

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



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January 5, 2017

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Circuit Overseer Accommodations and Financial Matters

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Dear Brothers:

1. This letter replaces the May 1, 2013, letter to all bodies of elders regarding traveling overseer accommodations and financial matters and has been added to the list of policy letters that will be cited in *Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders* (S-22). The sections on circuit apartments and expenses during the week of the visit have been adjusted. This replaces the direction in *Instructions for Circuit Accounting* (S-331) regarding circuit overseer residences. The visits of circuit overseers are of great benefit to the brothers worldwide. These brothers and their wives deeply appreciate your hospitality. Such practical assistance enables the circuit overseers to get the most accomplished and to cultivate a warm relationship with the brothers.—Rom. 12:13; 2 Cor. 8:1-4, 12-15.

2. **Allowance:** Circuit overseers and their wives receive a small monthly allowance from the branch office for personal items. Unlike the allowance for special pioneers, the allowance for circuit overseers does not include a monthly housing allowance. The allowance is adjusted from time to time to reflect changes in living costs. In addition to the monthly allowance, each circuit overseer and his wife receive an annual amount based on the number of years each has been in full-time service. These modest funds, which are made available after January 1 each year, also serve to defray personal expenses they have, such as in connection with traveling to visit family members or to purchase necessary items.

3. **Accommodations:** It is the responsibility of the body of elders to ensure that clean and suitable accommodations are arranged for the circuit overseer and his wife during the week of his visit. Even if an apartment is provided by the circuit, the circuit overseer may need to stay locally instead of commuting to a distant apartment. If he stays in the home of a local brother, please make sure the home provides what is needed for the circuit overseer to have sufficient rest and to do his work. Some brothers have lovingly made their homes available for two or more weeks at a time when circumstances have made this practical. If there is a need to rent a place for the week, please contact the Service Department.

4. When publishers open up their hearts and their homes and provide suitable accommodations for the circuit overseer and his wife, it is deeply appreciated. Although they do not wish to be an expensive burden, circuit overseers do need and appreciate clean places to stay. Some have allergies

or other health problems, and it is the responsibility of the coordinator of the body of elders or another elder designated by him to inquire of the circuit overseer as to any needs in this regard.

5. It is not easy to live in a different place each week, year after year. However, there are little things we can do that will make the circuit overseer's stay pleasant. (3 John 5, 6) Accommodations in a private home should be selected carefully. The coordinator of the body of elders or another elder designated by him should look at the accommodations to be offered to the circuit overseer to make sure all is in good order and is in accord with what is described in this letter. Circuit overseers have a full week of theocratic activity in each congregation. Careful advance arrangements to provide appropriate accommodations will help them fulfill their responsibilities in a fine way. Homes where there are family problems should not be used. Furthermore, if the host has a serious illness or severe allergies that require special attention, it would be best to avoid using such accommodations.

6. Though all of us enjoy the company of the circuit overseer and his wife and they enjoy ours, they need adequate time to themselves to study, to meditate, and to do necessary work. Sufficient rest is vital if they are to do their assigned work the next day. They follow a schedule that allows them to serve best the spiritual interests of the entire congregation.

7. Arrangements should be made for the circuit overseer and his wife to have a place to hang up their clothes. Clean dresser drawers should be made available if at all possible. A chair, a writing table upon which a computer may be placed, and good lighting are helpful. Circuit overseers very much appreciate this.

8. Elaborate meals are not needed. Also, it is left up to the discretion of the circuit overseers whether to accept any invitations to eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner with the brothers. At times they may want to eat their meals alone with their wives, in harmony with the schedule of the visit. Circuit overseers deeply appreciate your congregation's hospitality and, barring health problems, will gladly eat what is provided. Wholesome, nourishing food enables them to feel well physically and to keep up with their schedule.—g 3/11 p. 4.

9. A number of thoughtful coordinators of the bodies of elders have made it a point at the end of the circuit overseer's stay to ask him about the accommodation that had been arranged for him. This is a good practice, and we commend you brothers for showing this extra concern. It is not necessary to have the circuit overseer stay in a different home each time he visits the congregation. For example, if there is only one home that is truly suitable, then it may be best for him to stay there each visit, if the householder is willing and it is convenient, instead of rotating him to different homes where the facilities may be inadequate.—2 Ki. 4:8-11; 3 John 8.

10. **Circuit Apartments:** In some metropolitan areas or where congregations are fairly close together, suitable and convenient accommodations may not be available in the homes of the brothers for the circuit overseer and his wife. In these areas the collective body of elders in the circuit may decide that it would be more advantageous for the circuit to provide one modest, reasonably-priced apartment for the use of the circuit overseer. It is usually best for such matters to be discussed by the circuit elders at a business meeting in connection with an assembly.

11. If after prayerfully considering the factors involved the collective body of elders in the circuit decides that a rental apartment for the circuit overseer is practical and cost effective, the branch office has no objection if the elders make such arrangements. Any maintenance or minor repairs that are not cared for by the property owner (as stipulated in the contract) are the

responsibility of the circuit. All costs associated with a rented residence for the circuit overseer will be funded by the circuit.

