



“SHEPHERD
THE FLOCK OF GOD”
LIFE LESSON



“SHEPHERD THE FLOCK OF GOD”

—1 PETER 5:2

See letter dated October 7, 2010, to all bodies of elders regarding spiral binding of this textbook.
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Chapter One

Shepherd the Flock of God

A good shepherd will strive to imitate Jehovah and his Son as shepherds by loving the sheep in the following areas:

Feeding the sheep

Leading the sheep

Protecting the sheep

1. Jehovah has entrusted elders with the responsibility to care for his precious sheep that he purchased with the blood of his Son. (Acts 20:28) This is a serious responsibility, but through holy spirit, elders can properly care for the sheep. Not only has Jehovah provided his own example as the Supreme Overseer but he has also sent to the earth his own Son, “the fine shepherd,” to leave “a model” for us. (John 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:21, 25) God’s written Word is “beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness.” (2 Tim. 3:16) In addition, he gives timely direction through “the faithful and discreet slave.” (Matt. 24:45) This publication has been prepared to help elders to “shepherd the flock of God.”—1 Pet. 5:2.

2. *“Shepherd the Flock of God”* has been designed as a handbook for elders to supply vital information that will help them care for congregation matters. This publication is divided into chapters, each pertaining to a particular aspect of your work. Each chapter is numbered, and each paragraph within the chapter is also numbered. Therefore, paragraphs are referred to by chapter and paragraph number. For example, chapter 5, paragraph 10, would be written as

“5:10.” All cross-references are by chapter-paragraph notation. Because of efforts to simplify this publication, it does not cover every aspect of our work as elders. At times you may need to consult other publications and letters to the body of elders for detailed information. Be alert to future direction and adjustments so as to stay up-to-date on theocratic direction.

3. As an elder, your ultimate objective is to imitate the Supreme Overseer, Jehovah, and his Son in the way you treat the sheep. (Eph. 5:1) Jehovah sets the example for overseers as a God of love and as the perfect Judge in that he is just at all times and in all of his ways.

Our Loving Overseer

4. Jehovah’s love for us is expressed in action. He took the initiative to send his Son to die in our behalf. (John 3:16) He has given us knowledge of the truth and the privilege of being associated with the visible part of his universal organization. (John 6:44; Rev. 7:9, 10) Because of God’s love, we enjoy food, clothing, life, a measure of health, and innumerable other blessings. God lovingly considers our limitations. (Ps. 103:14) How many are the expressions of love Jehovah has showered down on us, yet none of us deserve his love! Jehovah’s example teaches us how to demonstrate love to others, especially those in the congregation.—1 John 4:19.

5. Our loving Supreme Overseer has also been a Guardian and Protector of his people both physically and spiritually. (Ps. 145:20; Prov. 18:10) Elders should also be guardians and protectors of his people. The basic idea inherent in the Greek word for overseer is protective care. Elders strive to be alert to the needs of individual publishers and families, stepping forward to assist in practical ways when there is a need. (Isa. 32:1, 2) When we imitate Jehovah, the flock in our

care is helped to feel secure and content.—1 Thess. 2: 7, 8.

A Lover of Justice and a God of Mercy

6. Jehovah's justice and mercy became evident in the way he handled the rebellion in Eden. Justice prevailed in the judgment he pronounced upon those three unrepentant rebels against his sovereignty. Yet, mercy was also demonstrated when he foretold a deliverer for the unborn offspring of Adam and Eve. (Gen. 3:15) In justice Jehovah has allowed mankind to suffer the due recompense for sin. (Deut. 32:4, 5) But in mercy he has made provision for their redemption and has given them hope of everlasting life. The ransom provision itself satisfies justice—a perfect life for a perfect life. (1 Tim. 2:6) What mercy that provision reflects! It is undeserved kindness to those in desperate need.—John 1:17; Eph. 1:7.

7. Jehovah shows himself to be just and merciful with groups of people as well as with individuals. David was worthy of death because of his sin with Bathsheba, but God extended him great mercy because of his sincere repentance and heartfelt remorse over his conduct. (2 Sam. 12:13; Ps. 51:4, 17) Jehovah extended to natural Israel the opportunity to supply the members of the bride of Christ. But when the required number failed to respond, Jehovah mercifully extended the invitation to the Samaritans and then to people of the nations.—Acts 8:14; 10:45; 15:14; Rom. 11:25.

8. Although elders today cannot read the heart, they must be both just and merciful in their dealings with others. In giving counsel and in judging, elders should hold to God's standard with everyone. What Jehovah expects of elders is revealed at Deuteronomy 1:16, 17; Micah 6:8; and Matthew 5:7. The elders' love for impartiality, justice, and mercy will assist them in

keeping the congregation clean and strengthening the faith of the flock.

9. To be an effective elder, you must care for Jehovah's precious sheep in the same way that he does—with loving-kindness, impartiality, and merciful judgment. Jehovah's people and, more important, Jehovah and his Son greatly appreciate your diligent efforts in behalf of the congregation. We pray for Jehovah's blessing to "be with the spirit you show."
—2 Tim. 4:22.

Chapter Two

How Elders Work Together as a Body

Demonstrate that you accept Jesus as Head of the congregation

Have productive elders' meetings

Be well-organized to care for the congregation's needs

Pursue peace with one another as spiritual men

1. Jehovah has appointed Jesus Christ as Head of the Christian congregation. (Eph. 1:22, 23) Revelation 1:20 depicts Jesus as holding the anointed elders in his right hand, thus, by extension, indicating that he controls all bodies of elders for the purpose of accomplishing Jehovah's will. (*re pp.* 28-29, 136) **Accepting Jesus as Head of the congregation promotes cooperation and unity** on the body. You demonstrate submission to Christ's headship when you do the following:

- Let the Bible be your guide in making decisions.—John 7:16-18.
- Obey direction coming from agencies used by “the faithful and discreet slave,” including Branch Committees, traveling overseers, and others appointed by the Governing Body to take the lead.—Matt. 24:45-47; Heb. 13:17.
- Avoid imposing personal viewpoints and opinions or arbitrary rules on the congregation or the body of elders.—1 Cor. 4:6.

- Listen carefully to the expressions of fellow elders.—Rom. 12:10b; Jas. 1:19.
- Deal in a kind and loving manner with each individual in the congregation, including fellow elders, not lording it over them.—Matt. 11:28-30; John 21:15-17; 1 Pet. 5:1-3, 5.
- Pray when a discussion of the body of elders seems to falter.—Jas. 1:5.

Elders' Meetings

2. The body of elders is a Scriptural entity. (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5; compare 1 Cor. 12:19, 20) When the body of elders discusses a matter, **Christ, by means of the holy spirit, can influence any elder** to make an expression that results in a wise decision, one that may not have been reached if the elders had been consulted individually.—Acts 15:6-21.

3. **When to hold elders' meetings:** Normally the body of elders holds four meetings a year. In addition to the two meetings held in conjunction with the visits of the circuit overseer, they should schedule another meeting about three months after each visit. The body of elders can arrange other meetings any time that circumstances necessitate. Limit additional meetings to their purpose and objectives. Endeavor to keep comments succinct and relevant to the matter under consideration. Unnecessary meetings, or unduly lengthy meetings, consume valuable time that the elders can better spend with their families, in the ministry, and in shepherding. (Matt. 24:14; 1 Tim. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:2) Before compiling an agenda, the coordinator of the body of elders should contact the other elders individually for their input to determine what matters they would like to discuss. The circuit overseer compiles the agenda for the meeting held during his visit. In addition to points he himself puts on the agenda, the circuit overseer should contact the coordinator for any input from the body of

elders. Meetings should normally not exceed two hours in length.

4. 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.

5. **Suggested matters to include on the agenda for elders' meetings:** Spiritual matters should be of principal concern. (Phil. 1:9-11) Elders can obtain appropriate ideas regarding matters to discuss by considering the counsel found in the letters to Timothy and Titus and in such passages as Acts 20:17-35 and 1 Peter 5:1-11. If necessary, elders can allow time on the agenda for matters of a mechanical, nonspiritual nature. These items would include problems that an individual elder, the Congregation Service Committee, or the operating committee cannot resolve separately. The coordinator of the body of elders should give a copy of the agenda to each elder far enough in advance of the meeting to allow time to do research and to give prayerful thought to what will be discussed.—Prov. 21:5.

6. The coordinator should set the pace of the discussion by sticking to the agenda as much as possible and by keeping the main points to the fore. By concluding each matter before opening another, he can ensure that the meeting flows smoothly. The secretary or another designated elder should take notes of the decisions and indicate who will follow through and the time schedule for completion. In some cases the coordinator may ask the elder recommending an item for the agenda to take the lead in presenting it for discussion.

7. Elders' meetings will be more productive if brothers speak up, using "freeness of speech." (1 Tim.

3:13) The coordinator should avoid dominating the discussion, being careful as to when and how he expresses himself. There should be no wrath or debates evident in elders' meetings. (1 Tim. 2:8) Speak on the points under discussion only when you have something meaningful to add.—Prov. 10:19.

8. It should be possible for bodies of elders to be unanimous in most of their decisions. (Acts 15:25) The body of elders should always base their decisions on Bible principles and written direction from “the faithful and discreet slave.” (Matt. 24:45) In cases that do not involve specific Bible laws or where there is no direction from the faithful slave, the body of elders must exercise their collective judgment and conscience. First, have the best interests of the entire congregation in mind, and second, consider what may spiritually assist any individual involved.

9. During the discussion, no one should insist on his personal viewpoint. **If a decision is not unanimous, the minority should give willing support to the final decision.** If in the opinion of the minority a Bible-based decision still has not been reached, the minority should continue to cooperate with the rest of the body and bring the matter to the attention of the circuit overseer during his regular visit. If the matter is urgent, write to the branch office.

How the Body of Elders Is Organized

10. The body should be well-organized to care for the needs of the congregation. All the elders should know their respective responsibilities. Just as individual members of the human body carry out certain functions without direct participation by other body members, individual elders have certain latitude to make decisions so as to carry out their respective re-

sponsibilities. (1 Cor. 12:12-31) Certain essential assignments in each congregation are outlined below.

Coordinator of the Body of Elders

He must be less than 80 years of age.

11. The coordinator should be, if possible, one who has loyally served with the organization for many years. The congregation should respect him for his hard work in the ministry and for his efforts as a shepherd in behalf of the congregation. (Acts 20:24, 31) He should be a good organizer and care for his responsibilities in real earnest. (Rom. 12:8) He should possess genuine humility and appreciate his fellow elders and the value of a multitude of counselors. (Prov. 15:22; Phil. 2:3, 4; Jas. 4:10) He should care about people, loving them and being interested in their spiritual welfare. (John 13:34, 35; 15:13; 1 Pet. 5:2, 3) He should have the respect and cooperation of the congregation and his fellow elders on the body. He must be a spiritual man and should be approachable.

12. The coordinator's duties include the following:

- Serves as chairman of meetings of the body of elders.
- He or another elder contacts the group overseers to determine the situation of each household when a disaster occurs. (*km 2/97 p. 7*) Notifies circuit overseer of results when compiled.
- Directly oversees the attendant, sound, and stage departments. Another elder may assist.
- Receives congregation mail, and passes it along to the secretary for circulation and filing.
- Compiles Scriptural and practical agendas outlining points for discussion at regular elders' meetings throughout the year.

- Distinguishes between items that individual elders can handle and those needing attention by the entire body of elders, so as to avoid unnecessarily taking the time of the entire body.—*w96* 1/15 p. 18 pars. 13-14.
- Makes sure that there is appropriate follow-through on decisions made by elders.
- Assigns Service Meeting parts. He may ask other elders to assist.
- Supervises the assigning of approved conductors and readers for the Congregation Bible Study.
- Arranges for public Bible discourses. Another elder or a well-qualified ministerial servant may assist.
- Approves all announcements made to the congregation, especially those of a judicial nature.
- Takes the lead in caring for details in preparation for the circuit overseer's visit.
- Serves as chairman of the Congregation Service Committee when considering regular or auxiliary pioneer applications, unassigned territory applications, or similar matters as required by the branch office.
- Calls a meeting of the body of elders when judicial matters arise if he is present when a matter comes to light.
- Arranges for two elders (a member of the Congregation Service Committee and usually the group overseer) to meet with each person desiring to become a new publisher.
- Along with the service overseer, determines whether it is advisable for another publisher to conduct a Bible study with the child of a Christian parent.—*km* 11/03 p. 3.
- Arranges for elders to review questions with baptismal candidates. If the assigned elder needs

to take someone along when meeting with a sister, another elder should be used. However, if needed, a capable ministerial servant may accompany the assigned elder to review the questions in “Part I—Elementary Bible Teachings” and “Part III—Jehovah’s Arrangement of Things.” If the congregation has very few elders, capable ministerial servants who have demonstrated good judgment and discernment may be assigned to review the questions in “Part I—Elementary Bible Teachings” and “Part III—Jehovah’s Arrangement of Things.” If the assigned ministerial servant needs to take someone along when meeting with a sister, another capable ministerial servant should be used. In all cases, only elders should be assigned to consider “Part II—Jehovah’s Righteous Requirements.”

- Arranges for two elders, one of them being the individual’s group overseer, to meet with each baptized publisher one year following baptism to provide encouragement and helpful suggestions.
- Arranges for quarterly audit of congregation accounts.
- Authorizes payment of all normal operating expenses of the congregation.
- Approves the items placed on the congregation information board.—*km* 1/89 p. 7.

~~13. When needed, at the conclusion of his regular visit, the circuit overseer will submit a recommendation to the branch office for appointment of the coordinator of the body of elders. If a temporary adjustment is made apart from the circuit overseer’s visit, the body of elders should immediately notify the branch office in a letter, signed by the Congregation Service Committee, explaining the reason for the change. A Coordinator of the Body of Elders/Secretary~~

See July 13, 2014, letter to all bodies of elders regarding the appointment and deletion of elders and ministerial servants.

