

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



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SDE:SSD May 25, 2015

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Guidelines for Congregation Meeting Conferencing Systems

Dear Brothers:

This letter replaces the letters dated June 5, 2008, and April 2, 2010, to all bodies of elders. The policies in this letter do not affect existing provisions for foreign-language congregations, groups, and pregroups to tie in to theocratic events or to benefit from recordings of theocratic events.

Our Christian meetings are occasions for great joy and bring many spiritual benefits. This includes opportunities to sing praises among fellow worshippers, express our faith through heartfelt comments, and enjoy an interchange of encouragement before and after meetings. There is no substitute for personal association at the meetings.—Ps. 22:22.

At times, though, a publisher may not be in a position to attend a meeting physically because of illness or other circumstances. To help such ones draw a measure of spiritual encouragement, they may use either a telephone (audio) conferencing system or video streaming system to tie in to congregation meetings. In some cases, it may be more practical to transmit the programme using a mobile device or to provide recordings of the meetings. However, care should be exercised that conferencing systems and recordings do not become convenient substitutes for attending meetings in person.

To assist elders in managing the use of conferencing systems and recordings, we would like to provide the following guidelines. The options for making congregation meetings available to homebound or isolated publishers may change depending on the technology, but the principles apply to whatever technology is selected.

- The body of elders decides what technology the congregation will make use of to make meetings available to individuals who are unable to attend a meeting in person. Of course, if the technology will be shared by multiple congregations in the same facility, the decision will be made by the combined bodies of elders.
- Congregation meetings should not be made available to a wide audience on the Internet. Neither should recordings of congregation meetings be distributed indiscriminately. However, it is not necessary to monitor who has access to congregation meetings.
- A conferencing system should not distract or interfere with the quality of the meeting. Some systems allow for two-way conversation, making it possible for those on the tie-line to offer comments. Those commenting from a remote location should ensure that private conversations or sounds of other activities are not heard by other listeners.
- Attendants should record as meeting attenders the number of those tied in to the live meeting. Those benefiting from delayed streaming or recordings would not be counted.
- A homebound or isolated publisher should generally tie in to or make use of recordings of his own congregation's meetings. At times, however, exceptions may be necessary because of circumstances. For example, perhaps an elderly or infirm publisher cannot listen to the entire meeting in a single sitting and needs to listen to the meeting of a

neighbouring congregation. Or a publisher may not understand the language spoken in the local congregation. He could be allowed regularly to tie in to or make use of recordings of meetings conducted in his mother tongue *while continuing to associate with the local congregation*. Such a provision may be necessary to maintain his spirituality.

- If the Congregation Service Committee of a homebound or isolated publisher agrees that it is necessary for the publisher to tie in to a congregation's meetings in another branch territory or to make use of recordings of such meetings, a member of the service committee of the homebound or isolated publisher should contact the Service Department in his branch office for direction.

Here is an overview of some options for making congregation meetings available to publishers who cannot attend in person:

- **Telephone (Audio) Conferencing:** Some companies offer a multi-party conference hub to which individuals can call to listen to a meeting. The congregation connects the meeting programme via a telephone line to the teleconferencing centre. Listeners dial a designated number, and then listen to the programme. Some systems are simple and economical and reduce the need for multiple phone lines.
- **Video Streaming:** An increasing number of Kingdom Halls have the ability to transmit video over the Internet. If the Kingdom Hall is already equipped, video streaming is permitted. It would be managed much like a telephone or audio tie-in system. In the future, guidelines will be provided regarding equipment and use of Internet streaming.
- **Mobile Devices:** If a telephone conferencing or video streaming system is not available, mobile devices may be used to transmit the meetings to a few individuals.
- **Recordings:** If it is not possible to listen to or view the live meeting, then an audio or video recording may be shared with those who are homebound.

Of course, if someone wishes to record congregation meetings on his own, he may do so as long as he does not connect his personal device to the sound system or unnecessarily disturb others in the process. However, such personal recordings should not be distributed indiscriminately, in harmony with the April 2010 *Our Kingdom Ministry* Question Box.

In Bible times, gatherings for pure worship were occasions for personal association with fellow believers. Such association required people to travel to a designated place. Jehovah promised his ancient servants that no one would pillage their land while they were physically separated from their property in order to attend the festivals. (Ex. 34:24) The apostle Paul spoke of times when "the whole congregation comes together to one place." (1 Cor. 14:23) The disciple James referred to Christian gatherings held in places into which people enter, where others observe them, and where they take seats or remain standing. (Jas. 2:1-4) The aged apostle John, though having another means of communication, preferred a face-to-face interchange with the congregation. (2 John 12) Clearly, what is being encouraged in the Scriptures is regular personal contact with our brothers and sisters. Any means of simulating such an experience by modern communication technologies is inferior and should be considered a temporary measure until personal association is possible. In harmony with Bible principles, elders 'should know well the appearance of their flock.' (Prov. 27:23; Acts 20:28) If anyone seems to be using the conferencing system when he could be attending meetings in person, he can be given some kind reminders.

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We are grateful to Jehovah that you are using every suitable occasion to incite one another to love and fine works and to exhort one another to remain firm in the faith. (Heb. 3:13, 14; 10:24, 25) May Jehovah bless you richly as you keep serving him loyally and faithfully.

Please be assured of our warm Christian love and greetings.

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

c: Circuit overseers

PS to the coordinator of the body of elders and secretary:

Please review at your next quarterly elders' meeting the local arrangements for congregation meeting conferencing and the use of recordings. This letter has been added to the list of policy letters that will be cited in *Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders* (S-22).