12. The collective body of elders in the circuit may desire to purchase an apartment, build an apartment in conjunction with a new Kingdom Hall, renovate an existing apartment or empty space, or add an apartment at an existing facility for the use of the circuit overseer. This is a matter for the branch office to determine. Therefore, the elders should contact the Local Design/Construction Department (LDC) if they feel the purchase, construction, or renovation of an apartment is needed.

13. Where an existing apartment located on the same property as a Kingdom Hall or on another property owned by a congregation is provided for the use of the circuit overseer, the congregation (or Kingdom Hall Operating Committee, if applicable) is responsible for the routine maintenance and minor repairs in connection with the apartment. There is no need to have a separate operating committee for the apartment. The circuit will pay for all costs associated with the use and maintenance of such an apartment by contributing to the appropriate congregation or operating committee account. A written agreement should be prepared between the circuit and the congregation or operating committee so that all will understand their financial responsibilities. If you have a unique situation and need further direction, please contact the LDC.

14. Expenses related to a circuit apartment are considered normal operating expenses not requiring a resolution. If sufficient funds do not exist in the circuit account to care for expenses related to a circuit apartment, the congregations in the circuit may be asked to contribute. While a specified amount may be suggested, it is the responsibility of each body of elders to discuss the matter and determine what contribution its congregation may be able to make.

15. Although basic furniture and permanent appliances may be provided as part of an apartment, it should not be necessary to purchase new furniture or appliances each time a different circuit overseer moves into an apartment. However, prior to the incoming circuit overseer's arrival, the assembly overseer or a brother designated by him should review the condition of the apartment, its furnishings, appliances, and items such as linens and tableware. Neither congregation funds nor circuit funds should be used to provide customized or personal furnishings.

16. It would not be proper for a circuit overseer to suggest or request that the circuit rent an apartment and thus put an unnecessary financial burden on brothers. Neither should he suggest major renovations to an existing apartment or pressure others to make changes to plans for a proposed apartment. If a circuit overseer chooses to make his own arrangements for accommodations such as by using a trailer, all expenses incurred in doing so must be cared for by the circuit overseer himself. This would include the purchase cost, insurance, maintenance, transportation, and so forth. Therefore, neither congregation funds nor circuit funds should be used for this purpose. Any exceptions to this must be approved by the branch office.

17. **Expenses During the Week of the Visit:** The coordinator of the body of elders may ask the circuit overseer to submit his expenses for the week. Such expenses may include food expenses, routine office expenses, transportation expenses that are not covered by the branch office, and certain moderate personal expenses. If the expenses are higher than usual, the circuit overseer could divide them among the congregations or submit them to the assembly overseer rather than asking one congregation to cover them. (See *Instructions for Circuit Accounting* [S-331].) If the congregation is not in a position to cover all or part of the circuit overseer's expenses, including accommodations, he can submit these to the branch office for consideration along with receipts.

(See paragraph 3 of this letter.) At no time should the circuit overseer and his wife be a financial burden to any congregation.—2 Cor. 11:9; 1 Thess. 2:9.

18. The circuit overseer should be considerate and discerning in submitting his expenses. Some personal expenses could be covered by the monthly allowance from the branch office or from personal contributions he may have received from individuals in the congregation. Other personal expenses, such as clothing, cosmetics, vitamins, over-the-counter drugs, insurance for personal property, or life insurance, would not be submitted to congregations or circuits for reimbursement. Rather, they should be covered with the circuit overseer's personal funds. A circuit overseer should not solicit funds from individuals.

19. If Internet or mobile telephone service is used to communicate with congregations and with the branch office, the expense incurred may be covered by either dividing the cost among the congregations or submitting them to the assembly overseer. If the congregations or circuit are unable to cover the cost of Internet or mobile telephone service, it may be submitted to the branch office for reimbursement. However, any Internet or mobile telephone service *beyond* what is needed to communicate with congregations and the branch office would be a personal expense for the circuit overseer to shoulder. Additional expenses related to Internet or mobile telephone service for the wife of a circuit overseer would also be a personal expense not submitted to congregations or circuits.

20. **Health Care and Vehicles:** In some lands, the branch office has made arrangements to provide health care and reliable transportation for circuit overseers. These costs are supported by donations made through the congregations.

21. **Proper Use of Congregation Funds and Circuit Funds:** Congregation and circuit donations are dedicated funds for defraying congregation and circuit expenses. If such funds were used to make monetary gifts to circuit overseers beyond their actual expenses, this would undoubtedly disturb or stumble some of our brothers. We should rightly be concerned that this does not happen. Monetary gifts should not be made from congregation or circuit funds. Likewise, it is inappropriate for individuals in a congregation or circuit to solicit money from brothers and sisters and then provide this as a gift to a circuit overseer.—2 Cor. 8:20.

22. Is it in harmony with theocratic principles for individual publishers to give circuit overseers personal gifts? If one is moved by appreciation and has a heart desire to make such a contribution, that is for the individual to decide. Such genuine Christian generosity on the part of the giver and acceptance on the part of the circuit overseer are private matters that need not concern others.—Matt. 6:3, 4; w09 2/15 p. 14 par. 20.

23. It is realized that in many lands resources are limited and the economy may be unstable. Nevertheless, we commend your willing spirit in caring for the needs of our circuit overseers. Please be assured of our warm Christian love and best wishes.

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

c: Assembly overseers
Assistant assembly overseers
Circuit overseers