

TESTIGOS CRISTIANOS DE JEHOVÁ

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SH February 5, 2018

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Correspondence sent to the branch office

Dear Brothers:

Recently, a new email system has started in our branch territory. Therefore, we are writing to offer you some reminders in connection to the correspondence that is sent to the branch office.

Before writing. First of all, it is vital to ask if it is really necessary to write to the branch office. **For example, is it something that has already been addressed in our publications or letters?** Please keep in mind that many of the questions received in the branch office have to do with matters treated quite thoroughly in our publications or in the letters addressed to the bodies of elders. (Publishers wishing to consult the branch may be directed to the guidelines provided in the “Question box” section of *Our Kingdom Ministry*, May 1983, page 8 and October 1974, page 8.) On the other hand, **is it something that the elders should handle first?** In this regard, the *Shepherding* textbook says: “While it is not wrong for an elder to contact the branch office if he feels the need, *it is generally best to discuss matters as a body first. Then, if necessary, write to the branch office.* If there is a truly urgent matter requiring assistance from the branch office, *it is best for two elders to call together to explain the situation and to make a note of the direction given.*” (*ks10* chap. 2 par. 4) This applies, especially, in cases of child abuse. (See the letter dated September 1, 2017.)

Writing correspondence. When it comes to **letters**, keep in mind the valuable recommendations that appear on pages 71 to 73 of the *Ministry School* textbook. It explains, for example, the importance of **tidiness**, saying: “In any letter, give attention to proper spelling, grammar, punctuation and, of course, neatness. Doing so will lend dignity to your letter and the message that it contains.” (*be* p. 72 par. 4) Here are some reminders about how to handle the different sections of a letter:

§ **Heading:** Are the *name, number and postal address* of the sending congregation *clearly identified*?
Is the *date* written?

- With the new email procedure through *jw.org* it is vital to not neglect this. Otherwise, the congregation from which the correspondence comes will not be able to be clearly and quickly identified.
- Correspondence should not be on stationery with a letterhead design that is similar to that used by the branch office.
 - Some individuals could wrongly conclude that letters with such a letterhead have been approved by or were sent by the branch office.

§ **Recipient:** Does the *recipient's name* appear on the letter, for example, the name of the department or the appropriate section?

- The official correspondence should be addressed to the appropriate department, not to a particular person.

§ **Body of the letter:**

- *Is the purpose of the letter clearly stated in the first paragraph?* This will allow the branch to know immediately why it is being written.
 - If the branch sent a letter previously, please indicate the desk symbols, the date of the letter and the specific subject that it addressed.

- § For example, if you want to refer to the content of this letter, it would be sent to the SH tray of the Service Department, making reference to the letter dated SH February 5, 2018, with the subject “Correspondence sent to the branch office”.
- If the letter refers to a matter with different issues or number of questions, it is preferred to use a separate paragraph for each issue or for each specific group of thoughts.
 - Thus, the different points of the letter would stand out distinctly and a better service or response could be given.
 - § If it is about totally different matters—or that should be handled by different desks or departments of the branch—, it would be better to write a different letter for each topic.
- **Brevity:** Brevity is always valuable in letter writing. By not including unnecessary words or redundant thoughts, the letter will be more effective. The purpose of the letter will be clearer if what is superfluous is left out. However, the information must be clear and complete. What is said should not leave room for ambiguity or confusion. In general, it should not be necessary to write another letter to explain what the previous one meant.
- § **Closure of the letter:** *Does it contain the full names and surnames of all the elders who approve the content of the letter?*
 - Unless otherwise indicated, it is not necessary to sign the letters or forms that are sent from the email address of jw.org. However, the names of the brothers who approve sending the correspondence must appear at the end of the document.
 - Except when the situation requires it—as in the case of routine matters—, the branch office does not respond to inquiries made by one elder on a personal basis, that is, if the body of elders should be making the inquiry instead.
- § **Reviewing the letter:** After having finished the letter, it would be convenient to read it again and evaluate its content. (*be p. 73 par. 2*)
 - The elders who make the consultation should make sure that the text of the letter is not confusing, that there are no unnecessary repetitions and that, at the same time, important details are not omitted.
 - For example, when making a query of a judicial nature, the elders could explain the sinner's story and many details of their conversation with him, but they could ignore important information such as, what are the proofs that sustain the accusation or the reasons why they believe that there is—or not—a basis to deal with the matter judicially. Even if they are not clear on how to act, they will provide the relevant information they have on hand in order to receive the needed guidance.
 - § For more information on the use of personal names in the correspondence see the letter dated SE:SSA December 30, 2017.
 - The elders will also check that the documents that should be attached with their correspondence are included and, if applicable, that those who correspond receive a copy of the letter.