~~Change of Address (S-29) form should accompany the letter.~~

14. If the coordinator will be away for a time, the body of elders should select one from among their number to act as a replacement during the absence. Mail and correspondence will be handled by the replacement during the time of absence.

Congregation Secretary

15. The body of elders selects the secretary and notifies the branch office by means of the *Coordinator of the Body of Elders/Secretary Change of Address (S-29)* form. The secretary should have good organizational ability and be known as one who does not procrastinate. (Rom. 12:11) He should have the ability to write in a way that is clear and understandable. If necessary, the body of elders may select an elder to assist him or a capable ministerial servant to assist in caring for some routine matters.

16. The secretary's duties include the following:

- Maintains the congregation records, including correspondence from the branch office, in an orderly way.
- Keeps congregation records, including *Congregation's Publisher Record (S-21)* cards, in an accessible but secure place (at the Kingdom Hall if possible) for use by any elder when the need arises. Although the secretary is primarily responsible for the organization of the congregation's file, each elder may be provided with a key to the file. *Every elder* should have access to the *Congregation's Publisher Record* cards, letters from the branch office, and other common records. Only elders directly handling a matter should open and view sealed confidential judicial records.
- Files sealed envelopes containing confidential records on disciplinary cases, including reports

This bullet point reflects updates provided in the September 7, 2011, letter to all bodies of elders with regard to keys to the congregation file.

made by the judicial committees. Information concerning an individual accused of child molestation, proved or otherwise, should be placed in congregation's confidential file and marked "Do Not Destroy" and kept indefinitely.

- Directly oversees those caring for accounts.
- Circulates among the elders photocopies of all letters from the branch office and traveling overseers, and files the originals for reference.
- Keeps records concerning Kingdom Hall ownership, loans, insurance, deeds, and other matters.
- Keeps a list of business items that elders or the congregation must handle in the future, such as utility bills, tax matters, and government items, and checks to be certain these are cared for on time.
- Notifies coordinator when a publisher has been baptized one year.
- Oversees district convention matters.
- Along with service overseer, takes the lead in organizing efforts to care for inactive ones.—See 4:12, 15.
- Compiles field service reports. Keeps *Congregation's Publisher Record* cards up-to-date. Promptly informs group overseers regarding publishers in their group who did not report time for the month.
- Transmits monthly reports promptly; sends communications prepared by other brothers as needed.
- Keeps body of elders informed of any problems that the pioneers are experiencing. With service overseer, reviews the activity of regular pioneers near midpoint of service year so that any having difficulty meeting the hour requirement can be given assistance.

See November 17, 2010, letter to all bodies of elders regarding letters of introduction.

- Promptly sends *Congregation's Publisher Record* card and a letter of introduction signed by the Congregation Service Committee to the congregation to which a publisher moves, without waiting for a formal request from the new congregation. If necessary, initiates correspondence requesting such when a publisher moves into his congregation.
- Ensures that there is an adequate supply of *Report of Meeting Attendance* (S-3) forms for use by the attendants.

Service Overseer

17. The service overseer takes a keen interest in the publishers' share in the ministry and their effectiveness. He is enthusiastic about the ministry and motivates others to have a full share. He is skillful in various aspects of the work, capable of training others, and alert to do so.

18. The service overseer's duties include the following:

- Schedules regular visits to all field service groups so that once each month he visits a different group. (In smaller congregations with few groups, he may arrange to visit each one twice during the year.) During his visit, he conducts meetings for field service, works with the group in the field ministry from house to house, and helps publishers with their return visits and Bible studies. Reviews *Congregation's Publisher Record* (S-21) cards with the group overseer, and checks the arrangements for field service.
- Takes the lead, working with the body of elders, in arranging meetings for field service at convenient times and locations during the day and in the evenings. Arranges for someone to conduct meetings for service, as needed. Organizes wit-

nessing on holidays and during special campaigns.

- If congregation territory is large enough, promotes and monitors the working of personal territories.—*km* 12/06 p. 8; *od* pp. 103-104; *km* 6/81 p. 3.
- Shows genuine interest in the Bible study activity, helping the publishers to conduct effective studies and to direct interest to the organization.
- Directly oversees the work of brothers assigned to handle literature, magazines, and territory. Ensures that there will be sufficient literature for upcoming campaigns. Makes sure there is always a supply of *Field Service Reports* (S-4), *House-to-House Records* (S-8), and so forth.—*km* 7/92 p. 3; *km* 4/87 p. 4; *km* 4/86 p. 3.
- Verifies with literature servant quantities of literature to be requested from the branch office.
- Reviews the territory file once a year, making a list of houses where it is not advisable to call. Under his direction, elders will determine whether these householders would accept visits from Jehovah’s Witnesses. Elders should adhere to recent direction from the branch office in contacting such ones.
- Presents recommendations to the Congregation Service Committee regarding adjustments of publishers assigned to field service groups.
- He and the coordinator of the body of elders determine together if it is advisable for a publisher to conduct a Bible study with the child of a Christian parent.—*km* 11/03 p. 3.
- Along with secretary reviews the activity of the regular pioneers near the midpoint of the service year so that any having difficulty meeting the hour requirement can be given assistance.

- Along with the secretary, takes the lead in coordinating efforts to care for inactive ones.—See 4:12, 15.

Congregation Service Committee

19. The Congregation Service Committee works under the direction of the body of elders and consists of the coordinator, the secretary, and the service overseer. This committee can make certain minor decisions that are in harmony with the judgment of the entire body. However, **these brothers do not function apart from the body, and their opinions do not carry more weight than those of the other elders.**

20. If unusual factors are involved or if the Congregation Service Committee is unsure of the thinking of the body, the entire body of elders should discuss matters and make a decision.

21. The duties of the Congregation Service Committee involve the following:

- Approves use of the Kingdom Hall for weddings and funerals.—*km* 11/08 p. 3; *od* pp. 42, 122.
- Assigns publishers to field service groups after consulting with group overseers involved.
- Signs correspondence regarding appointment or deletion of elders, ministerial servants, and pioneers.
- Signs letters of introduction to the elders of a publisher's new congregation.
- Processes applications for auxiliary and regular pioneer work, for Bethel service, and for other special service privileges.
- Approves publishers who have special needs for accommodations for a district convention.—*km* 12/07 p. 3, par. 6.

- Writes the branch office when a publisher plans to move and wishes to obtain information regarding congregations having a need for assistance.—*od* pp. 111-112.
- Determines whether to destroy records concerning a person reinstated five years if the judicial committee is unavailable or unqualified. May designate other elders to handle this.
- A member of the service committee is included in the meeting with each Bible student desirous of becoming an unbaptized publisher.—*w88* 11/15 p. 17.
- A member of the service committee gives direction on conducting a study with an inactive brother or sister who needs temporary spiritual help.—See 4:15; *od* pp. 85-86.
- If a member of the service committee is absent, another elder may substitute.

Group Overseer

22. The group overseer is responsible to assist all in his assigned group to make spiritual advancement. (1 Tim. 4:15) He should be an alert, caring shepherd and a zealous evangelizer. The entire body of elders chooses group overseers. In view of the importance of this assignment, **the body of elders should select those elders most qualified to fulfill all the aspects of this assignment.**

23. The responsibilities include the following:

- **Takes an active interest in the spirituality of each person in the field service group.** Takes note of who is missing during congregation meetings, seeks to determine the reason, and provides needed assistance. Along with his assistant (or another elder or qualified ministerial servant), periodically arranges to visit all in his group to provide encouragement and

See February 2, 2014, letter to all bodies of elders regarding shepherding.

counsel, concentrating on those who are weak, irregular in meeting attendance or field activity, ill, depressed, or inactive.

- **Assists and trains ministerial servants in the group to reach out and qualify for congregation responsibilities.** It is best that *another elder* accompany him when visiting someone in the group having serious problems. However, he may select a qualified ministerial servant to accompany him when visiting publishers to offer encouragement, which will allow the overseer to observe how the servant reasons on matters. The overseer can ask the ministerial servant in advance to be prepared to share a scripture or a thought from a publication, relate an encouraging experience, or offer prayer. Afterward, the overseer reviews with the ministerial servant the reasons the call was handled the way it was.
- **Assists each one in the group to have a regular, meaningful, and joyful share in the ministry.** If possible, is present for meetings for field service on weekends to take the lead. If he cannot be present, makes sure his group will be cared for, either by his assistant or by another qualified publisher. Periodically reviews with his assistant the record cards of those in his group to determine their strengths and weaknesses in the ministry. (If the assistant is not an elder or a ministerial servant, then the overseer orally shares information with him, noting areas of concern.) Regularly arranges to work in the ministry with each one to provide encouragement and training in all aspects of the work. Assists in the collection of monthly field service reports. Endeavors promptly to obtain late reports for the secretary. Promptly provides assistance if any have not participated for an entire month.

Watchtower Study Conductor

24. Since *The Watchtower* is the principal means by which the faithful and discreet slave dispenses spiritual food, the conductor chosen by the body of elders **should be one of the best teachers on the body.** (Jas. 3:1) He should also be one who has “great freeness of speech.”—1 Tim. 3:13.

25. The following will help the conductor to carry out this assignment in a way that will enable the congregation to receive the most benefit from the lesson.
—w03 9/1 pp. 21-22.

- Presents **brief, well-prepared opening remarks** for one to one and a half minutes. Highlights the theme and theme scripture, and tries to stimulate interest in the lesson. May do this by calling attention to the subheadings, by mentioning questions in the teaching box, or by raising two or three rhetorical questions answered by the lesson. Demonstrates warmth and enthusiasm.
- **Does not comment excessively.** Avoids any tendency to summarize or enhance comments from the audience. If the audience fails to comment on an important point, perhaps asking a specific auxiliary question will stimulate the thinking of the audience and prompt an appropriate comment. Should not ask additional questions unnecessarily, as this tends to stifle commenting.
- **Concentrates on the theme and main points, and highlights the practical value of the lesson** rather than focusing on details. Since much research has been done in producing the lesson, he avoids bringing into the discussion extensive outside theocratic or secular material from personal research.

See April 22, 2012, letter to all bodies of elders regarding reading scriptures at the *Watchtower Study*.

- **Highlights artwork and teaching boxes in the lesson.**
- **Focuses on the Bible.** Encourages the audience to comment on the scriptures in the lesson. Has the designated scriptures read and commented on. However, the paragraphs should be read uninterrupted.
- **Encourages as many as possible to participate.** Tactfully trains the audience that first answer should be a direct answer to the printed question. After that, audience may comment on cited scriptures, supporting arguments, practical application of the material, and so forth. Encourages individuals to comment in their own words. Calls on only one person at a time. Does not scold the audience if answers are not forthcoming.
- **Considers the review box** with the congregation.
- Keeps concluding remarks under one and a half minutes.
- Limits the study to **no more than 60 minutes**, excluding the songs and closing prayer.

Theocratic Ministry School Overseer

26. Since the Theocratic Ministry School trains publishers to present the Kingdom message in a clear and effective way, the body of elders should select a good teacher for this assignment. The body should also choose the auxiliary counselor and any counselors for secondary schools. In congregations that have few elders, qualified ministerial servants may be used as counselors for secondary schools. Instructions regarding the school are found in the book *Benefit From Theocratic Ministry School Education* and the current schedule.

Pursue Peace With One Another as Spiritual Men

27. Each body of elders is made up of imperfect men with different backgrounds and personalities. If these factors are allowed to cause strained relations, the free flow of Jehovah's spirit can be restricted and the congregation may be adversely affected. (Jas. 3:16, 18) You must therefore work hard to **pursue peace** with your fellow elders. (Rom. 12:18; 14:19; 1 Pet. 3:11) The Hebrew word translated "peace" includes the idea of friendship. (*it-2* p. 591) Thus, elders should **cultivate and maintain friendships with one another**, not merely tolerate one another.

28. By pursuing peace, you demonstrate that you are a spiritual man. **A spiritual man displays self-sacrificing love and other aspects of the fruitage of God's spirit**, such as peace, long-suffering, kindness, mildness, and self-control. (Gal. 5:22, 23) You can demonstrate love by not finding fault with your fellow elders but by accepting their limitations along with their excelling qualities. "Love . . . does not get puffed up, . . . does not look for its own interests, does not become provoked. It does not keep account of the injury. . . . It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Cor. 13:4-7; Matt. 7:1-5) At the same time, you should not hold back from giving fellow elders and their families counsel when needed.—Ps. 141:5; Prov. 27:5.

29. **A spiritual man takes the lead in showing honor to his fellow elders.** (Rom. 12:10) One way you can do this is by keeping communication open and free, especially if there are differences in background. Younger elders should be respectful of older, more experienced elders on the body and demonstrate patience. (Lev. 19:32) Older elders will not be quick to take offense when younger elders give suggestions or offer counsel.—Job 32:4-6; Eccl. 7:9; Joel 2:28; 1 Pet. 5:5.

30. A spiritual man develops “the mind of Christ.” (1 Cor. 2:16) Jesus was humble even though he was the greatest man who ever lived. (John 13:5, 12-17; Phil. 2:5-8) Humility will enable you to accept counsel. (Prov. 12:15) Even if you feel the counsel was not entirely justified, try to learn from it. (Prov. 17:10) Seek to imitate Jesus when you feel you are being mistreated. “When [Jesus] was being reviled, he did not go reviling in return. When he was suffering, he did not go threatening, but kept on committing himself to the one who judges righteously.” (1 Pet. 2:23) Remember that the peace and well-being of the congregation is more important than personal interests. —Rom. 15:1-3; 1 Cor. 10:23, 24.

