

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



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TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Foreign-language field

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Dear Brothers:

1. This letter replaces the letters dated December 4, 2009, and April 4, 2012, to all bodies of elders regarding the foreign-language field. Those letters should be removed from the congregation permanent file of policy letters and be destroyed. This letter defines what is meant by the term “pregroup.” It also provides guidelines on audio and video tie-in to foreign-language meetings, whether by means of live streaming or delayed streaming. Additionally, guidelines on the use of recordings of foreign-language meetings are provided. This will assist us to fulfill our commission to help people from all language groups to draw close to our impartial God, Jehovah.—Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:23; Acts 10:34, 35; Rom. 15:7.

2. People are more likely to make spiritual progress when they hear Bible truth in their native language. Thus, we should try to share the good news with them in the language they understand best. For example, we could employ the steps outlined in the front of the booklet *Good News for People of All Nations*. We could learn a simple presentation in the language, such as this: “Hello. My name is _____. Here is good news for you.” We could then offer a tract or a brochure if available in that language. Or we could direct the person’s attention to jw.org to receive a witness in his native tongue.—*km* 12/12 pp. 3-6.

3. **Forming pregroups:** At times, a sizeable population of people who speak a language other than the language of the congregation exists in the area, but a qualified elder or ministerial servant is not available to conduct a weekly meeting in the language. People who speak that language may be scattered throughout the territory of nearby congregations. If a few publishers are willing to learn the target language and a body of elders is willing to take the lead in organizing the preaching in that language, the elders should consult the circuit overseer. He may be aware of other congregations attempting to preach to people of that language and may provide valuable information on which congregation would be in the best position to host a pregroup. Once that congregation has been determined, the elders may write to the branch office and request permission to be formally recognized as a pregroup. At times, the branch office may take the initiative to inquire about the possibility of forming a pregroup in certain areas.

4. The body of elders of the congregation hosting a pregroup also arranges for **periodic meetings**, such as a public talk and/or a *Watchtower* Study, in the target language to determine the extent of support for meetings in that language. It is preferred that such meetings be held in an auxiliary room while the host congregation is conducting its Public Meeting and *Watchtower* Study. However, if because of serious and unchanging circumstances the elders feel that such is not possible, the periodic Public Meeting and/or *Watchtower* Study may be held on the weekend at a time other than the regularly scheduled meetings of the congregations in the Kingdom Hall.

5. **Forming groups:** The branch office will recognize a congregation as hosting a foreign-language group if the following four basic requirements are met: (1) There should be sufficient interest and potential for growth in a particular language field. (2) A small core group of publishers should know the language or be learning the language. (3) A qualified elder or ministerial servant should be available to take the lead and conduct **at least one weekly meeting** in that language. (4) A body of elders should be willing to host the group. When these requirements are met to a reasonable degree, then the body of elders will write the branch office about the particulars of the group and will request formal recognition as a congregation hosting a foreign-language group. The elder or ministerial servant taking the lead would be considered the “group overseer” or “group servant” responsible for taking care of the group.—*km* 11/09 p. 5 par. 10; *od* pp. 106-107.

6. However, the group does not function independently. It works under the oversight of the body of elders. The body of elders determines whether, in addition to the one weekly meeting, other congregation meetings should be added and determines how often those other meetings should be held during the month. (See paragraphs 18-24.) The elders also provide balanced direction and show initiative in caring for the group’s needs, including training publishers in the group to take on additional theocratic responsibility. If the group is ever dissolved, the elders should notify the branch office.

7. **Territory coverage:** The elders should be modest in deciding how much territory a foreign-language pregroup or group should work. The elders should direct the publishers and pioneers to focus on the areas where there is a high concentration of those who speak the target language. In addition, since new ones will need to be directed to the host congregation in order to progress, areas within a reasonable traveling distance to the Kingdom Hall should receive the greatest attention. Once or twice a year, the elders may arrange to work more distant areas. The elders should direct the coverage of the territory so that the publishers and pioneers use their strength and valuable resources productively.—1 Cor. 9:26.

