

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



Hse. No. J348/4 - Tema Beach Road - Nungua, Accra
P. O. Box GP 760, Accra, Ghana Tel. No.: (030) 2712456-8; 7010110 Fax: (030) 2712454

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TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Use of Kingdom Halls for Marriages

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Dear Brothers:

1. Much fine direction on the subject of wedding procedures and Scriptural freedom to remarry has been included in publications and the *Shepherding* textbook. However, at this time we are pleased to provide you with revised directions in connection with this matter. This letter replaces all letters relating to marriages previously posted on jw.org.

2. **Use of the Kingdom Hall After a Customary or Civil Marriage is Performed:** When a customary or civil marriage has been performed, couples who are approved by their Congregation Service Committee(s), may use any Kingdom Hall for a Bible talk on marriage. If the Kingdom Hall is shared by more than one congregation, then any of the Congregation Service Committees can approve the use of the hall after confirming with the other service committees that the hall is available. It is not the responsibility of the operating committee to determine the use of the Kingdom Hall for weddings. (See our letter dated December 2, 2017, paragraph 20.) Please note that any Kingdom Hall in Ghana may be used for such a Bible talk in line with the directions given in the April 2006 *Our Kingdom Ministry (Ghana edition)*. If the couple has a specific elder in mind, they can personally ask him to deliver the talk. If the couple has no preference, the body of elders can select one of their number to care for this assignment.

3. How should financial matters be handled by the couple requesting the use of the Kingdom Hall for their marriage ceremony? The direction in the *Instructions for Kingdom Hall Operating Committee Accounting (S-42)* paragraph 4 states that 'when a couple requests to use the Kingdom Hall for a marriage ceremony it will be alright to accept any contributions they may give towards the utilities bill of the hall and recorded accordingly. However, it will not be necessary to determine a fixed charge for the use of the Kingdom Hall.'

4. **Use of the Kingdom Hall for Civil Marriage:** At times a couple may desire to perform a civil marriage in the Kingdom Hall. It is important to note that only Kingdom Halls that are gazetted for registering civil marriages can be used for this purpose. In addition to gazetting the hall, the elder who will oversee the legal part of the ceremony should also be gazetted as a marriage officer. It has come to our attention that some elders who have not been gazetted by the state as marriage officers are overseeing the legal part of the ceremony in registered Kingdom Halls. This should be discontinued immediately. Please note from the above information that while any elder

may be asked to give the marriage talk at a civil marriage, only elders who are registered as marriage officers are authorized to perform the civil marriage. With the registration of several Kingdom Halls across the country for performing civil marriages, we do not encourage inviting non-Witness marriage officers to perform marriages at the Kingdom Hall.

5. However, in certain locations, there may not yet be registered Kingdom Halls, or gazetted elders for the performance of a civil marriage. In that case the couple may choose to obtain a special license with which they can invite the registrar from the government office to perform their civil marriage elsewhere and then come to the Kingdom Hall for a Bible talk. If a civil ceremony is performed elsewhere and the couple desires that a Scriptural talk be given at the Kingdom Hall, it is best that this feature comes soon after the civil marriage. The speaker would mention that the legal step has already been taken. Some couples still choose to repeat the marriage vows before God and the congregation, and this is possible. This should be done, however, in the past tense, since they have already exchanged marriage vows at a civil ceremony.—w84 4/15 pp. 12-14.

6. In some areas, depending on local circumstances, a marriage registrar in the government office may not be permitted to perform a civil wedding on a Saturday. As a result, some have been known to perform the wedding on the Saturday but back-date the certificate to the previous day. We are sure you can understand that this would be something to avoid as we want to conduct ourselves “honestly in all things.” (Heb. 13:18) If such a situation applies in your area, then it would be better for the couple to go through the process of civil marriage on the Friday and then have the Scriptural talk on the Saturday.

7. As you are aware, *the Kingdom Hall cannot be used to conduct a civil marriage ceremony for anyone who has already performed a customary marriage*. Therefore, when request is made to use the Kingdom Hall for a civil wedding, the elders would want to make sure that the couple would not be performing a customary marriage beforehand. When there is no customary marriage and this is made clear to all concerned, then the Kingdom Hall can be used for a civil wedding ceremony, since no other type of marriage would have taken place.—km 4/06 pp. 3-5.

8. Arrangements That Are Dignified and Respectful: The entire body of elders of the congregations sharing the use of the Kingdom Hall should be concerned about how the Kingdom Hall is used in connection with wedding arrangements. It should be remembered that if such arrangements conducted at the Kingdom Hall demonstrate a spirit of immodesty, disrespect, or a “showy display of one’s means of life,” it would not reflect well on the Christian congregation. In one Kingdom Hall for example, the yeartext was removed and a large banner was hung on the platform bearing the names of the bride and groom. We must keep in mind that the Kingdom Hall is a place of worship where God’s people come to be instructed. Therefore, any arrangements made should be dignified, respectful, and focus on the spiritual aspects of the marriage.