Chapter Three

Appointment and Deletion of Elders and Ministerial Servants

Closely examine Scriptural qualifications when considering brothers

Be particularly cautious when considering brothers who have had difficulties in the past

When meeting to inform a brother of his appointment, do not be hurried; allow sufficient time

Situations that may raise questions about an appointed man's qualifications

Follow proper procedure when reviewing an appointed man's qualifications

When an appointed brother moves into the congregation

Closely Examine Scriptural Qualifications

1. **Before meeting to consider recommending brothers** as ministerial servants or elders, individual elders should personally review the inspired qualifications found at 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:2; and James 3:17, 18. (*w01* 1/15 p. 13 par. 10) Helpful comments on the Scriptural qualifications can be found in chapters 5 and 6 of *Organized to Do Jehovah's Will*.

2. **During the meeting, closely examine the Scriptural qualifications** of brothers who may qualify, and make sure that the brother being considered measures up to a reasonable degree. Pray for God's spirit to guide you. (*w01* 1/15 p. 14 par. 13) The

Governing Body and its representatives rely heavily upon your good judgment and spiritual discernment in making your recommendations.

3. Natural ability does not qualify a brother for appointment. **He must be a spiritual man**, giving evidence that holy spirit is operating on him. (Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 1:14; *w01* 1/15 p. 14 par. 11) Is he zealous for fine works? (Titus 2:12, 14; 1 Pet. 3:13) Is he a good example in his attendance and participation at congregation meetings? (Heb. 10:24, 25) Does he demonstrate a zeal for the ministry? (Matt. 28:19, 20) Is he a student of the Bible? (1 Tim. 4:15) Does he endeavor to help his family spiritually, regularly studying with his wife and his children living at home? (Eph. 5:29; 6:4) Does he manifest the fruitage of the spirit in his daily life?—Gal. 5:22, 23.

4. **The congregation expects elders and ministerial servants to take the lead in the ministry.** (*od* p. 56 par. 1; *w91* 1/15 pp. 12-13) What is the brother's attitude toward preaching? Is he visible in the ministry? Is he doing all he can in view of his age, health, family obligations, and other theocratic responsibilities? To appoint a brother to a position of responsibility who is not exemplary in the ministry will adversely affect the congregation's zeal for the ministry.

5. Though it is the brother who must measure up to the Scriptural qualifications, you should also **consider the spirituality of those in his household.** If his wife is baptized, is she a good example? A wife's conduct often reflects favorably or unfavorably upon her husband. (1 Tim. 3:11) If the wife is spiritually weak, he should be doing all that he can to assist her. For instance, is he making Family Worship a priority? He should also have "believing children that [are] not under a charge of debauchery nor unruly." (Titus 1:6; see *ks10* 3:15.) As a general rule, he should have well-behaved minor children who are "*believing.*" They

should either be progressing toward dedication to God or be already baptized as Jehovah's Witnesses. The Scriptural qualification involves having "children in subjection with all seriousness." (1 Tim. 3:4) The conduct of *adult* children still living in the home also reflects upon him.—*w90* 9/1 p. 25 par. 7; *w88* 3/1 p. 24 par. 5.

Cautions Before Recommending Certain Brothers

6. Elders should make sure they have full and complete information regarding the brothers they intend to recommend to the circuit overseer ~~and branch office~~, especially those in the following circumstances.

7. **Brother previously reprovved or disfellowshipped:** When was he reprovved or disfellowshipped? What was the offense? In a case of reproof, did the judicial committee make an announcement? If disfellowshipped, what is the date of reinstatement? When were the last restrictions lifted? Was he reprovved or disfellowshipped on any other occasions? What convinces you that he has lived down his past wrongdoing and that others now view him as a good example? (*w90* 9/1 p. 24 par. 5) If the wrongdoing took place in another congregation, have you communicated with the elders there to determine how that congregation views him? Recommending him prematurely tends to minimize the seriousness of wrongdoing in his own eyes and in the eyes of others. It is also disturbing to those who still have his bad course fresh in their memories.

8. **Guilty of adultery in the past:** It will likely take longer for him to live down his wrong and gain a good reputation. *Before discussing his recommendation with the circuit overseer*, you should know the answers to the following questions: When did the adultery occur? Was he reprovved or disfellowshipped? In a case of reproof, did the judicial committee make an

announcement? Did the innocent mate reject him? How do you know this? If he divorced, did he remarry? Did he marry the individual with whom he committed adultery? Is there evidence that he schemed to put away his former mate or that he pressured her to accept a divorce? Did the adultery break up the marriage of the other person? How were others affected by his adultery? Is the innocent mate still alive? Did the innocent mate remarry? What convinces you that he has lived down his past wrongdoing and is now viewed with respect? If the wrongdoing took place in another congregation, correspond with the elders there to get their comments on your recommendation.

9. Separated or unscripturally divorced:

Who is primarily to blame for the marital problems? What were the circumstances surrounding the separation or divorce? Who is responsible for the separation or pursued the divorce? Did both sign the decree indicating their agreement? How long ago did it occur? What is the brother doing to try to reconcile? Is his mate unwilling to cooperate with his efforts? If so, why? How is his situation viewed by the congregations involved? How do the elders of the mate's congregation feel about the brother? When separation and divorce are involved, there may be deficiencies on the part of both mates that make it necessary to limit special privileges because neither of them is exemplary.—w88 11/1 p. 21 par. 7.

10. Brothers who served in an appointed position in the past: A clear understanding of the reasons for the previous deletion or resignation is necessary before making a recommendation. With what congregation did he previously serve, and when was he deleted? What were the reasons why he stopped serving? What makes his circumstances different now? What progress has he made since his deletion?

[See April 10, 2012, letter to all bodies of elders regarding pornography.](#)

Circuit
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Depending on the length of time since his deletion, if he previously served as an elder and his deletion was not the result of gross wrongdoing, it may not be necessary for him to serve first as a ministerial servant. If the removal took place in another congregation, you will need to correspond with the elders in that congregation for details of the situation and to get their view of his possible reappointment.

Making Recommendations to the Branch Office

See July 13, 2014, letter to all bodies of elders regarding the appointment and deletion of elders and ministerial servants.

~~11. The body of elders may recommend a brother as an elder or a ministerial servant on the following occasions:~~

- ~~• The circuit overseer visits the congregation. He will submit S-2 forms to the branch office, providing comments on the brother's qualifications and indicating whether the circuit overseer agrees with the recommendation or not, and why.~~
- ~~• A brother moves into the congregation with a letter of recommendation to reappoint, and the next visit of the circuit overseer is *not in the near future*. If the body of elders in the new congregation concurs that the brother qualifies, the Congregation Service Committee may send a letter to the branch office recommending his immediate reappointment. The letter from the new congregation should include the brother's full name, birth date, and baptism date. A copy of the letter of recommendation signed by the service committee from his former congregation must be included. The branch office will not act on the recommendation unless the entire Congregation Service Committee of each congregation signs their respective letter. If the recommendation is approved, an S-52 appointment letter will be sent to the congregation.~~

Appointments Made During the Visit of the Circuit Overseer ~~After You Receive the Response From the Branch Office~~

~~12. When the body of elders receives notice from the branch office of the appointment of a brother as an elder or a ministerial servant, the coordinator should assign two elders to meet with the brother before announcing the appointment. The atmosphere during the discussion should emphasize the seriousness of the matter; the elders should **not rush the discussion or handle it in a casual manner.**~~

See July 13, 2014, letter to all bodies of elders regarding the appointment and deletion of elders and ministerial servants.

~~13. In every case, the elders must ask the following questions: "Is there anything from your past, even before baptism, or in your personal or family life that disqualifies you or that would prevent you from accepting this appointment? Is there any reason why your appointment should not be announced to the congregation?" If the brother has not previously served as an elder or a ministerial servant, ask the following question: "Have you ever been involved at any time in the past with child sexual molestation?" If he answers yes to any of these questions, do not announce the appointment. Return the S-2 form or S-52 appointment letter to the branch office, and provide a complete explanation as to why the appointment should be annulled. If the brother answers no to these questions and accepts the appointment, the elders might direct his attention to information provided by "the faithful and discreet slave" that will help him fulfill his new privilege of service. Matt. 24:45; *ad* chaps. 5-6.~~

Recommendations Not Approved by the Circuit Overseer

~~14. If the branch office does not appoint a recommended brother, the elders should endeavor to help him qualify. Two elders may speak with the brother at an appropriate time and discreetly explain what he needs to do to qualify. **The elders should neither inform him that the body of elders recommended him nor read to him from the**~~

circuit overseer

not

~~confidential letter received from the branch office that explains why he was not appointed.~~ On occasion the branch office will not approve a recommendation so as to allow time for the brother to develop maturity and experience or to live down past conduct. In such cases, there may be no need to discuss matters with the brother.

circuit overseer

See April 10, 2012, letter to all bodies of elders regarding pornography. See also March 6, 2012, letter to all bodies of elders for direction on considering the qualifications of appointed men in connection with higher education.

Situations That May Raise Questions About an Appointed Man’s Qualifications

15. **Members of the brother’s household are involved in serious wrongdoing:** *The brother’s qualifications should automatically be reviewed if this occurs.* If the brother’s wife or children, including adult children living in his home, have serious problems, the body should seek to determine whether the head of the household was negligent. Was he permissive? Was he alert to provide needed direction, anticipating potential problems? Was he conducting a regular family study? Was he giving his family needed time and attention? When he became aware of serious wrongdoing, did he promptly inform the body of elders so that they could properly investigate the matter? Did he shield his family from discipline or try to manipulate the elders’ handling of the situation? Does he continue to have the respect and confidence of the congregation as an exemplary family head? If one of his children was guilty of serious sin, are the other children doing well spiritually? If the brother has done all that can reasonably be expected and especially if he has had spiritual success with others in his household, rejection of his fine direction by one family member would not necessarily disqualify him if he continues to have the respect of the congregation.—w88 3/1 p. 24; w78 2/1 pp. 31-32; w72 2/15 p. 126.

16. **A disfellowshipped or disassociated family member moves back into the home:** This is a

decision for the family head, not the body of elders. However, such a decision may cause many problems. If the brother has allowed a disfellowshipped or disassociated family member to move into his home, the body of elders should review his qualifications. Is the disfellowshipped or disassociated individual unable to live on his own, or has he moved back because it is an easier life? Are there valid reasons for allowing him back in the home, or is it primarily so that the Christian family members can resume a measure of association with him? Did the family avoid unnecessary contact with him when he was living outside the home? Is the arrangement temporary or permanent? What is the disfellowshipped or disassociated individual's conduct? What spiritual effect is he having on others in the household, especially siblings? Is the congregation disturbed by the brother's decision? Have a number lost respect for him?—*km* 8/02 pp. 3-4; *w81* 9/15 pp. 28-29.

17. **Bankruptcy:** If an elder or a ministerial servant declares bankruptcy, causing members of the congregation or the community to become upset, the elders should review his qualifications. Did the brother lack self-control in his spending or fail to use reasonable foresight in his business decisions? Does he have a reputation for being honest and responsible? Is he viewed as one who conscientiously tries to pay his debts? Does he feel a moral responsibility to repay canceled debts if former creditors would accept payment? Does he still have the respect of the congregation? Does he continue to have “a fine testimony from people on the outside”?—1 Tim. 3:7; *w94* 9/15 pp. 30-31; *w68* pp. 223-224.

18. **Tacit approval of a marriage between a baptized Christian and a person who is not baptized:** An appointed man should be loyal to Jehovah's standards, including the Scriptural directive to marry “only in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14,

15; Titus 1:8; w04 7/1 p. 31) This directive applies to all Christians, even those who are inactive. Questions about a brother’s qualifications would result if he gave tacit approval to a marriage between a baptized Christian and a person who is not baptized. Participating in, supporting, or assisting in the courtship, wedding, or reception implies approval. Questions would also arise if the brother did not get involved personally but allowed his wife or others in his household to do so. If an elder or a ministerial servant displays poor judgment in these areas to a degree that it raises serious questions in the minds of others, he may be Scripturally disqualified from serving.—w02 5/1 p. 17 pars. 13-15; w01 5/15 pp. 20-21 pars. 16-17.

19. If it comes to light or an appointed brother confesses that he has committed a disfellowshipping offense years in the past: The body of elders may determine he can continue to serve if the following is true: The immorality or other serious wrongdoing occurred more than a few years ago, and he is genuinely repentant, recognizing that he should have come forward immediately when he sinned. (Perhaps he has even confessed to his sin, seeking help with his guilty conscience.) He has been serving faithfully for many years, has evidence of God’s blessing, and has the respect of the congregation.

See October 1, 2012, letter to all bodies of elders regarding child abuse.

20. If the sin occurred before he was appointed as an elder or a ministerial servant, the elders will need to take into consideration the fact that he should have mentioned this possible impediment to his being qualified when elders interviewed him just prior to announcing his appointment. Moreover, the nature of the sin may reflect greatly on his qualifications to serve. For example, the sin may involve past child abuse, and this would likely disqualify him for many years.—w97 1/1 pp. 26-29; w77 pp. 697-698.

21. If the wrongdoing occurred *within the past few years while he was serving* as an elder or a ministerial servant, he is disqualified from serving as such, not being “free from accusation.” (1 Tim. 3:2, 10; Titus 1:6, 7) Depending on the circumstances, the situation may also need to be handled by a judicial committee.—See 5:43-44.

Procedure for Reviewing the Qualifications of Appointed Brothers Who Experience Difficulties

22. Do not be quick to recommend deletion unless there is a solid basis for doing so. It may be possible to assist the brother so that he can correct the reasons for disqualification and continue to serve. Has the brother served faithfully for many years? What has he done or failed to do that raises questions? How did he react to counsel? Has he had such difficulties in the past, and how did he then respond to efforts to help? Was his wrongdoing really so serious that it requires restricting his privileges? Possibly he just made a mistake, using poor judgment on an occasion. The congregation in general may still have respect for him and confidence in him as an elder or a ministerial servant. Perhaps the matter is not widely known, if at all. If he realizes his action was unwise, has learned from his mistake, has a good attitude, and wants to improve, it may be that he can continue to serve.