8. A foreign-language pregroup or group **may engage in the preaching work outside the territory of its host congregation.** The service overseer of the host congregation would take

the lead in contacting the service overseers of nearby congregations that have a large number in their territory who speak the target language. He should be modest in determining the number of congregations he will contact so that the group does not attempt to cover more territory than is reasonable. Good communication between the bodies of elders and the traveling overseer(s) involved will ensure that all language groups receive a fine witness.

9. When a foreign-language group or pregroup is ready to begin preaching in another area, the service overseer may contact the body of elders of the congregation there to **request help in locating** those who speak the target language. The body of elders would then arrange for an announcement to be made requesting the publishers to give the addresses of any who speak that language to the service overseer. He will pass any addresses he receives to the pregroup or group requesting such information.—*km* 7/12 p. 5, box.

10. The **search work** is often a key to growth. As noted in the article “Before Preaching, You May Need to Search” in the July 2012 *Our Kingdom Ministry*, pages 4-7, the search work involves making inquiries to locate those who speak a specific language. This article gives detailed instructions on how to succeed in organizing and carrying out the search work. Becoming thoroughly familiar with and implementing the suggestions in the article will lead to a more productive ministry in the foreign-language field.

11. **Host congregation:** The body of elders that hosts a foreign-language pregroup or group must be willing to take an active interest in developing the foreign-language field. Generally, the host congregation should be conveniently located to the target-language community. Such a location enables the publishers to make the most of their field service time and helps interested persons to attend the meetings. Other factors to consider are the location of the publishers, the availability of a suitable Kingdom Hall, and access to public transportation. At times, the host congregation may need to be adjusted. If so, the bodies of elders involved should send a joint letter to the branch office explaining why the change is needed and that the bodies of elders are in agreement with the change.

12. There are advantages when the appointed brothers and publishers in the pregroup or group belong to the host congregation. Doing so allows the body of elders to give better direction on matters pertaining to the pregroup or group and provide shepherding to the publishers. However, this may not always be possible for some appointed brothers. A brother may know the language well and be willing to help the pregroup or group, but family and other obligations may not permit him to move his family to the host congregation. If his helping the pregroup or group does not interfere with his providing for the needs of his family, he may assist to the extent possible. (1 Tim. 3:4, 5; 5:8) In this situation, good communication between the bodies of elders in both congregations will be helpful.

13. The body of elders should be reasonable in what they expect of the appointed brothers and publishers expending themselves in the foreign-language field. If the group conducts more than one weekly meeting, it would be a kindness to consider reducing the number of meeting parts that the publishers in the group present on the program of the host congregation. Consideration and mutual understanding will help all appointed brothers in the congregation to work together in carrying the load of responsibility.—Gal. 6:2, 5.

14. **Audio and video tie-in:** It is preferable for congregation meetings to be conducted locally. However, if such is not yet possible and the congregations are willing to obtain the necessary equipment, it may be possible for a pregroup or group to tie in to the meetings of a foreign-language

congregation. (Such equipment will soon be available as a supplier arrangement on the jw.org Web site. Please wait until then before purchasing equipment.) The bodies of elders involved must consider all of the factors surrounding the request in deciding whether or not to give approval for such an arrangement. Thereafter, it is important for the body of elders of the host congregation to maintain good communication with those in the pregroup or group and with the body of elders of the congregation transmitting the meetings in the target language. If the meetings of the two congregations are held on the same day and hour, the pregroup or group may meet in an auxiliary room in order to tie in to the meeting. In this way those in the pregroup or group would still benefit from association with the host congregation before and after the meeting. However, if the meeting schedule of the two congregations does not coincide, the pregroup or group would still attend the host congregation's regularly scheduled meetings. However, they may also tie in to the meetings of the foreign-language congregation at the appropriate time. It is preferred that the Kingdom Hall be used for such tie-ins. In such cases, the bodies of elders using the Kingdom Hall must also give their approval. This arrangement would be in addition to the local meetings and viewed as an extra privilege for publishers in the pregroup or group to grow spiritually and improve their ministry using the language of the pregroup or group.

15. **Recordings and delayed streaming:** Prerecorded meetings may be conveyed to a pregroup or group for later use. Delayed streaming is approved for those who have the capability to do so. However, prayers should be said locally since the delayed streaming is not simultaneous with the originating program. (*w78* 1/1 p. 32) If the recording or delayed streaming is used at a time other than that set aside for the host congregation's meeting, then the pregroup or group should still attend the meetings of the host congregation for association and encouragement.

