

TESTIGOS CRISTIANOS DE JEHOVÁ

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March 16, 2020

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Maintaining Congregation Meetings During COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Brothers:

During the current pandemic, our dear brothers and sisters need loving elders who will shepherd them and provide well-prepared, timely spiritual instruction. (Acts 20:28) Therefore, please *maintain regular contact* with each family in the congregation, including making shepherding calls, perhaps by telephone.—Prov. 27:23; *sfl* chap. 25 pars. 1, 2.

It is also the Governing Body's earnest desire that bodies of elders continue to *conduct regular, weekly congregation meetings*. Allowing the brothers and sisters to meet together, even electronically, and express their faith is much better than simply watching a recorded program. As noted below, making use of JW Stream should be considered only when other alternatives are not possible.

While gathering at the Kingdom Hall is the preferred method for meeting together as a congregation, this may not be possible or advisable. If secular authorities restrict large gatherings or limit the size of gatherings out of concern for public safety, we should be obedient and show that we are "in subjection to the superior authorities."—Rom. 13:1.

At the same time, the body of elders should give serious consideration to the following *alternative ways of conducting the weekly meetings*:

- **Present Programs by Videoconference:** The elders may choose to use online conferencing tools, such as Zoom or Skype. These tools allow the brothers and sisters to see each other, offer comments, and present their meeting parts from home. In this way, they can 'encourage one another.' (Heb. 10:24, 25) If it is not practical to tie-in all publishers in one videoconference, the elders could arrange a number of smaller videoconferences, perhaps according to field service groups. In all cases, publishers would connect from their own homes. There would be no need for them to meet together in person.
- **Present Programs from the Kingdom Hall:** Only program participants would assemble at the Kingdom Hall. All others would connect to the meeting electronically, such as by telephone tie-line or video streaming. In some cases, it may be possible for those connected to participate in the meetings. (*sfl* chap. 20 par. 24) If it is not possible to have audience participation, the assigned brother would summarize the material.
- **Organize Meetings in Smaller Groups:** If secular authorities permit and it is safe to do so, the body of elders may organize meetings by small neighborhood groups or family groups. If brothers are not available in such groups to conduct meetings, sisters could meet to consider the material together.—*od* chap. 7 par. 23.

- **Selective Use of JW Stream:** Making use of JW Stream should be considered only when other alternatives are not possible. JW Stream should not be used as a substitute for congregation meetings week after week. Jehovah's people rejoice at every opportunity to come together for worship and to express their faith by commenting, even if this must take place by videoconference.—Ps. 22:22; 122:1.
- **Inactive:** The elders should reach out to inactive ones and keep them updated as to adjustments in the meeting arrangements. (Luke 15:4-7; *sfl* chap. 25 pars. 13-15) If needed, elders may grant inactive ones access to JW Stream. The world situation may well move some to return to Jehovah.
- **Disfellowshipped:** Elders should use good judgment in determining whether and how to make brief contact with disfellowshipped ones to inform them about adjusted meeting arrangements held at the Kingdom Hall. (*sfl* chap. 25 par. 20) If meetings are not being held at the Kingdom Hall, then the elders should use good judgment in considering whether to grant a disfellowshipped person access to recordings of meetings on JW Stream.

These alternative ways of conducting meetings may need to be adjusted based on local circumstances. Elders should keep in mind that local publishers will have to make decisions regarding meeting attendance based on their personal circumstances.—Gal. 6:5.

We thank you in advance for your fine efforts to care for the spiritual needs of Jehovah's precious sheep.—1 Pet. 5:2, 3.

Your brothers,

Testigos Cristianos de Jehová

c: Circuit overseers