23. **If it is necessary to review an elder’s qualifications**, the body of elders should consider the matter, with the brother in question present, using the following procedure:

- After seeking Jehovah’s guidance in prayer, make sure all the facts are presented. Maintain a respectful, orderly atmosphere that is conducive to such a discussion.
- Allow the brother adequate time to express his feelings and to answer any questions. Ask him

for his view of the matters being discussed regarding his qualifications.

- Ask the brother to leave the room while the other elders continue their discussion and make a decision on what they will recommend.
- Invite the brother back into the room. If the decision is to recommend his deletion, inform him of this and the Scriptural reasons.
- Give the brother the opportunity to comment on the decision. This allows the elders to hear the brother's defense of himself if he chooses to make a defense. It may be necessary for the brother to leave the room again so that the elders can discuss the matter further before making a final decision.
- ~~If the elders decide to recommend his deletion and the brother disagrees with that recommendation, they should inform him that he may submit a letter stating why he does not agree with the recommendation. His letter should be included with the elders' letter of explanation to the branch office.~~

24. **If the qualifications of a *ministerial servant* are being reviewed**, the same basic procedure is followed except that rather than having the brother present during the meeting of the body of elders, it would usually be sufficient for two elders to speak with him in advance to hear him out. If the body of elders decides to recommend his deletion, the two elders would meet with him again to inform him of the decision and the Scriptural reasons and to give him the opportunity to express himself. If he disagrees with the elders' decision, he may submit a letter to the body of elders stating why he does not agree with the recommendation. The elders will consider his letter and determine whether to hold to their decision or not. If the visit of the circuit over-

seer is close, it would be good to discuss the matter with him.

Recommending Deletions to the ~~Branch Office~~ ← **Circuit Overseer**

25. The **approval of the ~~branch office~~ is required** when deletions of elders and ministerial servants are recommended in the following circumstances:

- A brother **resigns for personal reasons**. Two elders should first discuss the matter with him. Why does he wish to resign? Is he Scripturally disqualified? If his personal circumstances hinder him from doing what he would like, can the elders be of any assistance and encouragement? Until his circumstances change, perhaps they can lighten his load for a period of time while he continues to serve. If, after this discussion, he still feels he wants to resign, then the Congregation Service Committee should write the ~~branch office~~ and give sufficient information so that the reasons for resignation are clear. Full details should be provided as to why he chose to relinquish his privilege of service. ← **circuit overseer**
- The elders recommend deletion due to **poor judgment not of a judicial nature**. In most cases, it is best to consider such matters during the visit of the circuit overseer. However, if serious questions arise concerning a brother's qualifications and the next visit of the circuit overseer is not in the near future, the elders should make their recommendation to the ~~branch office~~. They should supply the following information: What has he done or failed to do that raises questions? What is he doing now, or not doing, that is different from when you recommended him for appointment? Does he agree with the recommendation for his deletion? ~~If he disagrees, he may submit a letter along with the~~ ← **circuit overseer**

See July 13, 2014, letter to all bodies of elders regarding the appointment and deletion of elders and ministerial servants.

elders' letter of explanation, stating why he does not accept the recommendation. Meanwhile, he will continue to serve as an elder or a ministerial servant. The body of elders will determine what congregation responsibilities he will have in the interim, according to the circumstances.

See July 13, 2014, letter to all bodies of elders regarding the appointment and deletion of elders and ministerial servants.

26. An ~~announcement of deletion~~ should be made to the congregation only after receiving from the branch office the returned S-2 form or an S-52 letter indicating that the recommendation has been approved. In such a case, the brother should be informed of his deletion before the announcement is made. The announcement should read as follows: **“Brother [name of person] is no longer serving as an elder (a ministerial servant).”**

See July 13, 2014, letter to all bodies of elders regarding the appointment and deletion of elders and ministerial servants.

27. In addition to the above situations, the branch office should be informed whenever an elder or a ministerial servant is no longer serving for the following reasons:

- ~~Moving or death:~~ The circuit overseer will inform the branch office following his next visit to the congregation. In such cases, an announcement of deletion would not be made to the congregation.
- ~~Disassociation, disfellowshipping, or reproof by a judicial committee:~~ After a judicial charge is clearly established, **an announcement of deletion** should be made to the congregation at the next Service Meeting without waiting for an acknowledgment from the branch office. The Congregation Service Committee should **inform the branch office immediately** of the deletion, providing full information about the case. Include the specific judicial offense, the name of any other person involved, any counsel given, and how the wrongdoing became known to the elders. Please

~~also specify the action taken (whether disassociation, disfellowshipping, or judicial reproof, and whether an announcement of reproof was made to the congregation). If one disassociates himself or is disfellowshipped, an announcement to that effect is made to the congregation. If the case is handled just prior to the visit of the circuit overseer, the deletion may be included with his report to the branch office and the details of the case provided in a confidential supplementary letter.~~

send to the Service Department

28. If the coordinator or secretary is being deleted, fill out and ~~include~~ the *Coordinator of the Body of Elders/Secretary Change of Address* (S-29) form.

~~29. **Information concerning the deletion of an elder or a ministerial servant should be retained indefinitely in the congregation's confidential file.** This would include S-2 forms and S-52 acknowledgment letters from the branch office and related correspondence. Such background material will be helpful in supplying the branch office with complete details in the event the brother is recommended for reappointment in the future.~~

See July 13, 2014, letter to all bodies of elders regarding the appointment and deletion of elders and ministerial servants.

When an Appointed Brother Moves to Another Congregation

30. The Congregation Service Committee should send a **letter of introduction** to the elders in the new congregation that plainly states whether the body of elders recommends that he continue to serve. Did he serve in other congregations? What is his total time of serving in an appointed capacity? In what assignments does he have experience? All three members of the Congregation Service Committee should sign the letter of introduction.

31. If any of the elders have *serious reservations* about the qualifications of an appointed brother who is moving, the body of elders should meet as soon as possible to determine whether they will recommend him for reappointment or not. If they do not recommend him, two or more elders should meet with him before he leaves and clearly explain the reason for the body's decision. The letter of introduction should clearly explain their concerns and the counsel they gave him.

When an Appointed Brother Moves Into the Congregation

32. **Elders and ministerial servants** who move to a new congregation *with a favorable letter of recommendation and who have a favorable recommendation from the elders of the new congregation* but who have not yet been reappointed may be used to handle Bible highlights, parts on the Service Meeting, public talks, and so forth, according to their abilities. They may attend a Kingdom Ministry School. In addition, they can be present with the ministerial servants during the meeting the circuit overseer conducts with the appointed servants in the congregation. If the circuit overseer's outline includes additional information for elders only, recommended elders who have not yet been reappointed can remain as this information is discussed. However, they should not be present when recommendations and local congregation needs are considered. If the brother is not recommended for reappointment either by the previous body of elders or by the new body of elders, he would not be eligible to attend the spiritual programs mentioned above. Brothers who served as elders in their former congregation do not function in an official capacity as elders (such as by serving on judicial committees or attending meetings of the body of elders) in their new congregation until they are reappointed.

- If an elder or a ministerial servant regularly moves away to live at a second residence, he should not be appointed in both congregations. One congregation should hold the *Congregation's Publisher Record* (S-21) card. Each time he leaves, the elders should write a letter to the congregation where he will be temporarily, explaining his circumstances and how he was being used. The elders of the congregation he is visiting can use him to care for duties and responsibilities in the congregation as outlined above. Even if he will be away for more than three months, he should send his field service reports to his home congregation.

Chapter Four

Assisting Those Who Are Weak

Be alert to symptoms of spiritual weakness

Help the weak to adopt and maintain a good spiritual routine

Provide the needed help promptly

1. Elders need to maintain the proper attitude toward assisting others. The apostle Paul referred to an outstanding quality of Jesus when he wrote: “We, though, who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those not strong, and not to be pleasing ourselves. . . . For even the Christ did not please himself.” (Rom. 15:1-3) Paul told the Ephesian elders: “You must assist those who are weak.” (Acts 20:35) Elders should be keenly aware of the need to “speak consolingly to the depressed souls, support the weak, be long-suffering toward all.” (1 Thess. 5:14) By doing so, elders imitate the Great Shepherd, Jehovah!—Ps. 23: 1-4.

2. Today, Jehovah is having a loving work done that harmonizes with his ancient promise: “I will search for my sheep and care for them. . . . I will deliver them out of all the places to which they have been scattered . . . In a good pasturage I shall feed them . . . The lost one I shall search for, . . . and the broken one I shall bandage and the ailing one I shall strengthen.”—Ezek. 34:11-16.

3. What, though, if your efforts do not seem to be producing good results? Do not give up quickly. Adjusting an imperfect heart can be a delicate and time-consuming endeavor, but it can lead to great

satisfaction. (Ps. 103:13, 14; 2 Cor. 13:7-9) Be supportive yet balanced in the amount of time you spend on those with chronic problems.

Symptoms of Spiritual Weakness

4. **Alert, loving shepherds will detect symptoms of spiritual unsteadiness** in others and **then act decisively** to help them before the problems escalate into serious sins. (Gal. 6:1, 2) Symptoms of spiritual fatigue include: lack of self-control in eating, drinking, and pursuit of pleasure; a complacent spirit; loss of enthusiasm for the truth, including daily Bible reading and personal study; harboring serious and lingering doubts; neglecting association at congregation meetings; and becoming overly critical of elders and the organization.—w86 1/15 pp. 18-19.

5. **Signs of spiritual weakness are usually symptoms of neglecting one or more aspects of a good spiritual routine.** Once you recognize signs of spiritual weakness, help the weak one see how he can make improvement. Scriptural shepherding calls can often encourage individuals to identify any spiritual weakness and avoid falling into serious sin. Try to motivate him to take advantage of the following Scriptural provisions to strengthen his faith: prayer for help by holy spirit (Luke 11:13; Gal. 5:22, 23; 1 Pet. 4:7); daily Bible reading and personal study in Christian publications (Ps. 1:1, 2); meditation on Scriptural matters (Ps. 77:12); regular attendance at meetings, assemblies, and conventions (Neh. 8:1-3, 8, 10; Heb. 10:23-25); regular participation in field service (Acts 20:18-21); willingness to accept spiritual help from congregation elders as well as from traveling overseers.—Rom. 1:11, 12; Heb. 13:17.

See February 2, 2014, letter to all bodies of elders regarding shepherding.

Shepherding That Encourages

6. The primary objective of a shepherding call is to impart a spiritual gift, to help make firm, and to

have an interchange of encouragement. (Rom. 1:11, 12) An elder may shepherd at the publisher's home, at the Kingdom Hall, while in field service, over the telephone, or on other occasions. The following basic points will assist in making encouraging visits to the homes of publishers.

- **Make an appointment:** Show consideration by making an appointment. If there is a serious problem you plan to discuss, it would be proper to inform the publisher of this before making the call.
- **Prepare:** Pray for Jehovah's guidance. Consider the individual's circumstances in determining his spiritual condition. Give thought to what kind of direction, encouragement, or counsel will be most beneficial. When there is a serious problem, arrange for another elder to accompany you. On other calls, you may take a qualified ministerial servant.
- **Keep the atmosphere relaxed, loving, and positive:** Express genuine concern for the individual's welfare. Give warm commendation for the good things he has done and is doing. Listen carefully. If you perceive that he might have a problem, tactfully draw the person out. Adapt your comments according to the need.
- **Use the Bible:** God's Word should be the primary source of information because it "exerts power." (Heb. 4:12) Skillful use of it lets Jehovah speak to the heart of the brother or sister.
- **Do not stay too long:** If an agreed-upon time is established, stick to it. If necessary, set up another visit to continue the discussion.
- **Conclude with a prayer:** A prayer is appropriate and truly appreciated.—Phil. 4:6, 7.
- **Follow up to see if further aid is needed and can be given.**

Giving Effective Counsel

7. Giving counsel is not only a privilege but also a weighty responsibility. **Be alert to give counsel before bad trends progress too far.** (Prov. 27:5, 6) Before proceeding with counsel, give careful thought as to what should be said and how to present the counsel in order to obtain the best results. Your endeavor should be to readjust the person so that he will grow spiritually.—Gal. 6:1.

8. Take sufficient time to listen; get all the facts. (Jas. 1:19; Prov. 18:13) It is essential to get the whole picture if you are to manifest true understanding, insight, and discernment in handling any question or problem.

9. Carefully plan your remarks; weigh your words. Endeavor to express yourself in a loving way. Remember that you are dealing with Jehovah's sheep and they should be treated with tenderness. (Ps. 100:3; w89 9/15 p. 19) Generally, it is beneficial to preface exhortation with specific, sincere commendation.

10. Carefully base what you say on the Bible and on Bible-based publications. (Ps. 119:105) Rather than expressing your personal opinion, let the Bible shape your view of what needs to be said. Endeavor to reach the heart, not just the mind.

11. In sensitive areas, such as dress and grooming and entertainment, it may be wise to seek the observations of another elder before providing counsel. This will ensure that your counsel is solidly based on God's Word and is not simply your personal opinion or preference. (Eccl. 7:16) If the counsel is appropriate, then you should speak to the individual without delay.

Assisting Those Who Are Inactive

12. The service overseer, along with the secretary, should be alert to assign each inactive publisher in

the territory to a group overseer. The group overseer should then endeavor to provide needed help, either personally or through another qualified elder in the group. Depending on the circumstances, group servants or assistants may accompany an elder when he visits an inactive one.

13. The principal objective of a visit is to help inactive ones appreciate that Jehovah cares for them. The shepherds should endeavor to be warm and upbuilding. They might share a few encouraging Scriptural points from chapter 24 of *Draw Close to Jehovah* or from the article “You Are Precious in God’s Eyes!,” which appeared in the April 1, 1995, *Watchtower*, pages 10-15, or from *The Watchtower* of November 15, 2008, pages 8-16. Other material may be used, according to the needs and circumstances of the person.