Sending correspondence. First, **how to know if a letter or a message should be sent?** The letter of October 8, 2017, related to the new email from jw.org, explains the following: “*For routine matters*, such as an inquiry on the status of a literature request, attaching a separate document is not necessary. Rather, *the mes-*

sage may be typed directly into the body of the e-mail.” (The reinstatements or death notifications will continue to be reported by a message [see the letters dated June 26 and December 22, 2014].) Lately, the sending of text messages has increased a lot and some issues are usually treated with certain lightness. However, that is not the objective of the text message feature of jw.org. **Matters that are not of a routine nature, such as those mentioned above, must be sent by letter.** On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that the principles mentioned above, related to the writing of letters, also apply to the sending of messages. The use of this function does not justify the sending of informal or incomplete messages.

To whom should correspondence be sent? In the “Documents” tab, under the section “Forms” you will find the document “Branch departments to which to send correspondence”. This document includes the list of departments to which correspondence must be sent. In general, the correspondence should be sent to a single department or recipient. (It is preferable to send correspondence for each different issue.) If you are hesitant to which department you should send correspondence to, it is best that you send it to the Service Department, which will handle it or send it to the corresponding department. If, by indication of the branch office or for exceptional reasons, you had to send the same correspondence to several departments simultaneously, we would appreciate this to be mentioned in the message.

Please do not request acknowledgment of your correspondence neither call the branch to ask for its status, unless it is something urgent. Of course, if much time has elapsed since the correspondence was sent and no answer has been received you may communicate with the branch office to make sure it was received. When doing so, it will be useful to make reference to the date, name of person who sent it, or any other information that may help to ascertain if the branch office received the referred letter or message.

What should be kept present when sending attachments with letters or messages? The letter dated October 8, 2017, says that “correspondence sent as an attachment to the branch office should be legible, of good quality, and preferably in a commonly used format, such as one of those used by Microsoft Word (files ending in “.doc” or “.docx”) or Adobe Acrobat (files ending in “.pdf”). Whenever possible, send the original electronic document as an attachment rather than sending a link to a document or sending a document that has been printed and then scanned.” Please take note that no links or hyperlinks to other documents should be used. It is convenient to indicate how many documents are being attached to the letter or message.

What should be written in the subject line? Please write the name of the congregation and the subject itself. Please write in a concise way the content of the letter. (For example, “Ajalvir Congregation: Territory Assignment”.) In general, the subject mentioned in the subject line will coincide with the one mentioned in the letter itself. If you send a form, it will suffice with mentioning that in the subject line. (For example, “Ajalvir Congregation: S-77 Form”.)

In which language should the foreign-language congregations write? Please do so in Spanish or in English, despite the congregation’s official language. (If the correspondence should be sent to a congregation located out of the Spain branch territory, such correspondence should be sent in the language spoken in the target language, with an English or Spanish translation, if applicable.)

We are certain that these reminders will contribute to “let all things take place decently and in an orderly manner.” (1 Cor. 14:40, footnote) Thank you very much for your faithful collaboration. Please accept our warm Christian love and best wishes. Please be assured of our warm Christian love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

Testigos Cristianos de Jehová

c: Circuit overseers