9. It is reasonable to expect that any arrangements for a Kingdom Hall wedding or Bible talk on marriage should start on time and close on time, so that the hall could be used for other theocratic activities during the day. It has been noticed that some have adopted the worldly standard that the bride and groom arrive late for their wedding. However, such intentional lateness would be inconsiderate and show a lack of love. Therefore, whether the hall is used for a wedding ceremony or a Bible talk on marriage, arrangements should reflect good judgment and Christian balance.

10. Couples wishing to use the hall should understand and agree with the guidelines outlined for Christian weddings in *The Watchtower* of October 15, 2006. On page 30, paragraph 1; it suggests that the elders ask the couple “whether the attire they have in mind would be modest

enough to wear at a Christian meeting.” The *Watchtower* adds: “Granted, the style of clothing might be different from regular meeting attire, and what is worn for the wedding may reflect local custom, but the level of modesty should accord with dignified Christian standards.” This means that if a wedding is to take place, the clothing worn, not only by the bride and groom, but also by anyone else connected with the proceedings, should be in accord with dignified Christian standards of modesty and good taste.

11. When a wedding talk is given for a civil marriage, the speaker (if he is not the marriage officer) with the consent of the marriage officer will administer the vows as stated in the outline and the couple can exchange any rings they have at this time. The couple will then proceed to sign the register under the supervision of the state appointed marriage officer present in the Kingdom Hall. After the signing, the speaker will pronounce the couple as married “...in the presence of the State appointed marriage officer.” The speaker will then say a prayer to conclude and then present the couple to the audience.

12. What about when a Bible talk on marriage is given after the couple has already performed a customary or civil marriage elsewhere? While we do not want to make many rules as to what people should wear or how they should behave, it would be good to keep in mind the principle mentioned in the April 2006 *Our Kingdom Ministry*, page 4, paragraph 6. There it states: “Arrangements connected with the talk should not create the impression that a second wedding is taking place.” How can this principle be applied? Help the couple to realize that the Scriptural talk should be seen as a spiritual highlight to their marriage. The couple should be encouraged to come with their Bibles, ready to listen carefully to the fine counsel that will be given. They should dress and act in a way that would be appropriate for the occasion. Since the marriage ceremony has already taken place, whether according to custom, or at the office of the marriage registrar, it would not be in order for the couple to conduct themselves as if they were reenacting the marriage. This would only confuse those in attendance who know that the couple has already performed their marriage ceremony. Concerning what may be appropriate dress for a Bible-based talk following a customary marriage, please see the *Watchtower* of October 15, 2006, page 21. While it is impossible to cover every situation, we are confident that the elders can apply the above principles in a balanced and reasonable manner.

13. Publication of Banns and Request for Gazettes: The civil marriage requirements as set out in the Marriages Act, which regulates civil marriages in Ghana, provides for the publishing of banns (notice of marriage) by posting it on notice boards for not less than 21 days before the marriage ceremony. This is not recommended for application at our Kingdom Halls. Thus, instead of posting banns at the Kingdom Hall of the engaged couple and making announcements of the forthcoming marriage ceremony for at least 21 days in advance, we recommend that you make use of the District/Municipal/Metropolitan Assembly in your area in the filing of notice for marriage. Thereafter, the engaged couple, upon receipt of the Registrar’s Certificate, would be legally qualified to use the registered Kingdom Hall for the civil marriage ceremony.

14. It is suggested that any bodies of elders wanting to have a Kingdom Hall registered/gazetted as a center for marriages, should write to the branch office, for the attention of the Legal Department. The branch office will determine whether the particular hall will serve the majority of publishers, given its location in relation to already registered halls.

15. Should Disfellowshipped Persons be Involved? There are some fine principles discussed in *The Watchtower* of September 15, 1981, pages 30-31, paragraphs 22-25. The article showed that if a disfellowshipped family member plays an active role in the marriage ceremony,

such as being in a 'bridal party' or plays a role of "giving away" the bride" in a gathering administered by the congregation, that would not be in harmony with the scriptural direction at 1 Corinthians 5:11 to 'stop keeping company' with a disfellowshipped individual. In all cases, with prayerful reliance on Jehovah and seeking practical advice, a couple may find that there are alternative ways to proceed without having a disfellowshipped family member play an active role in a marriage. Should there be some rare and extreme circumstances where there is no alternative but to have, say a disfellowshipped father accept a bride price, then the congregation would not be involved and it will be the responsibility of the couple to ensure that the process involves no spiritual or social association.

16. As we endeavor to please Jehovah more fully in all matters, including the area of contracting marriages, we will see more clearly his smile of approval in our lives.—1 Cor. 10:31, 32.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation
of Jehovah's Witnesses*

c: Circuit overseers

P.S. When a speaker who is not a duly authorized marrying agent is pronouncing the couple husband and wife, he will use the following statement: "Forasmuch as and have covenanted before Jehovah God and these witnesses to accept each other in wedlock, I, as an ordained minister and by the authority conferred upon me by the Holy Scriptures, *and in the presence of a duly authorized representative of the state of Ghana*, pronounce that they are husband and wife together. What God has yoked together, let no man put apart."