14. When an inactive person has been involved in serious wrongdoing and now desires to return to the congregation, the shepherds need to reflect Jehovah’s endearing quality of love. If the person acknowledges that he has sinned against Jehovah and he demonstrates genuine repentance, the shepherds will help him to appreciate that he can receive Jehovah’s forgiveness. Loving discipline may be required.—Heb. 12:7-11; see *The Watchtower* of November 15, 2008, pages 14-15, paragraphs 12-13.

15. A Bible study may be helpful in some cases when an inactive publisher wishes to resume activity with the congregation. The group overseer may discuss this with the service overseer, who will then consult with the other members of the service committee. If the service committee arranges for a Bible study, they should consider who is best suited to conduct the study, weighing the circumstances that are involved. They should also determine what material should be used. With inactive ones who have a good

knowledge of Bible truth but who have been sidetracked from Christian activities, a study of section 4 of *Draw Close to Jehovah* may help them to rekindle their love for Jehovah.—*od* pp. 85-86.

16. If the person has been *inactive for only a short time*, a helping hand from an experienced publisher might be all that is needed to reactivate the individual in the field service. A Bible study may not be necessary.

17. Before a *longtime inactive one* is invited to share again in the ministry, two elders should meet with him to see if he meets the basic requirements to serve as a publisher, as outlined on pages 79-81 of *Organized to Do Jehovah's Will*.—*km* 11/00 "Question Box."

Assisting Those With Marital Problems

18. The way married people discharge their marital responsibilities affects their relationship with Jehovah. (1 Pet. 3:7) In addition, a marriage can either bring honor to Jehovah and the congregation or cause reproach. Therefore, if fellow Christians experience marital difficulties resulting in one or both parties approaching the elders to seek help, the elders should try to provide loving counsel from the Scriptures and practical suggestions from Christian publications. Usually it is best to have both mates present. If only one is present, discuss only what he or she can do to improve the situation.

19. Elders should **be modest** as they try to provide help. Because they cannot know everything that occurs in a marriage, they should avoid taking sides. (Prov. 18:13) Likely both mates could make improvement and must share the blame for their marital problems. (Rom. 3:23; Jas. 3:2) Jehovah has not given elders the authority to make marital decisions for others. (2 Cor. 1:24; Gal. 6:5; w88 11/1 p. 21) Though

the elders can offer assistance, it is up to the couple to decide how they will handle their marital affairs.

20. If a Christian is contemplating separation, the elders can point out what the Scriptures say. (1 Cor. 7:10, 11) They can explain that there are a few exceptional situations that some have viewed as a basis for separation. (*lv* pp. 219-221; *w88* 11/1 pp. 22-25) If the Christian is considering obtaining a divorce, the elders should explain that divorce does not free him to remarry unless adultery occurs. (Matt. 19:9) In addition, the extreme step of divorce may make it more difficult to reconcile. Elders should not encourage separation or divorce; neither should they forbid it. Separation and divorce are personal matters, and each Christian will have to accept the consequences for his decision. (Gal. 6:7) However, the elders may determine that a publisher's decisions in this area disqualify him or her from receiving special privileges normally given to those viewed as exemplary.

Encouraging Those Who Were Abused in Their Childhood

21. Those who as children were abused, sexually or otherwise, many times grow up to be adults with emotional scars. They are in need of much loving attention. Thus, you will want to **be conscious of treating such ones with thoughtfulness, tenderness, and kindness.** Such an attitude helps to assure them that you really care for them and that you are “like a hiding place from the wind and a place of concealment from the rainstorm.” (Isa. 32:2) Like God, we should be “tenderly compassionate.” (Eph. 4:32) When offering encouragement to such ones, select from the body of elders those elders best qualified to give the needed assistance. Remember that elders have varied abilities; some may be more effective than others in handling these cases.—1 Cor. 12:4.

22. It must be recognized that **elders as such are not mental-health professionals or therapists but are spiritual shepherds.** (1 Pet. 5:2) Consequently, you should not conduct sessions for what some may view as group therapy. It is not necessary to spend time reading secular publications dealing with worldly psychology or psychiatry. You should not take on a role similar to that of a professional therapist. Someone who has serious mental or emotional illness may need professional help.—w88 10/15 p. 27.

23. One way you can show sincere interest is by being a good listener. (Prov. 21:13; Jas. 1:19) The October 1, 1983, issue of *The Watchtower*, on page 28, cautions against telling a sufferer who seeks assistance just to forget what occurred. Many have found great relief simply in talking with a sympathetic, nonjudgmental elder who can provide “the good word” of encouragement. (Prov. 12:25) God’s Word has healing power. Jehovah can heal “brokenhearted ones.” (Ps. 30:2; 147:3) Though you may need to ask tactful questions to help an afflicted one express himself, avoid probing unnecessarily or repeatedly into the details of the abuse, which can have a negative effect. After patiently listening, apply the soothing oil of God’s Word. (Jas. 5:13-15) ‘The peace of God excels all thought,’ including disquieting thoughts.—Phil. 4:7; Ps. 94:19; w95 1/1 p. 9 pars. 18-20; g91 10/8 pp. 3-11.

24. **Sometimes a sister who suffered abuse as a child may approach a capable older sister for help.** It is understood that a sister would not get involved in matters that need the attention of the elders. She can, however, give such a sister emotional support and encouragement as her circumstances and time allow. (w90 3/15 p. 28) If the elders are aware that a sister is offering such help, they should

check with her from time to time as to the progress being made.

25. There are times when an emotionally distressed Christian may seek **professional help**. Whether a Christian or his family pursues treatment from psychiatrists, psychologists, or therapists is a personal decision. An elder should not assume the responsibility of recommending a specific practitioner or facility. He may draw attention to or discuss material in the publications that provides cautions regarding therapies that may conflict with Bible principles. (w88 10/15 pp. 28-29; w82 6/15 pp. 25-29; w75 pp. 255-256) While participating in group therapy by a professional therapist is a matter for personal decision, there could be a revealing of confidential facts about other members of the Christian congregation during such sessions if a Christian does not exercise discretion.

26. Elders must recognize that the time they can spend in helping those who are disturbed emotionally is limited. Therefore, they must **balance this shepherding responsibility with all their other responsibilities**, which include caring for the spiritual, emotional, and material needs of their own family and assisting all in the congregation. In some cases an abuse victim may ask for more attention than you can give. Elders need to maintain soundness of mind. (1 Pet. 4:7) Some elders have found it beneficial to place limits on the time they spend in shepherding. It may take several visits to get the desired relief for the victim, if this is possible. If the individual approaches you looking for help at times when you cannot discuss the problem extensively, perhaps giving some brief words of encouragement, assuring that one of Jehovah's love, reading an appropriate scripture, or offering a short prayer will affirm to the sufferer your interest and willingness to help to the extent possible. Also, discussing Biblical examples

of some who had to endure a terrible childhood and yet succeeded in becoming faithful servants of Jehovah can help sufferers see that they need not be permanent victims of a bad family life.—*w01* 4/15 pp. 25-28.

Cautions Regarding Assisting Sisters

27. Elders and ministerial servants must **never meet alone** with a sister not closely related to them and should avoid becoming the sole confidant of an individual of the opposite sex who is experiencing marital problems. This includes lengthy phone conversations. Of course, this does not mean that it would be inappropriate for an elder to talk with a sister while in the full view of others at her home, at congregation meetings, or in the field service.—*w06* 9/15 p. 26 par. 7.

28. It is important never to meet alone with a sister who is **a victim of abuse, suffers from depression, or for any other reason is in a delicate emotional state**. A woman in such an emotional state may be more vulnerable and may be prone to develop improper feelings toward an elder meeting with her. So that this does not occur, it is the course of wisdom to have different pairs of elders involved in shepherding such a sister. This would serve as a protection for the elders, as well as for the sister, because it is possible for an elder to develop improper feelings for a sister he is comforting or counseling.—Jer. 17:9.

Chapter Five

Determining Whether a Judicial Committee Should Be Formed

Act promptly upon receiving a report of serious wrongdoing

Is the alleged offense serious?

Has the wrongdoing been established?

Are there other factors to be considered?

1. Elders should **act promptly** when they receive a report of serious wrongdoing so as to safeguard the congregation and provide assistance to the wrongdoer. (Jude 4) Neglecting to care for such matters can hinder the flow of Jehovah's holy spirit to the congregation. Elders must first assess whether the alleged wrongdoing, if established, is serious enough to require a judicial committee.

Offenses Requiring Judicial Decisions

2. Listed below are offenses that may require review by a judicial committee. Of course, this list is not comprehensive. There may be other matters that would also merit the attention of a judicial committee. The elders must use good judgment and reasonableness when evaluating the seriousness of the alleged wrongdoing. They should consider the extent and nature of the misconduct, intent and motive, frequency or practice, and so forth. If there is a question about whether certain wrongdoing merits judicial action, the body of elders may write to the branch

office requesting further direction concerning the case.

3. **Manslaughter:** Aside from deliberate murder, bloodguilt may be incurred if a person causes loss of life through carelessness or because of violating a traffic law or other safety law of Caesar. The elders should investigate and if warranted appoint a judicial committee to hear the matter. The committee should base its decision on clearly established facts, not simply on a decision that may have been made by secular authorities.—Deut. 22:8; *w06* 9/15 p. 30.

4. **Attempted suicide** may be the result of deep despair or major depression. Deal carefully and compassionately with such a person. In most cases a judicial hearing is not required.—Ps. 88:3, 17, 18; Prov. 15:13; Eccl. 7:7; *w90* 3/1 pp. 5-9; 3/15 pp. 26-30; *g90* 9/8 pp. 22-23; *w83* 8/1 pp. 3-11.

5. **Por-nei'a:** (Lev. 20:10, 13, 15, 16; Rom. 1:24, 26, 27, 32; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10) *Por-nei'a* involves **immoral use of** the genitals, whether in a natural or in a perverted way, with **lewd intent**. There must have been another party to the immorality—a human of either sex or a beast. Willing participation incurs guilt and requires judicial action. It is not a casual touching of the sex organs but involves the **manipulation** of the genitals. It includes oral sex, anal sex, and manipulation of the genitals *between individuals not married to each other*. (*lv* p. 99; *w06* 7/15 pp. 29-30; *w04* 2/15 p. 13; *w00* 11/1 p. 8 par. 6; *w83* 6/1 pp. 23-26) *Por-nei'a* does not require skin-to-skin contact, copulation (as in penetration), or sexual climax.

6. Self-abuse, or masturbation of oneself, is not *por-nei'a*.

7. One who was **raped** would not be guilty of *por-nei'a*. Discernment is needed in considering claims of rape, taking into consideration such factors as the mental disposition of the person, the circumstances that led up to the incident, and any delay in

See March 6, 2012, letter to all bodies of elders for further comments on the definition of *porneia*.

reporting.—w03 2/1 pp. 30-31; *it-1* pp. 862-864; w83 3/15 p. 30 ftn.

8. In all cases involving the possibility of *por-nei'a*, it is the responsibility of the judicial committee to use the Scriptures to weigh carefully the facts in each case. This responsibility is especially serious when it involves the Scriptural freedom to remarry. (Mal. 2: 16a) In situations in which the elders are uncertain or divided on their conclusions, it is best to write the branch office.

9. **Brazen conduct, loose conduct:** (Gal. 5:19) The Greek word translated “brazen conduct,” or “loose conduct,” is *a-sel'gei-a*. *Strong's Greek Dictionary* uses very forceful terms to define it: “licentiousness; filth[iness], lasciviousness, wantonness.” *The New Thayer's Greek English Lexicon* adds to the list “unbridled lust, . . . outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence.” Another lexicon defines *a-sel'gei-a* as conduct that “violates all bounds of what is socially acceptable.” Rather than relating to bad conduct of a somewhat petty or minor nature, “brazen conduct” describes acts that reflect an attitude that betrays disrespect, disregard, or even contempt for divine standards, laws, and authority. Therefore, two elements are involved in brazen conduct: (1) The conduct itself is a serious violation of Jehovah's laws, and (2) the attitude of the wrongdoer toward God's laws is disrespectful, insolent.—w06 7/15 p. 30; w83 3/15 p. 31; w73 pp. 574-576.

10. Though this is not an exhaustive list, brazen conduct may be involved in the following if the wrongdoer has an **insolent, contemptuous attitude** made evident by a practice of these things:

- Willful, continued, unnecessary **association with disfellowshipped nonrelatives** despite repeated counsel.—Matt. 18:17b; 1 Cor. 5:11, 13; 2 John 10, 11; w81 9/15 pp. 25-26.

- **Child sexual abuse:** This would include fondling of breasts, an explicitly immoral proposal, showing pornography to a child, voyeurism, indecent exposure, and so forth.
- **Continuing to date or pursue a romantic relationship with a person though not legally or Scripturally free** to marry, despite repeated counsel and generally after a warning talk to the congregation.—Gal. 5:19; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14, 15.

See October 1, 2012, letter to all bodies of elders regarding child abuse.

11. Evidence (testified to by at least two witnesses) that the accused stayed all night in the same house with a person of the opposite sex (or in the same house with a known homosexual) under improper circumstances.—If questions are raised regarding Scriptural freedom to remarry, see 12:12.

- **Elders should use good judgment in assessing the situation before forming a judicial committee.** Were the two persons *alone* together *all night*? Is there evidence of a *romantic relationship*? Are there understandable reasons, such as an unexpected emergency, that caused the situation?
- If there are no extenuating circumstances, a judicial committee would be formed on the basis of strong circumstantial evidence of *por·nei'a*.
- Depending upon the attitude of the accused, there might even be evidence of brazen conduct.

