

Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses



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TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Witnessing in Public Places

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Dear Brothers:

1. This letter replaces the letter dated October 14, 2016, to all bodies of elders regarding witnessing in public places and has been added to the list of policy letters cited in *Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders* (S-22). Paragraph 8 contains updated direction on who may participate in public witnessing. Paragraph 10 makes reference to the new information sheet *Public Witnessing Guidelines* (S-148).

2. **Selecting Suitable Locations:** After consulting with the other elders, the Congregation Service Committee will make the final decision as to specific locations for public witnessing. Primary consideration should be given to areas of high pedestrian traffic that are most visible in accordance with local regulations. Possible locations include transportation hubs, public squares, parks, busy streets, shopping malls, college campuses, airports, and locations of annual events. (See also “New Initiatives for Public Witnessing” found in the July 2013 issue of *Our Kingdom Ministry*, pages 4-6.) If the elders become aware of an opportunity to set up a literature display at a large event, such as a national or international book fair, they should contact the Service Department for further direction.

3. Locations selected for public witnessing must be within the congregation’s territory boundaries. Where the territories of different-language congregations overlap, the service overseers should communicate with one another so as to accomplish the most good while not overwhelming pedestrians and business people.

4. **Site Permission and Insurance Coverage:** In some public locations, permission may be needed from a manager or secular authority before setting up a literature display. The service overseer or someone else designated by the body of elders should determine what may be legally required, if anything, in the way of permissions, permits, and insurance coverage. Any application to use a mobile cart or to set up a table or kiosk to display literature must be filled out in the name of an individual publisher, not in the name of the congregation, any corporation used by the organization, or “Jehovah’s Witnesses.” If a small administrative fee is needed in order to acquire space in a public area, it is to be paid by the individual publisher, not the congregation. Publishers should carefully review any such applications to see what responsibility they are taking upon themselves with

respect to liability. Publishers who apply to distribute literature at these areas are doing so on their own initiative as part of their personal ministry.

5. At times, administrators or managers have waived insurance requirements when the voluntary and non-commercial nature of our Bible educational work was explained to them. Any meeting that is held with a location's manager should be informal, such as one between neighbors in a community, and not a discussion of legal rights. If this meeting is unsuccessful or an excessive fee is required, the body of elders should identify other public areas within their congregation's territory where public witnessing equipment could be used effectively.

6. **Public Witnessing Equipment:** The Congregation Service Committee will determine what equipment (including posters) will be used and where it will be stored. Only artwork approved by the branch office should be displayed. Regularly, and at various times throughout the month, it would be good for public witnessing locations to display posters that feature our Bible study program. These can be displayed in rotation with the posters that feature magazines and other topics.

7. Public witnessing equipment can be requested in the same way that publications are requested. The *Public Witnessing Supplies* (S-80) form contains sample pictures and descriptions for the standard carts, stands, tables, kiosks, and so forth. The equipment will remain the property of the congregation. Care should be taken to request only equipment that will be put to good use by publishers who have been trained in its use and that can be financially supported by the congregation. The congregation may be informed that the cost of the public witnessing equipment will be covered by their contributions to the worldwide work.

8. **Determining Who May Participate:** The Congregation Service Committee will select qualified baptized publishers to participate in this feature of the ministry. Those selected should be known to present themselves in a dignified way. Their appearance and dress should be professional, well-arranged, and modest. Those selected should demonstrate discernment and a willingness to witness in different public settings, should enjoy and promote good relations with others, should be committed to taking the assignment seriously, and should be willing to cooperate with the body of elders. If a parent is approved to participate in public witnessing, his well-behaved child may accompany him. The service committee should use good judgment in deciding whether a mature baptized minor may be approved to participate in public witnessing.

9. If it is possible and practical, the service overseer or someone designated by the body of elders should organize a midweek and weekend schedule for each selected location. There is an advantage to having the literature displays set up in the same location, on the same days, and at the same times. They serve as a constant feature readily recognized by those in the area.

10. **Providing Practical Training:** The service overseer or someone designated by the body of elders will provide the initial training to field service group overseers, their assistants, and publishers chosen to participate. The training should be based on *Public Witnessing Guidelines* (S-148), and a copy of that document should be provided to those participating. The group overseer and his assistant will monitor and assist publishers, and if additional training is needed, the group overseer and the service overseer will provide reminders.

11. Publishers should widely publicize jw.org and should be trained how to highlight its features. For example, those who hesitate to converse with us or accept literature may be more inclined to investigate our website. (*km* 12/12 pp. 5-6) Publishers should know how to help an interested person access material in his language on jw.org, including sign-language videos that would appeal to the deaf and audio recordings that would appeal to the visually impaired.

12. **Displaying Literature:** Taking into account local circumstances and interests, the service overseer will determine the quantity of literature to be displayed. Discernment is needed to ensure

that literature will not be wasted or misused. (*km* 12/11 p. 2) The display should be neat and dignified. Experience has shown that a simple, eye-appealing arrangement of literature is best. In many areas, it would be appropriate to feature those tracts, brochures, magazines, and books that have wide appeal. During the annual campaigns for the Memorial and for the convention, posters featuring these events may be displayed and invitations distributed. Magazines and literature in frequently-requested languages may be kept on hand. If more literature is needed than the quantity allowed for request on *jw.org*, the Shipping Department should be contacted. While Bibles should not be displayed on public witnessing equipment, they may be kept on hand to offer to individuals who request one or who demonstrate sincere interest in the truth. Additionally, a modest supply of the *Return to Jehovah* brochure should be kept on hand (though not displayed) for the benefit of any inactive ones who are encountered.

13. Use of Electronic Devices: If practical, a flat screen monitor connected to a portable electronic device may be used at a literature table or kiosk. The monitor could be used to display approved public witnessing posters, to demonstrate features of *jw.org*, or to play a short video, such as *Why Study the Bible?*

14. Special Metropolitan Public Witnessing: If this separate initiative has been arranged in your area, additional information will be provided to the circuit overseers and congregations so that all may work together in an orderly and organized manner.—*km* 7/13 pp. 4-6.

15. Schools and Universities: Before setting up a literature display at a school or university, it is usually best to approach the school principal, headmaster, or dean. Those making such visits should be forthright in identifying themselves as Jehovah's Witnesses. Many educators gladly receive and make good use of our magazines, literature, videos, and online material once they are made aware of its availability and its educational value. (*g* 1/09 p. 32; *g* 8/07 p. 32) The service overseer may train well-qualified publishers to visit schools and universities.

16. Nursing and Retirement Homes: Some publishers have had success in reaching elderly persons by approaching the manager or activities director of the facility and volunteering their time to encourage residents who might enjoy Bible reading and discussion of Bible accounts. It may be explained that volunteers from the congregation would be pleased to read Bible-based material, to conduct a free weekly Bible study, or to show Bible-based videos to anyone who wishes to attend. Oftentimes, the staff, volunteers, family members of patients, and other visitors will join in the study. The service overseer may train well-qualified publishers to make such visits.—*km* 6/14 pp. 2-4.

17. Harbor Witnessing: Harbor witnessing is a specialized ministry that requires specific direction from the branch office. If there is a major harbor within your congregation's territory and you have not yet received such direction, please write to the Service Department and provide the name, location, and size of the port. If you have a program in place to do harbor witnessing and have not yet contacted the Service Department, please do so in order to explain what harbor is being worked and what is being done.

18. We are confident that Jehovah will bless your efforts to reach all honesthearted ones with the good news. (Eccl. 11:6; 1 Cor. 3:6-9) Please accept an expression of our warm Christian love.

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

c: Circuit overseers