16. **Interpretation of meetings:** Generally, simultaneous interpretation at the congregation level for languages other than sign language is not recommended. (See *Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders* (S-22) for direction on sign-language interpretation.) Some who are not fluent in the language of the congregation find it helpful to prepare well for the meetings in their mother tongue to the extent possible before listening to the meetings. Others may appreciate help in locating certain Bible texts. Publishers who know the foreign language may also share the highlights of the meetings at another appropriate time. However, if the body of elders feels there is merit in having some of the program interpreted simultaneously, good judgment is essential. It may not be possible to interpret each part. The parts to be interpreted, as well as who will interpret them, should be assigned well in advance. It should not unduly distract others or work a hardship on the interpreters. Interpreters should be exemplary baptized publishers.

17. **Recording meeting attendance:** The attendance of the meetings of a pregroup or group is included with that of the host congregation's in the *Congregation Meeting Attendance Record* (S-88). This is true whether the meetings are conducted locally or streaming or recordings are used *at the same time* as the host congregation's meetings. However, if the streaming or recordings are used at a time *different* from the host congregation's meetings, the attendance would not be included with the host congregation's, since it is expected that the pregroup or group would have also attended the host congregation's meeting. Neither would the pregroup's or group's attendance be included with the transmitting congregation's attendance. In any case, a separate record of the attendance of a pregroup or group may be kept so that the elders can review its progress.

18. **Congregation Bible Study:** The group should gather for this meeting in another area of the Kingdom Hall, such as an auxiliary room, while the host congregation is conducting its Congregation Bible Study. The group should begin the study with song and prayer in the language of the group. Since in most congregations it is possible to hear the music for the opening song in all

parts of the building, those in the auxiliary room could sing to the same accompaniment from songbooks in their own language. In rare instances in which the song being sung in the main auditorium is not available in the foreign-language edition of the songbook, it may be possible to turn off the sound from the main auditorium and an alternate song may be selected and sung in the auxiliary room, provided it does not cause disturbance for those singing in the main auditorium. A brother in each auditorium could then say an opening prayer in the language of the audience. Then the Congregation Bible Study could commence without having to dismiss the foreign-language group from the main auditorium. The group should follow the weekly meeting schedule for the Congregation Bible Study as outlined in the foreign-language edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry*. If *Our Kingdom Ministry* is not produced in the target language, please request the approved Congregation Bible Study schedule from the branch office.

19. If because of serious and unchanging circumstances the elders feel that it is impossible to follow the guidelines outlined above, they may request that the branch office give approval to hold this meeting just prior to the start of the Congregation Bible Study of the host congregation. A less preferred option would be to hold this meeting just prior to or after the Public Meeting and *Watchtower* Study of the host congregation. Other exceptions are not approved.

20. **Theocratic Ministry School:** At the conclusion of the Congregation Bible Study, the group may begin its Theocratic Ministry School if it is able to hold one. If there is not a qualified brother available to present the Bible highlights, then the group may either join the main audience for that part and then return to the auxiliary room to present the student talks or it may simply remain in the auxiliary room and listen to the Bible highlights. The group should follow the weekly meeting schedule for the Theocratic Ministry School as outlined in the foreign-language edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry*. If *Our Kingdom Ministry* is not produced in the target language, please request the approved Theocratic Ministry School schedule from the branch office.

21. **Service Meeting:** Foreign-language groups do not present the Service Meeting. If the group will not be tying in to, or using a recording of, the Service Meeting of a foreign-language congregation at the same time as the host congregation's Service Meeting, the group should rejoin the host congregation for the Service Meeting, including the opening and closing songs and the closing prayer. However, if sustained interest and potential for further growth is evident and the body of elders feels that the group is ready for a Service Meeting in the foreign language, the body should consider with the circuit overseer whether it is time to recommend to the branch office that the group become a congregation.