Consider the following examples:

- A married brother spends an inordinate amount of time with his female secretary after work hours but insists there is no romantic interest. His concerned wife informs the elders, who give him strong counsel. Later, when he claims to be leaving overnight for a “business trip,” his

suspicious wife and a relative follow him to the secretary's home. They observe the secretary invite him inside at 10 p.m. and continue watching *all night* until he leaves the home at 7 a.m. When the elders speak to him, he admits that he spent the night alone with his secretary, but he denies that he committed adultery. In such a case, the elders have a basis to take judicial action because there is strong circumstantial evidence of *por-nei'a* and there may be elements of brazen conduct. The innocent mate's conscience may allow her to choose to divorce him and remarry; the elders would not take action against her for making this decision.

Below are examples in which judicial action would likely not be warranted:

- An elderly Christian living alone has a member of the opposite sex move into the home to help care for him. There is no evidence of a romantic attachment or reason to suspect sexual immorality.
- After attending a social gathering at a single sister's home, a brother walks to a train station to catch the train home. After waiting for some time, the brother learns that the last train for the day has already left the station. He walks back to the sister's home, but by the time he arrives, everyone has left and it is quite late. The sister allows him to sleep in the living room while she sleeps in her bedroom.
- A single brother visits a married couple for several days. One night after everyone goes to bed, the husband is called to an emergency at his place of work and does not return until morning. The wife and the single brother are alone in the home all night sleeping in separate bedrooms.

12. The elders cannot apply one rule to every case; each situation has unique circumstances. After two elders have thoroughly investigated, the body of elders should use good judgment in determining whether serious wrongdoing has occurred. If elders are unsure how to proceed, they should consult with the branch office.

13. **Gross uncleanness, uncleanness with greediness:** (2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19) Galatians 5:19-21 lists many vices that are not classed as *por-nei'a* but that could lead to one's being disqualified from God's Kingdom. Among them are uncleanness (Greek, *a-ka-thar-si'a*). When one practices uncleanness to a **gross**, or serious, degree, it can be grounds for disfellowshipping from the Christian congregation. Elders should use good judgment in discerning whether the conduct is minor uncleanness that can be handled by counsel or is gross uncleanness that requires the formation of a judicial committee.—*w06* 7/15 pp. 29-31; *w83* 3/15 p. 31.

14. Though this is not an exhaustive list, gross uncleanness **may be** involved in the following:

- **Passion-arousing heavy petting or caressing of breasts on numerous occasions** between individuals not married to each other. If such conduct occurred on a few isolated occasions, especially between two persons involved in a courtship with the intent to marry, counsel from two elders may suffice to handle such minor uncleanness. The elders should inform the coordinator of the situation. However, if the conduct occurred *on numerous occasions* and the actions escalated in gravity and frequency, it may constitute gross uncleanness with greediness, requiring judicial action. *Their wrongdoing may constitute brazen conduct if they give evidence of a disrespectful, insolent attitude toward God's laws.* For example, the individuals may

have no honorable intentions of pursuing marriage.

- **A practice of engaging in immoral conversations by telephone, in Internet chat rooms, or through similar electronic means** can involve obscene speech or gross uncleanness, either of which can be a basis for judicial action. (*g00* 1/22 pp. 20-21; *km* 11/99 p. 4) If such conduct occurred on a few isolated occasions, judicial action may not be necessary. Counsel from two elders is sufficient to handle such minor uncleanness. The elders should inform the coordinator of the situation. However, such conduct may escalate in gravity and by frequent repetition become gross uncleanness with greediness requiring judicial action, especially if the individual had been previously counseled.
- **An entrenched practice of viewing, perhaps over a considerable period of time, abhorrent forms of pornography that is sexually degrading.** Such pornography may include homosexuality (sex between those of the same gender), group sex, bestiality, sadistic torture, bondage, gang rape, the brutalizing of women, or child pornography. Brazen conduct would be involved if the offender was promoting such material, such as by inviting others to view it, thus giving evidence of a brazen attitude.—*w12* 3/15 pp. 30-31; *w06* 7/15 p. 31.
- **Misuse of tobacco:** Elders should use good judgment in weighing the circumstances and extent of the wrongdoing so as to determine whether a judicial committee should be formed. For example, an elder or two may handle matters by means of counsel if a Christian smoked a few cigarettes in private. The coordinator of the body of elders should be informed. However, a judicial committee is required for a practice of

This bullet point reflects updates provided in the April 10, 2012, letter to all bodies of elders regarding pornography. See that letter for additional information.

using tobacco. (Mark 15:23; 2 Cor. 7:1; w06 7/15 pp. 30-31) When questions arise, consult with the branch office.

- **Extreme physical uncleanness:** (Deut. 23:12-14; 2 Cor. 7:1) Every effort should be made to help the offender see the need to keep his body and place of residence physically clean. Before disfellowshipping would be considered, elders would need to be certain that the uncleanness is pronounced and offensive, bringing much reproach upon Jehovah's good name and his people in the community. Appropriate counsel should be given. If this is not heeded, then marking may be necessary. (2 Thess. 3:14) If there is blatant, willful disregard of the counsel given and extremely offensive unclean conditions continue, disfellowshipping action may be necessary.

15. **Misuse of addictive drugs:** (2 Cor. 7:1; Rev. 21:8, *Kingdom Interlinear*; 22:15, *Int*) Please note: the use of addictive drugs *under medical supervision*, such as for pain management, would not necessarily require judicial review. When questions arise, consult with the branch office.

16. **Apostasy:** Apostasy is a standing away from true worship, a falling away, defection, rebellion, abandonment. It includes the following:

- **Celebrating false religious holidays:** (Ex. 32:4-6; Jer. 7:16-19) Not all holidays directly involve false religion and require judicial action.
- **Participation in interfaith activities:** (2 Cor. 6:14, 15, 17, 18) Apostate acts include bowing before altars and images and sharing in false religious songs and prayers.—Rev. 18:2, 4.
- **Deliberately spreading teachings contrary to Bible truth as taught by Jehovah's Witnesses:** (Acts 21:21, ftn.; 2 John 7, 9, 10) Any with sincere doubts should be helped. Firm,

loving counsel should be given. (2 Tim. 2:16-19, 23-26; Jude 22, 23) If one obstinately *is speaking about or deliberately spreading false teachings*, this may be or may lead to apostasy. If there is no response after a first and a second admonition, a judicial committee should be formed.—Titus 3:10, 11; w89 10/1 p. 19; w86 4/1 pp. 30-31; w86 3/15 p. 15.

- **Causing divisions and promoting sects:** This would be deliberate action disrupting the unity of the congregation or undermining the confidence of the brothers in Jehovah’s arrangement. It may involve or lead to apostasy.—Rom. 16:17, 18; Titus 3:10, 11; *it-2* p. 886.
- **Continuing in employment that makes one an accomplice to or a promoter of false worship** would subject one to disfellowshipping after being allowed a reasonable amount of time, perhaps up to six months, to make the needed adjustments.—w99 4/15 pp. 28-30; *km* 9/76 pp. 3-6.
- The practice of **spiritism**.—Deut. 18:9-13; 1 Cor. 10:21, 22; Gal. 5:20.
- **Idolatry:** (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 10:14) Idolatry includes the use of images, including pictures, in false religious worship.

17. **Drunkenness:** (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9, 10; *it-1* p. 656) A judicial committee is required when there is a practice of drunkenness or a single incident of drunkenness that brings notoriety. (w83 5/1 p. 8) A Scriptural description of drunkenness can be found in the following references: Job 12:25; Psalm 107:27; Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35; Isaiah 24:20.

18. If an individual confesses to an elder that on one occasion he overindulged in alcohol to the point of drunkenness in the privacy of his own home *and there was no notoriety*, it may suffice for the elder to

give strong counsel. In any case, the elder should inform the coordinator of the matter.

19. **Gluttony:** (Prov. 23:20, 21; *w04* 11/1 pp. 30-31) A glutton **routinely shows a lack of restraint**, even gorging himself on food to the point of feeling very uncomfortable or becoming sick. **Gluttony is determined, not by someone's size, but by his attitude toward food.**

20. **Stealing, thievery:** (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Eph. 4:28; *w86* 11/15 p. 14) Though all stealing is wrong, the body of elders should use discernment in weighing the circumstances and the extent of the involvement in wrongdoing to determine whether it is a judicial matter.

21. **Deliberate, malicious lying; bearing false witness:** (Prov. 6:16, 19; Col. 3:9; Rev. 22:15; *it-2* pp. 244-245) Though all lying is bad, judicial action is taken only if there has been a practice of deliberate, malicious lying. "Malicious" means deliberately harmful, harboring ill will or enmity. Lying that justifies judicial action involves more than just exaggerations or petty, misleading statements of relatively minor consequence or lying because of momentary pressure or fear of man.—Matt. 26:69-75.

22. Generally, elders should not consider administering discipline if a Christian charges another Christian with making false statements in a court dispute. For example, this may involve divorce, child custody and support, and so forth. The Christian making the charge can express his concerns to the court that has the responsibility to determine what is truthful when rendering a judgment.

23. **Fraud, slander:** (Lev. 19:16; Matt. 18:15-17; *it-1* pp. 870, 989-991; *od* pp. 147-150; *w97* 3/15 pp. 17-22) Fraud is defined as "the intentional use of deception, trickery, or perversion of truth for the purpose of inducing another to part with some valuable thing

belonging to him or to give up a legal right.” (w97 3/15 p. 21) Slander is defined as a false report meant to do harm to the good name and reputation of another. Such talk is generally malicious. Slander is not identical to negative gossip. Negative gossip may be true; slander is always false. Negative gossip requires counsel but not judicial action. (w89 10/15 p. 10; *it-1* p. 990 par. 2) The congregation would not consider forming a judicial committee unless the offended Christian had taken steps one and two of Matthew 18:15, 16 and had initiated step three of Matthew 18:17.—*od* pp. 147-149.

24. If asked, elders could participate in step two, but they do not represent the body of elders. If the matter proceeds to step three, any elders who were witnesses in step two could serve only as witnesses in step three. They would not be used to serve on the judicial committee in step three.

25. It is not the place of elders to become arbitrators of financial agreements. They are not debt collectors. Nor should they be involved in formulating contracts or written agreements, not even signing as witnesses to such. The same holds true should the matter reach step three.

26. The body of elders may first need to **investigate** before appointing a judicial committee. If so, the brothers involved in step two would not be used to investigate; they would be interviewed as witnesses.

27. It is not considered slander to make an accusation to the police, the court, the elders, or others who have authority to look into matters and render a judgment. (*it-1* p. 990) This is true even if the accusation is not proved.—w97 8/15 p. 28 par. 1.

28. **Reviling:** (1 Cor. 6:10; *it-2* pp. 801-802) Reviling involves “subjecting a person to insulting speech, heaping abuse upon him.” (*it-2* p. 801) The body of

elders should weigh the circumstances and extent of wrongdoing so as to determine whether a judicial committee should be formed. Elders should not be quick to take judicial action unless the reviling is extreme, disrupts the peace of the congregation, and persists despite repeated counsel.

29. **Obscene speech:** (Eph. 5:3-5; Col. 3:8) Obviously, certain words are more offensive than others. Profanity is any kind of language that profanes. However, obscene speech involves sexually explicit, filthy expressions. (*g03* 6/8 p. 19-20; *w83* 2/1 p. 4) Is the speech sexually explicit? Does it persist despite repeated counsel? This would include obscenities used both in written and in oral communication, such as Internet chat rooms, phone sex, or e-mail.

30. **Greed—gambling, extortion:** (1 Cor. 5:10, 11; 6:10; 1 Tim. 3:8; *it-1* pp. 789, 1005-1006; *w89* 1/15 p. 22) Christians should avoid gambling in all its various forms, including lotteries. (Isa. 65:11; *g02* 7/22 pp. 4-8; *w89* 7/15 p. 30; *g82* 7/8 pp. 25-27; *g81* 11/22 p. 27) If a person makes a practice of gambling and after repeated counsel unrepentantly pursues a course of greediness, judicial action would be appropriate.—*w80* 9/1 pp. 29-30; *w67* p. 356.

31. An individual continuing in employment directly involved with gambling or employment making him a clear accomplice or promoter of gambling would be subject to judicial action, usually after being allowed time, perhaps up to six months, to make the needed adjustments. (*w95* 5/15 p. 23 par. 11; *km* 9/76 pp. 3-6) In questionable cases it is best to consult with the branch office.

32. If a business gives out prizes or prize money to winners of a contest or to potential customers for advertising, accepting the gift is an individual's decision to make. However, a person needs to be careful that accepting such a prize does not stir up greed.

(Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 10:31-33; *g75* 7/8 p. 28; *w73* p. 127) The elders do well not to involve themselves in what individuals do with regard to petty gambling solely for entertainment. They may need to give counsel if this becomes a cause of stumbling for others or affects the spirituality of the individual or the congregation.—*w02* 11/1 p. 31.

33. A Christian who **greedily and unrepentantly extorts a high bride-price** may be disfellowshipped from the congregation.—1 Cor. 5:11, 13; *g69*, 10; Heb. 13:5; *w98* 9/15 pp. 24-25.

34. **Adamant refusal to provide materially for one's own family, leaving wife and children destitute when having the means to provide:** (1 Tim. 5:8; *w88* 11/1 pp. 22-23; *km* 9/73 p. 8) Some of the factors the body of elders should consider before forming a judicial committee are:

- Does the Christian *adamantly* refuse to provide for his family, or is the failure to provide because of other factors, such as health or financial difficulties? Is he doing what he *reasonably* can do to provide necessities for the family?
- Has counsel been previously given, and has there been an opportunity for the person to respond?
- Does his wife have material resources affording a secure life so that the family is not destitute?
- If the family is destitute, is it because they have rejected the family head's provisions by choosing to live apart from him?
- When a separation is involved, to what extent is the other mate responsible?

