor care-homes, day-care centres or any activities that assume responsibility for the care of vulnerable adults. Therefore, it is our understanding that congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses do not fall within the scope of legislation and regulatory guidance concerning those who work with or provide care to vulnerable adults, thus obviating the need for a formal policy. Nonetheless, although not having a legal or regulatory obligation to do so, as made clear in the above-mentioned religious guidance in *The Watchtower* magazine, Jehovah’s Witnesses consider it a Christian duty to do what they reasonably can to provide support to vulnerable adults and their family members.

It is the view of Jehovah’s Witnesses that a formal policy is not necessary to move them to demonstrate Christlike love toward individuals who need comfort and support for a variety of reasons. Nevertheless, regardless of whether a legal obligation exists, Jehovah’s Witnesses continue to be interested in caring for the elderly and vulnerable and welcome constructive suggestions that may help create even further improvements.

I hope these comments, and the supporting references, help make clearer the position of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the matter of caring for vulnerable adults associated with our congregations.

³ [Meeting the Needs of Our Older Ones—A Christian Challenge — Watchtower ONLINE LIBRARY \(jw.org\)](https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20080815/Jehovah-Tenderly-Cares-for-His-Elderly-Servants/)

⁴ <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20080815/Jehovah-Tenderly-Cares-for-His-Elderly-Servants/>

⁵ [Caring for the Caregiver—How Others Can Help — Watchtower ONLINE LIBRARY \(jw.org\)](https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20080815/Jehovah-Tenderly-Cares-for-His-Elderly-Servants/)

⁶ [Providing Care for the Elderly, paragraph 13 — Watchtower ONLINE LIBRARY \(jw.org\)](https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20080815/Jehovah-Tenderly-Cares-for-His-Elderly-Servants/)

⁷ [Providing Care for the Elderly, paragraph 17 — Watchtower ONLINE LIBRARY \(jw.org\)](https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20080815/Jehovah-Tenderly-Cares-for-His-Elderly-Servants/)

Yours sincerely,



*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*