22. **Public Meeting and/or Watchtower Study:** If there are sufficient qualified speakers to present a weekly public talk directly in the foreign language, the group should gather for the talk in another area of the Kingdom Hall, such as an auxiliary room, while the host congregation is holding its Public Meeting. (The procedure followed for songs and prayers should be that described previously for the Congregation Bible Study.) If the group is not able to present a weekly public talk but is able to conduct the weekly *Watchtower* Study, the group may listen to the talk (either in the language of the congregation or through a simultaneous interpreter) in the auxiliary room and thereafter conduct the *Watchtower* Study in the target language.

23. If because of serious and unchanging circumstances the elders feel that it is impossible to follow the guidelines outlined above, they may request that the branch office give approval to hold the Public Meeting and/or *Watchtower* Study on the weekend at a time other than the regularly scheduled meetings of the congregations in the Kingdom Hall. It is preferred that the public talk and

the *Watchtower* Study be held together. However, if such is not possible, the group would be expected to attend the public talk of the host congregation.

24. **Memorial of Christ's death:** If a qualified speaker is available, the body of elders of the host congregation may make an arrangement to present the Memorial talk in the language of the pregroup or group.

25. **Meetings during the visit of the circuit overseer:** A foreign-language group may hold its meetings even when the circuit overseer is visiting the host congregation. However, the group will rejoin the host congregation for all of the service talks and the public talk that the circuit overseer presents. Consideration could also be given to simultaneously translating the talks for the benefit of the group.

26. **Kingdom Hall sign, listing of meeting times, and yeartext:** Arrangements can be made for a Kingdom Hall sign to be posted in the language of the group if it is determined that the group is well established and that it will continue to hold at least one weekly meeting at the Kingdom Hall. (*km* 1/90 p. 8) If possible, the sign listing the schedule for the meeting times of the congregations may also include the meeting schedule of the group. Further, consideration can be given to putting up the yeartext in that language. There is no special yeartext for the sign-language field.

27. **Handbills:** The host congregation may request handbills from the branch office in the language of the group to advertise its weekly meeting(s). The group should not make its own posters or flyers for advertising its meetings.

28. **Forming congregations:** If there are valid reasons, the group may request congregation status even if they have less than the recommended 75 regular publishers. There should be sufficient population in the target language to allow the publishers to have a meaningful ministry. The circuit overseer helps the elders to prepare the necessary paperwork correctly and to verify that it is complete before submitting it to the branch office. The publishers involved must be strong spiritually and able to keep the congregation functioning actively. There is no specific number of elders and ministerial servants needed to form a congregation. However, the appointed brothers must be able to provide the necessary spiritual oversight and to take the lead in the preaching work. Such ones must also work diligently to become conversant in the language of the congregation.

29. **Meeting schedule for congregations:** Generally, the meeting schedule for the Congregation Bible Study, the Theocratic Ministry School, and the Service Meeting is outlined in the foreign-language edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry*. However, there will be occasions when congregations must adjust the Service Meeting schedule. For example, the foreign-language edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry* may carry an article that applies exclusively to the congregations serving under the *translating* branch office, such as an article regarding a special preaching campaign for that branch territory. In that case, the article should not be considered. The body of elders should select an appropriate part from the Service Meeting schedule in the *local* edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry* for consideration. A summary of the article, not a word-for-word translation, could be presented.

30. The coordinator of the body of elders should examine the local edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry* each month to make sure that direction applying specifically to all congregations in the branch territory is scheduled for consideration at the Service Meeting, such as parts dealing with the district convention. The local needs part could be used to cover such material, or it may be necessary to replace a part on the Service Meeting scheduled in the foreign-language edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry*.

31. **Literature offers:** Generally, foreign-language congregations, groups, and pregroups should follow the literature offers as they are outlined in the foreign-language edition of *Our Kingdom Ministry*.