35. **Fits of anger, violence:** (Prov. 22:24, 25; Mal. 2:16; Gal. 5:20; *g01* 11/8 p. 12; *g97* 6/8 p. 20; *fy* p. 150; *g93* 2/8 p. 14) Judicial action would be warranted if an individual repeatedly and unrepentantly gave in

to violent fits of anger despite counsel. In questionable cases it is best to contact the branch office.

36. If a Christian took up **professional boxing** and refused to stop despite repeated counsel, judicial action would be appropriate.—*w81 7/1 pp. 30-31.*

Evidence Establishing Wrongdoing

37. Even though a Christian has been accused of wrongdoing serious enough to require judicial action, **a judicial committee should not be formed unless the wrongdoing has been established.** What kind of evidence is acceptable?

- **Confession** (admission of wrongdoing), either written or oral, may be accepted as conclusive proof without other corroborating evidence. (Josh. 7:19) There must be two witnesses to a confession, and the confession must be **clear and unambiguous**. For example, a statement from a married Christian that his mate is “Scripturally free” would not by itself be viewed as a clear confession of adultery.

A guilty plea entered in court by a Christian as part of a plea bargain, perhaps on the advice of an attorney so as to avoid the possibility of a harsher sentence, would generally not in itself be viewed as an admission of guilt in the congregation.

- There must be **two or three eyewitnesses**, not just people repeating hearsay; no action can be taken if there is only one witness.—Deut. 19:15; John 8:17.
- If there are two or three **witnesses to the same kind of wrongdoing but each one is witness to a separate incident**, the elders can consider their testimony. While such evidence is acceptable to establish guilt, it is preferable to

have two witnesses to the same occurrence of wrongdoing.

- The **testimony of youths** may be considered; it is up to the elders to determine whether the testimony has the ring of truth.
- The **testimony of unbelievers and disfellowshipped or disassociated ones** may also be considered, but it must be weighed carefully.

38. If wrongdoing has not been established but serious questions have been raised, the body of elders should **appoint two elders to investigate the matter promptly**. For example, there may be just one witness. If so, it would be loving for the witness first to confront the accused and encourage him to take the initiative to approach the elders. The elders can then allow the accused a few days to approach them. (For the witness by himself to confront the accused may not be advisable in all cases—for example, if the witness and the accused were involved in sexual immorality together or if the witness was a victim of incest or rape by the accused or is a child and the victim of sexual abuse. Or it may be that the witness is extremely timid.) Whether the witness approaches the accused or not, the two elders appointed should speak with the accused regarding the accusation.—*w97 8/15 p. 27*.

39. If the accused denies the accusation, the investigating elders should try to arrange a meeting with him and the accuser together. (Note: If the accusation involves child sexual abuse and the victim is currently a minor, the elders should contact the branch office before arranging a meeting with the child and the alleged abuser.) If the accuser or the accused is unwilling to meet with the elders or if the accused continues to deny the accusation of a single witness and the wrongdoing is not established, the elders will leave matters in Jehovah’s hands. (Deut.

19:15-17; 1 Tim. 5:19, 24, 25; w95 11/1 pp. 28-29) The investigating elders should compose a record, sign it, put it in a sealed envelope, and place it in the congregation's confidential file. Additional evidence may later come to light to establish matters.

See September 7, 2011, letter to all bodies of elders for further direction on filing confidential material.

Those Who Have Not Associated for Many Years

40. In deciding whether to form a judicial committee or not, the body of elders should consider the following:

- Does he still profess to be a Witness?
- Is he generally recognized as a Witness in the congregation or the community?
- Does his conduct continue to affect any other person, such as in some cases of adultery or child abuse?
- Does the person have a measure of contact or association with the congregation so that a leavening, or corrupting, influence exists?
- Is the person willing to meet with a committee, thus admitting accountability to the Christian congregation?

41. Depending upon length of inactivity and other factors suggested above, elders may determine to hold the matter in abeyance. In such a case, they would make a record of the person's questionable conduct for the congregation file. When the individual again shows interest in returning to the congregation, they can clarify these matters.

42. If the sinful conduct is known only to believing family members and no congregation action has been taken, believing relatives will likely determine to curtail family association severely, viewing the relative as bad association.—1 Cor. 15:33; w85 7/15 p. 19 par. 14.

Wrongdoing That Occurred Years in the Past

43. Depending upon the circumstances, the situation may need to be handled by a judicial committee. But if the immorality or other serious wrongdoing occurred more than a few years ago and the individual is genuinely repentant and recognizes that he should have come forward immediately when he sinned, good counsel by elders may be sufficient.

44. The body of elders may appoint two elders to gather the facts. Thereafter, the body would determine whether a judicial committee is needed or not, taking into consideration answers to the following questions:

- Was the wrongdoing in the distant past?
- How widely known is the matter?
- Does the erring one show evidence of spiritual progress as opposed to evidence that progress is being hindered?
- Will counsel be sufficient to restore him, or will more be required for him to have a clean conscience?
- Are there works befitting repentance?
- Did he voluntarily confess, or did the matter come to light by other means?
- How will respect for the body of elders be affected in the congregation?
- If *por-nei'a* was involved, has a confession been made to the innocent mate?
- To what degree have lives been affected or damaged by the wrongdoing? For example, does the matter involve child abuse or adultery?

45. If the individual is serving as a ministerial servant, elder, or pioneer, his qualifications should be examined. If the body of elders determines that he no longer qualifies, a report should be submitted to the branch office.—See 3:19-21.

Was the Wrongdoer's Baptism Valid?

46. When dealing with wrongdoers, **the elders should not raise questions about the validity of the individual's baptism.** If the individual raises the issue, the elders may refer him to the February 15, 2010, *Watchtower*, page 22. Further information on rebaptism can be found in the February 15, 1964, *Watchtower*, pages 123-126, and the March 1, 1960, *Watchtower*, pages 159-160. Rebaptism is a personal matter.

47. At times a wrongdoer will claim that his baptism is not valid and that he feels he is not accountable to a judicial committee because he secretly engaged in wrongdoing shortly before he was baptized. If the elders had been aware of his serious wrongdoing committed just before baptism, likely they would not have approved him for baptism. However, this does not necessarily mean that he did not make a valid dedication. Some individuals make a dedication long before the baptism; others have made a dedication shortly before. The elders are not in a position to read the heart and know for a certainty how Jehovah viewed the person at the time he was baptized. If the elders learn that a baptized individual secretly engaged in serious wrongdoing while he was an unbaptized publisher but the wrongdoing ceased before baptism, they should give counsel and encouragement. **A judicial committee should not be formed for prebaptism wrongdoing.** (1 Cor. 6:9-11) However, if the individual resumed serious wrongdoing after baptism, the elders would generally deal with him on the basis of what he has professed to be, a dedicated and baptized Christian, and would meet with him judicially. Thereafter, if he feels he should be rebaptized, this would be a personal decision. However, a person should not get rebaptized simply because he gains improved understanding or appreciation of the truth or some Scriptural doctrine. —Prov. 4:18.

48. There are rare occasions when it is obvious that the baptism was invalid because serious wrongdoing did not cease before baptism, even for a brief period of time. For example, it may be that at the time of baptism, the individual was *living* immorally with a member of the opposite or the same sex, was *a member* of a non-neutral organization, or something similar. If there are questions, the branch office should be consulted.

Which Congregation Should Handle the Matter?

49. Bodies of elders should cooperate if there is a question regarding which congregation should handle a case of wrongdoing. Which congregation has the facts? Which congregation can handle the case most effectively? Jurisdiction should not become an issue.

50. If a wrongdoer moves before a case has been concluded, it is usually best for the elders of the original congregation to follow through if possible and if distance permits. They are acquainted with the person and his circumstances. If he has moved a great distance away, the brothers of the original congregation should not insist on handling matters if the wrongdoer says he is unable to return to the congregation for the hearing. In such a case, it may be advisable to refer matters to the elders of the congregation where he now lives. There should be good communication between the two bodies.

51. If the elders learn that a publisher who is visiting the area for a short period of time is guilty of wrongdoing, they should promptly report the matter to the elders of his congregation.

If Wrongdoing Involves Publishers From Different Congregations

52. If a member of a congregation confesses to wrongdoing that involves a person in another con-

gregation, the elders should promptly pass along what they know to the elders of the other congregation and allow them time to investigate. Does the other individual admit the wrong? Do their accounts match, or are there significant differences? The judicial committees should communicate freely and cooperate in obtaining the facts. There are **many advantages to interviewing individuals jointly** to ascertain what actually occurred and to clarify discrepancies. (Prov. 18:13, 17) If a joint hearing is held, thereafter the judicial committee of each congregation will withdraw and handle the case of the person from its own congregation. **The judicial committee in one congregation should generally not conclude its case before the elders of the other congregation have fully investigated the situation.**

Unbaptized Publishers Who Engage in Serious Wrongdoing

53. The elders should promptly handle a case of serious wrongdoing by an unbaptized publisher. While a judicial committee would not be formed, the elders should select two elders to meet with him, perhaps the ones who approved him as an unbaptized publisher. They should try to readjust him and to determine whether he continues to qualify.—*od* pp. 157-158; *w88* 11/15 pp. 17-20.

54. The assigned elders may determine to place certain restrictions on the individual for a time, including not commenting at meetings, giving talks on the Theocratic Ministry School, or sharing in the public ministry.

55. If the wrongdoing is widely known or might become widely known later and the wrongdoer is repentant, the two elders should inform the service committee, who will arrange for the following

announcement to be made during the Service Meeting: **“A matter involving [name of person] has been handled, and he [she] continues to serve as an unbaptized publisher with the congregation.”**

56. There may be reasons for the body of elders to determine that a Scriptural talk about the sort of wrongdoing involved should be given to the congregation a few weeks after the announcement.

57. If the unbaptized publisher does not respond to the elders’ assistance, thus displaying an unrepentant attitude, the two elders should inform him that he no longer qualifies as an unbaptized publisher. Or if he informs the elders that he no longer desires to be a publisher, they will accept his decision. In either case, the elders will have the following announcement made during the Service Meeting: **“[Name of person] is no longer recognized as an unbaptized publisher.”** Because of his unrepentant wrongdoing, it would be best for a time not to call on him if he raises his hand to comment at meetings.

58. If the elders see that such a person is a threat to the flock, they can privately warn those endangered. For example, despite the announcement, the wrongdoer might attempt to socialize with youths in the congregation. In that situation, the elders would speak privately to the parents of the endangered ones and maybe to those youths also.

59. There is **no specific arrangement for an appeal** or a seven-day waiting period before announcing the decision that one is no longer recognized as an unbaptized publisher. If he expresses dissatisfaction with the conclusion, the body of elders should choose two different elders to review the case.

60. If someone who was previously removed as an unbaptized publisher begins to make progress and wishes once again to share in the ministry, two elders

(perhaps those who met with him earlier) should meet with him to determine his qualifications. If he qualifies, an announcement should be made that he is an unbaptized publisher. There is no need to wait until he reports field service again to make the announcement.

61. **If the unbaptized publisher is a minor by law**, the two elders should first speak with the Christian parents to discern what occurred, the child's attitude, and the corrective steps that the parents are taking. If the parents have the situation in hand, the two elders may choose not to meet with the minor but will check with the parents from time to time to offer helpful counsel, specific suggestions, and loving encouragement.

62. When an unbaptized publisher is involved in wrongdoing, the two elders assigned to meet with him should prepare a written record of the case. The secretary files this record in the same manner as he files judicial cases.

See September 7, 2011, letter to all bodies of elders for further direction on filing confidential material.

Chapter Six

Preparing for the Judicial Hearing

Select the elders for the judicial committee carefully

Elders are accountable to Jehovah for the judgment they render

Make proper arrangements for the hearing

Selecting the Judicial Committee and Chairman

1. If a judicial committee is needed, the elders who are present at the Kingdom Hall should determine which elders will serve on the committee and which one will be chairman. (See 2:12) The elders chosen should be men of discernment and good judgment. Extensive details of the case do not need to be conveyed to the entire body, but enough information should be presented for the elders to determine whether a disfellowshipping offense has actually been committed and, if so, who is best qualified to handle the particular type of case that has arisen. (*km* 9/77 pp. 5-6) It is usually best for newer elders to serve first with more experienced ones. They would never serve as observers on a judicial case. However, complex cases may warrant having four or even five experienced elders on the committee.

2. If the elders know that the accused has strong feelings against a particular elder, it would be better not to use him. An elder who is a close relative or has been in business with the accused or has had a special friendship with him would not normally serve on the committee. (*km* 9/77 p. 6) If there are not enough elders locally to make up the committee, the

body of elders may request the assistance of an elder in a neighboring congregation by contacting the body of elders where he serves. In such situations, you may also contact the circuit overseer for recommendations.

Preparing Your Mind and Heart to Judge

3. Serving on a judicial committee is a heavy responsibility. You are judging for Jehovah and are accountable to him for the judgment you render. (2 Chron. 19:6, 7) Your decision will likely have long-lasting and far-reaching consequences for the individual involved, his Christian family members, and others in the congregation. **Each time you serve on a judicial committee, you should first review Chapters 5-7 of this publication.**

4. Allowing an unrepentant wrongdoer to remain in the congregation could result in a leavening influence. (Gal. 5:9) Failure to remove the individual may also minimize the wrong in the mind of the wrongdoer and in the minds of others who may know of his sin. (Eccl. 8:11) On the other hand, an individual unjustly dealt with may have difficulty recovering his spirituality.—Matt. 18:6.

5. You can render a good judgment with Jehovah's help. (Matt. 18:18-20) Pray for wisdom, discernment, and God's holy spirit. (1 Ki. 3:9; Phil. 1:9, 10; Jas. 1:5) Do careful, thorough research using Bible-based publications, not relying solely on past experience in handling judicial matters. (Prov. 15:28) Endeavor to obtain a clear picture regarding what occurred and what the individual's true attitude is.—Prov. 18:13, 17.

