

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MERGING CONGREGATIONS

These instructions are provided to assist bodies of elders and circuit overseers when consideration is being given to merging one congregation with another. When more than one circuit is affected, the circuit overseers involved should work together in preparing the recommendation.

- 1. Factors to Consider:** The dissolution of a congregation and subsequent merger with another congregation(s) may be considered if there are an insufficient number of local publishers or elders to support the congregation and if present publisher growth and potential for growth from the field are minimal. The dissolution of a congregation may also be considered if this would result in better use of a nearby Kingdom Hall. Consideration should be given to the effect this would have on travel costs and to the distance publishers would need to travel to attend congregation meetings.
 - A titleholding congregation may be dissolved for the reasons described above. However, when the Kingdom Hall will likely continue to be used by at least one congregation, it is preferred that a congregation other than the titleholder be selected for dissolution.
 - Although the dissolution of a congregation can be an emotionally difficult adjustment for some, many congregations that have merged have experienced higher-quality meetings and a better distribution of experienced brothers. However, there may be small rural congregations that are able to cover their territory and function without problems. Such congregations may not need to be dissolved.

- 2. Recommendation Letter From Circuit Overseer:** If the circuit overseer believes that it would be beneficial for congregations to be merged, he should send a recommendation letter to the Service Department after consulting with the bodies of elders involved. At this point, the recommendation should remain confidential and should not be shared with the publishers in the congregations. It should answer the following questions:
 - Which congregation(s) would be dissolved? What are the specific reasons for this recommendation?
 - Do the bodies of elders have serious reservations about this recommendation? If so, explain their concerns.
 - Which congregation(s) would be recommended for the publishers to attend? What are the projected publisher figures for the affected congregation(s)? Would the Kingdom Hall(s) have sufficient parking and seating to accommodate all the publishers adequately?
 - What effect would the merging of congregations likely have on the spirituality of the publishers?
 - Does the congregation that would be dissolved hold title to a Kingdom Hall or to any other real property? If so, answer the following additional questions:
 - What is the address or location of each property owned by the congregation?
 - Does the property include accommodations for special full-time servants?

- 3. Meeting With Elders and Response to Service Department:** If the branch office provides the circuit overseer with a letter approving the recommendation, he will organize a meeting with the bodies of elders involved to discuss the points listed below. The appropriate forms and a letter containing the requested information should be sent to the Service Department. (See step 4, “Informing Congregations.”) The letter should be signed by each Congregation Service Committee and circuit overseer involved.
 - A date for the merger to take effect should be recommended. The recommended date must be after the date that transfer of any real property owned by a congregation that will be dissolved is expected to be completed. All mergers must take place on the first day of the month.

- A *Coordinator of the Body of Elders/Secretary Change of Address* (S-29) form should be completed for any remaining congregation in which the coordinator of the body of elders or the secretary will change.
- A *Territory Adjustment Request* (S-6) should be prepared for each remaining congregation whose territory boundaries will be affected. Since congregation names should reflect their territory assignment, verify that the names of the congregations involved will still be appropriate after the boundaries are adjusted.
- A *Shipping Information* (S-36) form should be completed if the merger makes it necessary to designate another congregation as the ship-to congregation.
- A recommendation should be made as to which congregation would acquire the confidential file and the accounting records of the dissolved congregation.

4. Informing Congregations: After the meeting described in step 3, “Meeting With Elders and Response to Service Department,” each congregation involved should be informed of the merger at the next midweek meeting. This should be done in a kind and sensitive manner. The congregation should be directed not to discuss the matter with publishers in other congregations until the announcement has been made in each congregation involved.

5. Notification of Approved Merger Date: The branch office will notify the congregations involved and the circuit overseer of the approved merger date. Thereafter, the circuit overseer may generate letters of appointment of elders and ministerial servants, effective as of the approved merger date. Adjustments in the congregation assignments of regular pioneers should be handled as if the pioneers had moved to another congregation. Updated territory assignments will follow.

6. Congregation Funds: Funds belonging to the congregation to be dissolved should be reallocated as recommended by the elders and approved by congregation resolution. Thereafter, the congregation bank account should be closed.

7. Kingdom Hall Operating Committee Funds: Funds contributed to a Kingdom Hall Operating Committee account by the congregation being dissolved would not be returned to the congregation. If the operating committee account was opened in the name of the congregation being dissolved, the funds in the account should be reallocated as follows:

- If two or more congregations will continue to use the Kingdom Hall, the funds should be deposited into a new operating committee account as outlined in *Instructions for Kingdom Hall Operating Committee Accounting* (S-42.)
- If only one congregation will continue to use the Kingdom Hall, the funds should be deposited into that congregation’s bank account.
- If the Kingdom Hall will be sold, the branch office will provide further instruction.