

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



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February 26, 2017

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Witnessing in Public Places

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Dear Brothers:

1. This letter replaces the letter dated July 15, 2014, to all bodies of elders regarding witnessing in public places and has been added to the list of policy letters cited in *Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders* (S-22). Paragraph 6 has been adjusted to comment on featuring our Bible study program at various times throughout the month. Paragraph 12 contains updated direction on how publishers should conduct themselves while engaging in public witnessing. The elders should thoroughly review this paragraph, and participants in the public witnessing work should be trained accordingly. Paragraph 17 has been adjusted to comment on having a modest supply of the *Return to Jehovah* brochure available at public witnessing locations.

2. **Selecting Suitable Locations:** After consulting with the other elders, the Congregation Service Committee will make the final decision as to specific locations for public witnessing. Primary consideration should be given to areas of high pedestrian traffic that are most visible in accordance with local regulations. Possible locations include transportation hubs, public squares, parks, busy streets, shopping malls, college campuses, airports, and locations of annual events. (See also “New Initiatives for Public Witnessing” found in the July 2013 issue of *Our Kingdom Ministry*, pages 4-6.) If the elders become aware of an opportunity to set up a literature display at a large event, such as a national or international book fair, please contact the branch office for further direction.

3. Locations selected for public witnessing must be **within the congregation’s territory boundaries**. Where the territories of different-language congregations overlap, the service overseers should communicate with one another so as to accomplish the most good while not overwhelming pedestrians and business people.

4. **Site Permission and Insurance Coverage:** In some public locations, permission may be needed from a manager or secular authority before setting up a literature display. The service overseer or someone else designated by the body of elders should determine what may be legally required, if anything, in the way of permissions, permits, and insurance coverage. **Any application to use a mobile cart or to set up a table or kiosk to display literature must be filled out in the name of an individual publisher**, not in the name of the congregation, any corporation used by the organization, or “Jehovah’s Witnesses.” If a small administrative fee is needed in order to acquire space in a public area, it is to be paid by the individual publisher, not the congregation. Publishers should carefully review any such applications to see what responsibility they are taking upon themselves with respect to liability and possible proof of insurance coverage. Publishers who apply to distribute literature at these areas are doing so on their own initiative as part of their personal ministry.

5. At times, administrators or managers have waived insurance requirements when the voluntary and non-commercial nature of our Bible educational work was explained to them. Any meeting that is held with a location’s manager should be informal, such as one between neighbors in a community, and not a discussion of legal rights. If this meeting is unsuccessful or an excessive fee is required, the body of elders should identify other public areas within their congregation’s territory where public witnessing equipment could be used effectively.

6. **Public Witnessing Equipment:** The Congregation Service Committee will determine what equipment (including posters) will be used and where it will be stored. Only artwork approved by the branch office should be displayed. Regularly, and at various times throughout the month, it would be good for public witnessing locations to display posters that feature our Bible study program. These can be displayed in rotation with the posters that feature magazines and other topics.

7. Public witnessing equipment can be requested in the same way that publications are requested. The *Public Witnessing Supplies* (S-80) form contains sample pictures, descriptions for the standard carts, stands, tables, kiosks, and so forth. The equipment will remain the property of the congregation. Care should be taken to request only equipment that will be put to good use by publishers who have been trained in its use and that can be financially supported by the congregation. The congregation may be informed that the cost of the public witnessing equipment will be covered by their contributions to the worldwide work.

8. **Determining Who May Participate:** The Congregation Service Committee will select qualified publishers to participate in this feature of the ministry. Those selected should be known to present themselves in a dignified way. Their appearance and dress should be professional, well-arranged, and modest. Those selected should demonstrate discernment and a willingness to witness in different public settings, should enjoy and promote good relations with others, should be committed to taking the assignment seriously, and should be willing to cooperate with the body of elders.

9. If it is possible and practical, the service overseer or someone designated by the body of elders should organize a midweek and weekend schedule for each selected location. There is an advantage to having the literature displays set up in the same location, on the same days, and at the same times. They serve as a constant feature readily recognized by those in the area.

10. It is usually best for two or more persons to be assigned to work together. The safety of participants as well as their varying abilities should be taken into account when scheduling. Partners should remain watchful over each other since the conditions in a normally safe area can unexpectedly change.—Prov. 22:3; Eccl. 4:10, 12.

11. **Providing Practical Training:** The service overseer or someone designated by the body of elders will provide the initial training to field service group overseers, their assistants, and publishers chosen to participate. He may schedule this training during one of his regular visits to field service groups. The group overseer and his assistant will monitor and assist publishers participating, and if additional training is needed, the group overseer and the service overseer will provide reminders.

12. When publishers are using a literature cart, stand, table, or kiosk, they should endeavor to be warm, friendly, and inviting. They should be instructed not to approach people directly, but to let people approach them. However, warm smiles and good eye contact are essential for effective public witnessing. (*be* p. 125) If a person gives his attention to the display, the publisher should invite the individual to take literature that interests him. The publisher should endeavor to start a conversation, perhaps by saying, “Have you ever wondered what the Bible says about that subject?” Additionally, publishers can be shown how to direct attention to the literature cart or table while doing informal witnessing within view of the literature display. (*km* 11/14 p. 2) Publishers engaged in public witnessing should be ready and willing to speak with all who approach. Thus, it is important that publishers avoid nonessential use of electronic devices and excessive conversation with other publishers since such activities can hinder attentiveness to passersby.

