

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



The Ridgeway, London, NW7 1RN Telephone: 020 8906 2211

COA:COB November 30, 2015

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: 2016 Conventions—Local Needs Item

Dear Brothers:

Although we likely have many fond memories of our 2015 conventions, we are already making plans for our 2016 regional conventions.

We are pleased to be able to give you some updated information regarding the arrangements for the local needs as outlined in our letter dated October 30, 2015. Your congregation should already have received a separate letter with your congregation's convention assignment for 2016. There is also an attached letter for the local needs regarding the hotel arrangement which is to be read to the congregation. Please select from the body of elders a brother who is a good reader and who can convey this information in a positive manner, through tone and intonation, which will build confidence in this arrangement. (The letter to be read to the congregation is also available in French, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish.)

The ibsaconvention.org website will go live on December 8, 2015 at 9:00 a.m. The password/code for the website will be your congregation number. There is no need to inform the brothers that it is the congregation number but just provide the number to the publishers. The number can be given when reading the attached letter (where it states "*announce congregation number*").

We are providing an attachment with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). When the website becomes available, the "FAQ" section will be accessible. However, you can address these questions during the local needs part if needed, or elders can have them available to answer questions as the need arises.

When available, all of the convention locations and dates will be listed on the website, together with the *Approved Hotel Lists*. Over the last few months, our brothers have been working hard, trying to secure discounted rates for our delegates. It is good to encourage publishers to book hotels through the IBSA arrangement. Publishers who book hotels outside of the arrangement severely reduce the negotiating leverage that our hotel negotiators have with those hotels in the future. Hotels that are close to the venue are often not on the *Approved Hotel List* because they refused to negotiate with the brothers. Of course, elders should always set the lead. However, as the accompanying letter mentions, there are some areas where the rates need further improvement.

Since the secretary takes the lead in the congregation regarding convention matters, he should become familiar with the website to help any in the congregation who may need assistance. Group overseers may also be able to help publishers that struggle to use this website provision.

The "FAQ" section of the website should provide the majority with answers to their questions. However, if needed, we are encouraging all publishers to use the email address available on the website **only** for rooming-related matters. However, the email listed on the website can be used for secretaries to email the Convention Committee regarding convention-related matters, such as parking tickets. However, please allow the Convention Committees time to take the initiative to provide direction to congregations.

If there is a need to send a *Special Needs Room Request* (CO-5a) form to the Rooming Department, the secretary should scan the completed form and it should be sent to the same email address that is listed on the website. (This updates the direction in the October 27, 2013, letter to all bodies of elders.) The Congregation Service Committee should review the guidelines on the form (CO-5a) and the October 27, 2013, letter.

All local convention matters are handled by the various Convention Committees. The brothers will respond to your email. However, please be patient in awaiting a response.

If you have your circuit overseer's visit during this week, the attached letter should still be read. If you have a circuit assembly, the group overseers should inform their respective groups of the information.

Thank you for your conscientious follow-through in these matters. We take this opportunity to convey our warm Christian love and greetings.—1 Thess. 4:9, 10.

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

Attachments

Dear Brothers:

Regional conventions are always a theocratic highlight of the year. They are a wonderful opportunity to associate and learn about Jehovah. Many travel each day from their home to the convention while others choose to stay in hotel accommodation.

The Teaching Committee of the Governing Body has directed that the branch office organize rooming arrangements for conventions. The purpose is to provide good quality, convenient, safe, comfortable, and reasonably-priced hotels for those who need accommodation.

Background: In the past, when hotels were aware that the same venue would be used each year, they raised their hotel rates for the dates of our convention. In 2013 we began sampling hotels in selected convention cities to assess the potential for negotiating lower rates.

Since 2014, a team of 40 brothers have been trained in hotel negotiations. These brothers spend several months, visiting and inspecting many hotels for each regional convention. As a result, in most locations, a larger selection of hotels is now available at rates which are more competitive than they were this past year.

The Challenges: When our negotiators go to a hotel, they inform them that if they provide competitive rates, they will be added to an *Approved Hotel List*. If the hotel believes that *individuals* will book a room anyway, they refuse to negotiate. Hotels that do not offer us a sufficient discount are not included on the *Approved Hotel List*.

We appreciate many brothers have access to Internet hotel offers, however, these discounted prices are only for a small number of rooms and then the prices increase sharply. It may appear that booking outside of the arrangement is cheaper. However, this will push prices up, *affecting the majority of our brothers and sisters in the long term*.

This does not mean that for 2016 we have fully achieved our objective. Nevertheless, when all support this arrangement and book accommodation from the *Approved Hotel List*, it greatly strengthens the position of our hotel negotiators for future years. In this way we should be able to expand the range of hotels offered on the *Approved Hotel List* each year.

Our unified approach will drive prices down. We have contracted approximately 70 per cent of the hotels we want to include on our website. With your support we may bring the other 30 per cent to the negotiating table so that they too can be used in future years.

Convention Hotel Website: The Rooming Department carefully manages the use of nearby hotels during our conventions. To facilitate the booking, the **IBSAconvention.org** website has been set up. It will become active on **Tuesday, December 8 at 9:00 a.m.** There is a “Frequently Asked Questions” (FAQ) section also available on the website. **Although the dates and location for your regional convention are being announced tonight please do not try to book your hotel room until December 8.**

[If possible, show the slides of the new website to the congregation.]

The website lists all hotels available through the convention rooming arrangement. Information about the hotels can be found with the convention rates. Last year, thousands of brothers and sisters all over the country booked their convention accommodation through this website.

How do you access the website?

- You may gain access to the website by entering a code [*announce number*] and then selecting “enter.”

- You will see a list of all 2016 conventions—for non-English conventions, first select the “NON-ENGLISH CONVENTIONS” option.
- Read the instructions, then select the appropriate convention.
- Help on using the site is available at the top of every page (select “HELP”).
- If you have any questions, review this FAQ section on the website.
 - If you do not find an answer to your question, you will see an email address that can be used for convention rooming questions (available from December 8).
 - The Rooming Department for your convention will be pleased to reply. Please do not write to the branch office.

You will find the website very easy to navigate and use. Use the booking link or telephone number provided to book your hotel. You will need to quote the booking code listed on the website.

The *Approved Hotel List* gives a broad choice of good quality accommodation while using the most cooperative hotels. However, if your economic situation is *genuinely* such that you cannot afford to use any hotels listed, please make whatever arrangements you feel are necessary for you and your family to enjoy the convention. This arrangement does not affect those who make use of guest houses or apartments.

Benefits of New Arrangement: The smoothness of how the new rooming arrangement functions depends on our mutual cooperation.

In summary, what are the benefits of this improved rooming arrangement?

- Association with brothers and sisters at the same hotel
- Cheaper hotel rates collectively for the majority
- Better negotiations in the future.

We pray that Jehovah blesses your efforts to attend this year’s convention. Your loving cooperation is greatly appreciated. We look forward to seeing you at the convention.

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

c: Circuit overseers