32. **Assisting publishers:** A publisher desiring to learn another language and support a foreign-language congregation, group, or pregroup should be assisted to count the cost. You could review with him such articles as “Can You Step Over Into Macedonia?” in the December 15, 2009, issue of *The Watchtower* or “Serving With a Foreign-Language Congregation” in the March 15, 2006, issue of *The Watchtower*. (Luke 14:28) The occasional feature article “They Offered Themselves Willingly” in study editions of *The Watchtower* will help you to keep the conversation positive, upbuilding, and realistic regarding what it takes to be successful in the foreign-language field. (*w13* 1/15 pp. 3-6; *w12* 10/15 pp. 3-6; *w12* 7/15 pp. 3-6) It is helpful if the elders in both congregations communicate before the letter of introduction is sent. Before he reaches out to serve in the foreign-language field, it is important that the publisher be viewed as a good example. If it is evident that it would be premature for the publisher to serve in the foreign-language field now, the elders in both congregations can work together in offering suggestions and encouragement so that the publisher can set a future goal of serving in the foreign-language field.—*od* p. 112.

33. It may require considerable time for a publisher to become conversant in the new language. Most will progress if they are fully absorbed in congregation activities. They should be encouraged to enroll in the Theocratic Ministry School and to participate in the meetings as soon as possible. The elders may organize a special reading class. (*be* p. 285) If appropriate, arrange for qualified publishers who know the language well to work in the ministry with the language learners. Use a simple vocabulary and speak clearly in your conversations with them. Commend their efforts to progress in the language.—*w08* 8/15 pp. 22-25.

34. Our publications provide excellent suggestions that can help immigrant parents in teaching their mother tongue to their children. (*w02* 10/15 pp. 22-26) At times, our children may feel caught between cultures. (*g* 9/07 pp. 18-20) Reassure them that Jehovah loves them for who they are and that they are needed in the congregation. Train them to take on congregation responsibility. Commend them for using their knowledge and experience to help others of similar ethnic background to learn about Jehovah. Doing so will give such young ones a meaningful purpose in life and make them genuinely happy.—Acts 20:35.

35. A publisher who has already moved to the foreign-language congregation may need personal assistance if his struggle with the language is impeding his spiritual progress. Is the publisher beginning to comprehend the congregation meetings? Does he participate at the meetings, making brief comments? Does he give understandable presentations in the ministry? Is he staying strong spiritually, cultivating the fruitage of the spirit, and working for the peace of the congregation? The answers to such questions will guide the elders in determining what may need to be recommended to the publisher so that he maintains strong spirituality. In some cases, it may be best to recommend that the publisher consider returning to a congregation in his native tongue.

36. **Cooperation between congregations:** Congregation territory assignments in multilingual areas are made according to language. The direction on pages 107-108 of the *Organized* book should be followed in working the territory. In addition, the October 1990 *Our Kingdom Ministry* Question Box (*Watchtower Library*) realistically noted: “Obviously at times there will be some overlapping of our efforts.” For example, family members of the same household may speak different languages. However, as the April 1984 *Our Kingdom Ministry*, page 8, (March 1984 in *Watchtower Library*, page 8) observed: “It is good to keep foremost in mind that as we preach, our

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purpose is to make disciples—to teach the truth. (Matt. 28:19, 20) Teaching should be done in the language people understand best. (1 Cor. 14:9).” By concentrating our ministry on people who best understand or prefer the language of the congregation we attend, much good can be accomplished.—*km 7/12 pp. 4-7; km 6/08 p. 4; km 7/03 p. 4.*

37. **Circuit events:** Questions regarding the interpretation of circuit events or tying in to or attending the circuit event of a foreign-language circuit should be forwarded to the local circuit overseer. He has been provided with detailed instructions on such matters.

38. Jehovah has kindly strengthened and united his people by means of loving theocratic direction worldwide. (*jr* p. 220) Truly, Jehovah God is not partial. He lovingly invites all language groups to know and serve him. May we rejoice, as did the prophet, and say: “You have added to the nation; O Jehovah, . . . you have glorified yourself. You have extended afar all the borders of the land.” (Isa. 26:15) Rest assured of our Christian love and appreciation for your self-sacrificing efforts.

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

cc: Traveling overseers

PS to coordinator of the body of elders and secretary:

This letter should be retained in the congregation permanent file of policy letters. You may wish to update the congregation copy of *Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders* (S-22) at this time as well. As a reminder, a copy of the December 5, 2009, letter to publishers learning another language to advance the good news should already be retained in the congregation permanent file of policy letters. Please provide a copy of that letter to any publishers who have not already received a copy and who would benefit from it. If in the future publishers decide to expand their ministry in this way, a copy should be made for them as well.