13. Publishers should **widely publicize jw.org** and should be trained how to highlight its features. For example, those who hesitate to converse with us or accept literature may be more inclined to investigate our website. (*km* 12/12 pp. 5-6) Publishers should know how to help an interested person access material in his language on jw.org, including sign-language videos that would appeal to the deaf and audio recordings that would appeal to the visually impaired.

14. If a friendly conversation with a person ensues and the person is willing to provide his contact information, publishers should follow up on the interest promptly with the goal of starting a Bible study. If the interested person lives outside the congregation’s territory or speaks another language, publishers should make arrangements to have the interest followed up on by local Witnesses. When possible, the publisher may continue to cultivate the interest through the telephone or e-mail until the individual is contacted by a local publisher.

15. Some individuals may inquire how our work is funded. If so, the publisher may explain that donations can be sent to the address listed in our literature. In the interests of personal safety and in view of the voluntary nature of our ministry, publishers in this setting should not personally accept any donations, and contribution boxes should not be set up.

16. **Handling Unique Situations:** Practical training should be given to the publishers to help them handle unique situations they may encounter. For example: **(1) Disruptive individuals:** Remain calm and friendly. Do not debate with the person. If near a literature display, step away so others will not be discouraged from approaching. If the person persists in causing a disturbance or becomes irate and threatening, it may be best to leave the area. Help from the local

authorities may be requested in extreme situations. **(2) Disfellowshipped individuals interested in returning to the congregation:** Obtain the person's name and address. Assure him that you will give the information to the elders in his local area, who will be pleased to visit him in order to explain how he may return to the congregation. **(3) The media:** In general, it would be best that publishers not accept a journalist's request for a personal interview. Journalists may be directed to the "Newsroom" or "About Us" sections of jw.org for information about the work of Jehovah's Witnesses. The elders should telephone the branch office to provide them with the journalist's contact information and a brief explanation of his inquiry.

17. **Displaying Literature:** Taking into account local circumstances and interests, the service overseer will determine the quantity of literature to be displayed. Discernment is needed to ensure that literature will not be wasted or misused. (*km* 12/11 p. 2) The display should be neat and dignified. Experience has shown that a simple, eye-appealing arrangement of literature is best. In many areas, it would be appropriate to feature those tracts, brochures, magazines, and books that have wide appeal. During the annual campaigns for the Memorial and for the convention, posters featuring these events may be displayed and invitations distributed. Magazines and literature in frequently-requested languages may be kept on hand. If more literature is needed than the quantity allowed for request on jw.org, the Shipping Department should be contacted. While Bibles should not be displayed on public witnessing equipment, they may be kept on hand to offer to individuals who request one or who demonstrate sincere interest in the truth. Additionally, a modest supply of the *Return to Jehovah* brochure should be kept on hand (though not displayed) for the benefit of any inactive ones who are encountered.

18. **Use of Electronic Devices:** If practical, a flat screen monitor connected to a portable electronic device may be used at a literature table or kiosk. The monitor could be used to display approved public witnessing posters, to demonstrate features of jw.org, or to play a short video, such as *Why Study the Bible?*

19. **Special Metropolitan Public Witnessing:** If this separate initiative has been arranged in your area, additional information will be provided to the circuit overseers and congregations so that all may work together in an orderly and organized manner.—*km* 7/13 pp. 4-6.

20. **Schools and Universities:** Before setting up a literature display at a school or university, it is usually best to approach the school principal, headmaster, or dean. Those making such visits should be forthright in identifying themselves as Jehovah's Witnesses. Many educators gladly receive and make good use of our magazines, literature, videos, and online material once they are made aware of its availability and its educational value. (*g* 1/09 p. 32; *g* 8/07 p. 32) The service overseer may train well-qualified publishers to visit schools and universities.

21. **Nursing and Retirement Homes:** Some publishers have had success in reaching elderly persons by approaching the manager or activities director of the facility and volunteering their time to encourage residents who might enjoy Bible reading and discussion of Bible accounts. It may be explained that volunteers from the congregation would be pleased to read Bible-based material, to conduct a free weekly Bible study, or to show Bible-based videos to anyone who wishes to attend. Oftentimes, the staff, volunteers, family members of patients, and other visitors will join in the study. The service overseer may train well-qualified publishers to make such visits.—*km* 6/14 pp. 2-4.

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22. **Harbor Witnessing:** Harbor witnessing is a specialized ministry that requires specific direction from the branch office. If there is a major harbor within your congregation's territory and you have not yet received such direction, please write to the Service Department and provide the name, location, and size of the port. If you have a program in place to do harbor witnessing and have not yet contacted the Service Department, please do so in order to explain what harbor is being worked, what is being done, and who has oversight of the arrangement.

23. We are confident that Jehovah will bless your efforts to reach all honesthearted ones with the good news. (Eccl. 11:6; 1 Cor. 3:6-9) Please accept an expression of our warm Christian love.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*

c: Circuit overseers