

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses

675 Red Mills Road Wallkill NY 12589-3292 Phone: (845) 306-1100

March 4, 2020



TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS IN THE UNITED STATES BRANCH TERRITORY

Re: Coronavirus Outbreak

Dear Brothers:

We continue to be very concerned for the welfare of our brothers who have been affected or may be impacted by COVID-19. Your efforts to care for your brothers and sisters during these difficult times give us a fine opportunity to demonstrate love for our "brotherhood." (1 Pet. 2:17, ftn.) This letter replaces paragraph 3 in the postscript of the letter to all congregations dated February 27, 2020.

Practical measures to protect those attending meetings at the Kingdom Hall: In addition to posting the letter dated February 27, 2020, on the information board, please also post the attached *Reminder* in each of the restrooms.

Individuals with a risk of being contagious with the flu or flu-like symptoms are encouraged not to attend meetings in person. Therefore, please ensure that arrangements are made for a tie-in to the meeting. (October 2019 *Announcements and Reminders* [S-147]) If a tie-line is not possible, publishers can watch both the weekend and midweek meetings using JW Stream. (*sff* chap. 20 par. 26) Otherwise, publishers can be encouraged to consider the meeting material individually or as a family.

Additionally, please arrange for the following:

- A routine to disinfect all frequently touched surfaces in the Kingdom Hall including but not limited to door and fixture handles, microphones, seat arms, hard surface furniture, sinks, toilets, urinals, and drinking fountains. This should be done before and after each meeting.
- Roving microphones should be used in a way that does not require the commenter to touch the microphone. Providing reminders to discourage touching the microphone may prove helpful.
- Confirm that sufficient alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers are available.
- Encourage all in the congregation to review the jw.org Newsroom article entitled "Coronavirus Update and Response" and possibly as part of their family worship.

In the event of a *local outbreak* or a *confirmed exposure* of COVID-19 in or near your congregation territory, implement these additional measures:

- **Entrance signs:** The attached *Congregation Health Notice* should be posted at the primary entrance points of the Kingdom Hall. The objective is to direct high-risk individuals to attend the meeting via tie-line and not to enter the Kingdom Hall.
- **Announcement for the congregation:** We have provided an announcement for field service group overseers to immediately convey *orally* to publishers in

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their groups. Additionally, it should be read at the beginning of each congregation meeting as long as there is a risk of exposure in the area. **However, please do not place this letter or the announcement on the information board. Also do not distribute the announcement in writing.** Following this instruction to refrain from attending scheduled congregation activities *in person* will reduce the risk of exposing others.

- **Adjustments to congregation activities:** The postscript to elders of the letter dated February 27, 2020, states: "It will be important for you to remain alert to official notices and warnings issued by governmental authorities and understand what is expected if orders related to a health emergency include restrictions to group or public assembly. If the authorities prohibit public assembly in your area due to the COVID-19, please follow such instructions and inform the branch office at the earliest opportunity." It is best to obey these "superior authorities" in this regard. (Rom. 13:1) In addition, if you learn that someone exposed to COVID-19 has attended a meeting at the Kingdom Hall or has been in contact with other publishers, you should consider if congregation meetings should *temporarily* be cancelled. Before resuming meetings, the Kingdom Hall should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. You may also review whether publishers should be directed to participate in the ministry through letter writing or telephone witnessing for a period of time, instead of engaging in the door-to-door work, cart witnessing, or other forms of the public ministry. It would also be appropriate to consider sensitivities in the community and the reputation of our organization when making these determinations, especially if other organizations or groups are curtailing their gatherings or activities.
- **Informing your circuit overseer:** Immediately inform your circuit overseer of adjustments you make to congregation activities due to COVID-19, as well as bodies of elders using the same Kingdom Hall.

If you are considering adjusting congregation activities even though no restrictions on public gatherings have been implemented and there is not a case of exposure to COVID-19, then please consult with your circuit overseer for direction before making a decision. If the matter is urgent and you are unable to contact your circuit overseer, please contact the Service Department. If after hours, feel free to use the emergency number for security threats, (845) 744-1999.

Please be assured that we trust that your body of elders will prayerfully evaluate the facts and circumstances in your local area as you implement this direction. We are confident that Jehovah's spirit will guide you and that the congregation will see the evidence of your love for them as you follow through on this direction.—Jas. 1:5, 3:17; 2 Cor. 8:24.

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

c: Circuit overseers

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PS to coordinators of the bodies of elders:

The body of elders should meet immediately to read this letter and discuss how best to implement this direction locally.