



Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses (Australasia)

PO Box 280, Ingleburn NSW 1890, Australia | ABN 86 632 883 133 | Phone: +61 2 9829 5600

SA August 28, 2019

To All Bodies of Elders

Re: Congregation Records

Dear Brothers:

We are writing to provide a few general reminders about confidential records. Please review these as a body of elders when you first have an opportunity.

Elders' Meetings: As noted in the *Shepherd* book (*sfl*), chapter 1, paragraph 8, "The secretary or another designated elder should take *notes of the decisions*, including the names of elders who will follow through and the suggested date for completion." There should be no need for any elders to take extensive notes during elders' meetings. When decisions have been implemented by the assigned elder(s), there is generally no need for the notes to be retained.

Baptized and Unbaptized Publishers Involved in Serious Wrongdoing: When the assigned elders have concluded the matter, a written record should be prepared. These brothers should ensure that this record "contains only a *brief summary* and any correspondence from the branch office and any correspondence to and from the branch regarding the wrongdoer." (*sfl* 22:24) "The summary should include only pertinent facts and the final determination of the person's standing in the congregation; it should not contain personal opinions." (*sfl* 22:21) A *Confidential Summation Sample* is available in the forms section of jw.org for use as required. The confidential records should contain only sealed envelopes with details on the outside of the envelope as directed in *sfl* 22:23, 24.

Personal Note-taking During Judicial Hearings: While the judicial committee may determine the need to take some brief personal notes, in many cases this may not be necessary. Good judgment in this regard may reduce the likelihood of stifling the brother or sister's free expression. Elders assigned to serve on a judicial committee should view the hearing as another aspect of their shepherding work where note-taking, generally, is not required. Instead, the focus should be on asking questions that reveal what the wrongdoer is thinking, what his heart condition is, and listening carefully to what he says. This allows each elder to understand how the individual really feels about his wrongdoing, about his relationship with Jehovah, and about his determination to avoid sinning seriously against God in the future. Elders are encouraged to allow these ones to pour out their heart and not to be offended by any "wild talk" on their part. (*w19* June p. 22 par. 10; Job 6:2, 3) However, if this "wild talk" is recorded in detail, it may not be accurately assessed when reviewed out of context. In any case, if it is determined that some brief personal notes need to be taken during a hearing, they **should be destroyed** once a summation of the hearing has been prepared.—*sfl* 22:21.

Letters of Introduction: A sample letter of introduction can be found in the forms section of jw.org. A copy is also attached for your reference. In addition to providing the necessary details as outlined in chapter 26, paragraph six of the *Shepherd* book, paragraph seven suggests you include information that you would like to receive if the person moved into your congregation. If this additional information is provided, please endeavour to frame this in a positive way, perhaps highlighting some Bible principles that the person has been encouraged to apply more fully. Ask

yourself if you would be prepared to share this information with the individual in a shepherding call if opportunity arose. In many instances, you may already have done so. While letters of introduction may be kept by the receiving congregation for *up to* five years, in most instances, once the elders have considered the introductory comments, there would be no need for the letter to be retained. (*sfl* 22:8) If it is sent via jw.org e-mail, and not printed or saved to another location, it will be automatically deleted after 45 days. In general, there is no need to retain letters of introduction sent to other congregations.

Review of Current Records: As a reminder, policy letters are now incorporated into the *Shepherd* book. As mentioned in our February S-147 Announcements and Reminders, “use of the *Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders* (S-22) and the letters referenced therein has been discontinued. Any printed or electronic copies of such documents, as well as the old *Shepherding* textbook (*ks10*), should be destroyed.”

After discussing this letter as a body of elders, we would like the secretary along with the coordinator, or another assigned elder, to review what is currently in the congregation’s confidential file. They should examine the contents of all sealed envelopes in the file to confirm that they contain only the documents mentioned in the *Shepherd* book, chapter 22, paragraphs 22-23. The assigned elders should adhere to the direction in paragraph 26 when determining if the entire contents of the envelope should be destroyed. If the elders are not sure if a particular document needs to be retained, they should feel free to contact the Service Department for assistance.

Please ensure that all records kept in the file are in harmony with what is outlined in the *Shepherd* book, chapter 22, and our comments above. Additionally, we ask that each elder check his personal computer, or hard copy files, and even his meeting bag, to ensure that no confidential correspondence is retained outside the congregation’s confidential file. We would like the secretary to confirm with each elder that this has been done.

Thank you very much for your attention to this important matter. We appreciate that each one of you has personal and family obligations to care for along with the weighty responsibility you carry as elders and shepherds of the “flock of God.” (1 Timothy 3:4; 1 Peter 5:2) May Jehovah’s rich blessing with be you and your families. We take this opportunity to send our warm Christian love and greetings.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation of
Jehovah's Witnesses (Australasia)*

Attachment

c: All Circuit Overseers