

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses

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April 9, 2018

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS IN NIGERIA

Re: Importance of Complying With Legal Requirement With Respect To Christian Marriages

Dear Brothers:

Marriage is a sacred arrangement instituted by the Creator of mankind, Jehovah God. (Mark 10:6-9) As has been repeatedly stated in our letters and various Bible-based publications, while Jehovah originated marriage, human governments exercise a measure of control over the actions of those getting married.

Under the law that governs celebration of statutory marriages in Nigeria, Christian elders and, in exceptional circumstances, ministerial servants are authorized to officiate at Christian weddings and to legally pronounce couples husband and wife. This is a very weighty responsibility that must be given serious attention in accordance with governmental laws. Jesus said: "Pay back Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God." (Mark 12:17). Similarly, the apostle Paul directed: "Let every soul be in subjection to the superior authorities, for there is no authority except by God; the existing authorities stand placed in their relative positions by God."—Romans 13:1; Titus 3:1.

Over the years we have provided direction in various letters and *Our Kingdom Ministry* articles regarding the proper procedure to follow in contracting statutory marriages. We have observed however that proper procedure is still not being followed especially in relation to celebration of marriages in licensed Kingdom Halls. Reports reaching us at the branch office indicate that some are still not giving proper advice and assistance to prospective couples. The sad consequence is that some Christian couples have ended up contracting invalid marriages and unsuspectingly living in fornication or adultery. Clearly, our brothers and sisters' relationship with Jehovah is involved. We have had a case of a couple who lived together for over three years in the erroneous belief that they were validly married, only to discover that they were actually living in fornication.

In the circumstances, we are providing below comments on some important aspects of statutory marriage that you may need to assist prospective couples in your congregations to fully comply with the law:

- 1. LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL DIRECTIVES:** From time to time, some government departments and agencies, especially the local government councils, may provide instructions or directions that conflict with directions from the organization, particularly in relation to performance of statutory marriages in licensed Kingdom Halls. Whenever this occurs, please follow the direction we have provided and promptly inform us if the council officials' direction makes it difficult for you to validly perform statutory marriages in the licensed Kingdom Hall.
- 2. TRANSFER OF BOOKLETS OF MARRIAGE CERTIFICATES FROM A LICENSED KINGDOM HALL:** For a statutory marriage to be valid, it must be celebrated in a Kingdom Hall licensed for celebration of marriages. Please note that a marriage

celebrated in an unlicensed Kingdom Hall may **NOT** be valid. It is also illegal to carry a booklet of marriage certificates from a licensed Kingdom Hall to an unlicensed Kingdom Hall. Note that there is a difference between the celebration of marriages in a licensed Kingdom Hall and the giving of a marriage discourse in an unlicensed Kingdom Hall. It may be possible to combine the celebration of marriage and the giving of the marriage discourse in the same Kingdom Hall if the Kingdom Hall is a licensed one. The same principle is applicable to moving a booklet of marriage certificates. It can be moved from one licensed Kingdom Hall to another, but not to an unlicensed Kingdom Hall.

3. **TIME WITHIN WHICH A STATUTORY MARRIAGE MUST BE CELEBRATED IN A LICENSED KINGDOM HALL:** The Marriage Act provides that, for a marriage celebrated in a licensed Kingdom to be valid, the marriage must be celebrated with open doors between the hours of 8 o'clock in the morning and 6 o'clock in the evening. Any marriage celebrated outside this stated time limit may not be legally valid.
4. **CONTRIBUTIONS FOR USE OF THE KINGDOM HALL FOR MARRIAGES:** It has come to our attention that prospective couples that apply to celebrate their marriage at some licensed Kingdom Halls, or to use some unlicensed Kingdom Hall for their marriage discourse, are often asked to defray expenses, such as diesel for generators, tissue papers, electricity bills, replacement of marriage booklets and annual renewal fees for the licensed Kingdom Hall. **Please note that the responsibility of replacing the booklet of marriages and paying an annual renewal fee for a licensed Kingdom Hall are those of the congregations using the licensed Kingdom Hall, as agreed in the resolutions they took before the Kingdom Hall was approved to be licensed for celebration of marriages. We are therefore asking you to immediately desist from the practice of levying intending couples for these purposes, if that has been your practice.** Regarding other expenses, publishers in the congregations may resolve to bear them. If they had resolved to bear such extra costs, then it will be inappropriate to demand that brothers using the Kingdom Hall for marriage should also defray such expenses. If a couple chooses not to contribute, they should not for that reason be denied the use of the Kingdom Hall. Any contributions should be voluntary and unsolicited.
5. **USE OF THE KINGDOM HALL VENUE DURING WEDDINGS FOR PURPOSES OTHER THAN THEOCRATIC:** It has been observed that during weddings some Kingdom Halls are being used for purposes other than the purpose for which it was built, that is for pure worship. The Kingdom Hall should not be used as a substitute for the wedding reception venue. It is not also proper to distribute foods and drinks to wedding guests within the Kingdom Hall premises.
6. **USE OF WRONG FORM C TO OBTAIN FORM E (MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE):** It has come to our attention that some marriages were celebrated at licensed Kingdom Halls without complying with the legal requirement of first obtaining the "Registrar's Certificate" (Form C) before being issued with marriage certificate (Form E). Instead of obtaining the "Registrar's Certificate," some couples simply presented a wrong Form C (used for registration of customary marriage) and thereupon were issued with marriage certificate (Form E). Please note that any marriage celebrated without first obtaining the correct Form C from the registrar at the local government council could be declared invalid. To avoid confusing the "Registrar's Certificate" with the certificate of registration of customary marriage, which is also called Form C, please review our January 31, 2011, letter to all congregations in Nigeria.

Re: Importance of Complying With Legal Requirement With Respect To Christian Marriages
April 9, 2018
Page 3

We trust that you would continue to assist the brothers to “let marriage be honorable.” (Hebrews 13:4) Meanwhile, if you need further clarification on any of the things stated above, please do not hesitate to write to us.

Be assured of our warm Christian love and best wishes.

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

cc: Circuit overseers