Inviting the Accused to the Judicial Hearing

6. It is best for two elders to invite him orally. Their invitation should include the following information:

- Make clear that the meeting is a judicial hearing.
- Explain what his course of action is *alleged* to have been.
- State the time and place of the hearing and how the person can contact the chairman if the person is unable to meet at the scheduled time and location.

7. If circumstances permit, **hold the hearing at the Kingdom Hall**. This theocratic setting will put all in a more respectful frame of mind; it will also help to ensure greater confidentiality for the proceedings.

8. The assigned elders should make every effort to arrange for a judicial hearing right away. Leaving the matter unresolved can harm the congregation and the accused. **If the accused does not make himself available to receive an oral invitation** despite *repeated efforts* by the judicial committee, then the judicial committee should send a written invitation. (Do not leave confidential information on an answering machine or voice mail or send by way of e-mail.) A written invitation signed by the judicial committee should include the same information as outlined above for an oral invitation. If possible, send the invitation in such a way that the elders can verify that the addressee received it. If they are unsuccessful in their diligent efforts to invite him and they cannot confirm that he received the invitation, they should hold the matter in abeyance.

9. **If he accepts the judicial committee's invitation, yet fails to appear**, the judicial committee should reschedule the hearing and endeavor to invite the accused again. If he does not attend after it is confirmed that he received the second invitation and if it is evident that he is unwilling to cooperate with the judicial committee, the committee will proceed with

the hearing but will not make a decision until evidence and testimony by witnesses are considered.

10. **If the accused makes known to the elders his adamant refusal to meet with a judicial committee**, the judicial committee may proceed in his absence without extending further invitations. —See 7:29.

Meeting With Marriage Mates

11. **If the accused is a married sister**, it is best to have her believing husband present for the hearing. He is her head, and his efforts to restore her and direct her can be very helpful. (1 Cor. 11:3) If unusual circumstances are involved or the elders feel it would be best not to invite the husband because of their concerns for the safety of the wife, the elders should call the branch office.

12. **If the accused is a married brother**, his wife would normally not attend the hearing. However, if the husband wants his wife to be present, she may attend a portion of the hearing. The judicial committee should maintain confidentiality.

13. **If the husband committed adultery**, he has an obligation to inform his wife of the facts. The judicial committee should promptly inquire of the Christian wife as to what her husband has told her. If he refuses to inform her of his adultery, the elders should inform her that because of her husband's conduct, it is up to her to decide whether to pursue a Scriptural divorce or not. Furthermore, they should inform the innocent mate that her resuming sexual relations with the guilty mate would negate any claim to Scriptural freedom. But they should not give her further details. On the other hand, the elders may find that while the husband did confess adultery to his wife, he did not tell her the full extent of his wrong conduct and left out important information that the wife should know. The elders should not pro-

vide this confidential information to the wife, but they can suggest that she speak with her husband again. Even if he does not tell her anything more, this will alert her to the fact that he is withholding information from her, and this may help her to determine whether to forgive or not.

Meeting With Baptized Minors

14. It is best to meet with the youth and his Christian parents, since they have the responsibility to raise and train him. If the accused is living in the home of his believing parents but is no longer a minor, the elders would not generally invite the parents to the hearing. However, if the accused living in his parents' home has recently become an adult and the parents ask to be present and the accused has no objection, the judicial committee may decide to allow them to attend *a portion of the hearing*.

Meeting With Incarcerated Ones

15. When the judicial committee endeavors to meet with the incarcerated accused wrongdoer, the secular authorities may not allow all three members to meet with him at the same time. If so, a judicial committee should not handle the case over the telephone with a conference-line arrangement. The elders should endeavor to arrange for two members of the committee to meet with him in person in a confidential setting. Others should not be present when the accused person is interviewed. Afterward, the two brothers would discuss the case with the third member of the committee, and the judicial committee may then render a decision. Two members of the judicial committee should inform him of the decision. If he is disfellowshipped, the elders should inform him and tell him of his option to appeal, and so forth. If the authorities allow only one elder at a time to speak with him, the judicial committee should

decide in advance what questions to ask. Then two on the judicial committee should talk with him *separately* and ask the same questions. Thereafter, the judicial committee should convene to make a decision. In unusual cases, the branch office should be contacted.

If the Accused Threatens Suicide

16. In judicial cases where the accused threatens suicide, it may be best for the committee to suspend the hearing to focus on helping him regain his balance. (See 7:12) They should assure him of the committee's desire to help him, then broach the subject of depression and suicide, using the Scriptures and Bible-based publications. (Prov. 3:11, 12; 4:13; Heb. 12:5, 6, 11-13) Depending upon his emotional state, it may be best to do this a day or two later. The elders can prepare by reviewing articles that will help them deal sensitively with the depressed individual. (w00 9/15 pp. 3-7; w88 10/15 pp. 25-29; 11/15 pp. 21-24; w82 6/1 pp. 9-14) The judicial committee should avoid prolonging the case unnecessarily, as this can cause stress for the accused. They should take notes for the confidential file, outlining the dates of their conversations and the scriptures and articles that were considered. They should sign it and place it in the file for the case. The judicial committee should communicate with the branch office if there are questions about a certain case.

If the Accused Threatens Legal Action

17. If the accused threatens legal action against the elders, the elders should suspend proceedings and promptly telephone the branch office.

18. If a member of the media or an attorney representing the accused contacts the elders, they should not give him any information about the case or verify that there is a judicial committee. Rath-

er, they should give the following explanation: “The spiritual and physical welfare of Jehovah’s Witnesses is of paramount concern to the elders, who have been appointed to ‘shepherd the flock.’ The elders extend this shepherding confidentially. Confidential shepherding makes it easier for those who seek the elders’ help to do so without worrying that what they say to the elders will be divulged later. Consequently, we do not comment on whether elders are currently or have formerly met to assist any member of the congregation.” If there is a need to do so, the elders may obtain the inquirer’s name and phone number and inform him that their attorney will contact him. The elders should then promptly telephone the branch office.

19. If the authorities request confidential congregation records or ask that elders give testimony regarding confidential congregation matters, the elders should promptly telephone the branch office.

Chapter Seven

Judicial Hearing Procedure

Try to put the accused at ease

Establish the facts and ascertain his attitude

If repentance is unclear, try to lead him to repentance during the initial meeting

If repentance is commensurate with the extent of wrongdoing, reprove the wrongdoer from the Scriptures

If not convinced of sufficient repentance, inform the wrongdoer of the decision to disfellowship, explaining how he can repair his damaged relationship with Jehovah

1. The judicial hearing should be opened with prayer with the accused present. The judicial committee should feel free to seek Jehovah's wisdom through prayer at any time during their private deliberations. (Jas. 1:5) The chairman should state the reason for the meeting. He may offer a Scriptural point at the outset, such as from Proverbs 28:13 or James 5:14, 15. The elders on the judicial committee should **convey their desire to be helpful and try to put the accused at ease.** They should be quick to listen but slow to indicate a preference or a leaning one way or the other. Even if the accused is belligerent, they should treat him kindly and respectfully, **never harshly.**—w89 9/15 pp. 19-20.

2. **The chairman should invite the accused to make a personal statement.** If the accused contends that he is innocent, the witnesses to the wrongdoing should be presented and their testimony

should be given in the presence of the accused. It is best that the witnesses give their testimony in person. However, it may be that the witnesses live a great distance away or for some reason are not able to be physically present. If so, their testimony may be presented in the hearing of the accused by a secure phone call or perhaps submitted in writing and read to the accused. The accused should be given opportunity to respond to the testimony. If he wishes to present witnesses to establish his innocence, the judicial committee should allow them to give their testimony.

3. **Hear only those witnesses who have relevant testimony** regarding the alleged wrongdoing. Those who intend to testify only about the character of the accused should not be allowed to do so. The witnesses should not hear details and testimony of other witnesses. Observers should not be present for moral support. **Recording devices should not be allowed.**

4. In the rare event that testimony presented during the hearing causes the judicial committee to conclude that the matter should not be handled judicially, the hearing should be suspended. Inform the person that he will be contacted further regarding the matter. The body of elders should then be consulted to determine whether the judicial committee should be disbanded.

5. The committee should first seek to **establish the facts and ascertain the attitude** of the accused. This requires skillful and discreet questions. The judicial committee should be thorough but not inquire about needless details, especially in regard to sexual misconduct. However, in some instances, when Scriptural freedom to divorce and remarry may be an issue, details may need to be clarified. When the elders on the judicial committee feel that they have a clear picture, they may excuse the accused

from the room and discuss the case and the individual's repentance or lack thereof.

Determining Genuine Repentance

6. In Greek, two verbs are used in connection with repentance. The first stresses a changed viewpoint or disposition. The second emphasizes a feeling of regret. Therefore, repentance involves a deep regret over a damaged relationship with Jehovah, remorse over the reproach brought upon Jehovah's name and people, and a sincere longing to come back into God's favor. It includes a heart-motivated rejection of the bad course as something repugnant, hated. (Rom. 12:9) Such an attitude should be demonstrated by "fruits that befit repentance," making evident to an adequate degree a sinner's claimed repentance.—Luke 3:8; *it-2* pp. 770-777.

7. Judging repentance is not simply a matter of determining whether the wrongdoer is weak or wicked. **Weakness is not synonymous with repentance.** (*w95* 1/1, pp. 27-29) Neither should the judicial committee's decision be determined by the notoriety of the wrong. The judicial committee should look for clear works of repentance commensurate with his wrongdoing. (2 Cor. 7:10, 11) In order to extend mercy, the committee must be **convinced** that the wrongdoer has a changed heart condition and that he has a zeal to right the wrong and is absolutely determined to avoid it in the future. Even if this is the individual's first time before a judicial committee, it is necessary to determine whether his actions and attitude indicate that he has repented and can thus remain in the congregation.

8. The extent to which the person deviates from righteousness may be major or minor, and logically **the degree of regret (repentance) ought to be commensurate with the degree of deviation.** Was the individual caught off guard so that he

momentarily succumbed to temptation, or did he plan to do wrong? Was he unaware of the gravity of his sin, or did he deliberately ignore counsel or warnings? Was it a single offense, or was it a practice? The more an individual repeats serious sin, the more that one reasonably gives evidence of being like wicked people who are “practicers of what is hurtful.”—Ps. 28:3; *it-2* p. 771 par. 5.

9. While there is no such thing as automatic disfellowshipping, **an individual may have gone so far into sin that he may not be able to demonstrate sufficient repentance** to the judicial committee at the time of the hearing. If so, he must be disfellowshipped, allowing time to pass for him to prove his repentance. Or it may be that the individual has been dealt with judicially a number of times in the past. Because he appeared repentant, he was reproofed each time. Now he has sinned again. In such cases his *life course* may indicate a lack of repentance.—*w81* 9/1 p. 26 par. 23.

10. Below are **some indications of repentance**. However, none of these is the sole criterion for determining whether the sinner is repentant or not.

- Was his confession voluntary, or did he have to be accused by others? Some offenders are so deeply ashamed or have such difficulty expressing themselves that they are reluctant to speak.
- Is the individual truthful? (Acts 5:1-10) When questioned, are his answers forthright? Is he cooperative with the judicial committee? The judicial committee should be especially cautious if the individual has shown himself to be guilty of hypocrisy, lying, or deliberate efforts to deceive.
- Has he contritely prayed to Jehovah and sought his forgiveness and mercy? Keep in mind that some wrongdoers, though repentant, find it difficult to pray.—Jas. 5:14.

- Has he made restitution, expressed willingness to do so, or apologized to offended ones, those damaged by his sinful course? Has he sought forgiveness of those wronged?—w92 9/15 p. 10; w81 9/1 pp. 25-26; w73 p. 351.
- In cases of adultery, has he confessed to the innocent mate and asked for forgiveness?—w73 pp. 351-352; w68 pp. 319-320.

Note: The option to forgive adultery rests with the innocent mate. The guilty mate cannot be viewed as repentant if, after committing adultery, he refuses to inform her and allow her the opportunity to forgive. If the wrongdoer is unwilling to confess and ask for forgiveness because of *fear of violence* by the innocent mate, contact the branch office before proceeding.

- Does he manifest a spirit of agony and regret over having damaged his relationship with Jehovah?—Ps. 32:3-5; 51:1-4.
- Does he demonstrate godly sadness or worldly sadness? (2 Cor. 7:8-11) Is his sadness primarily because of hurting Jehovah and bringing Him into reproach or because of the disappointment he has caused to family and friends and the shame he has experienced? (Ezra 10:1; Luke 22:59-62) Individuals vary in their emotional makeup and control. Tears do not necessarily indicate sincere repentance; neither does a lack of strong emotion show a lack of repentance.—Gen. 25:29-34; 27:34.
- Does he accept responsibility for his error, or does he minimize or justify his bad course?—1 Sam. 15:24; 2 Sam. 12:13.
- Does he recognize the fact that lesser sins led up to the wrongdoing, and is he determined to avoid these?

11. Each case is different. The judicial committee should consider all the unique factors involved, including any **extenuating circumstances**. For example, the wrongdoer may have been a victim of some type of abuse in the past. Extenuating circumstances do not excuse the wrongdoing. (g93 10/8 p. 4) However, discerning them will help the judicial committee to understand better the wrongdoer and his response to the judicial committee. Nevertheless, **there would be no basis to extend mercy if fruits of repentance are lacking.**

12. The same is true regarding wrongdoers who suffer from **mental or emotional problems**. (See 6:16) The congregation cannot overlook his wrongdoing if he is able to discharge normal responsibilities toward himself and the community in a reasonably acceptable manner and others generally view him as one who could be held accountable for what he does and says. However, the judicial committee should show consideration and patience in their dealings with him and be especially aware of the need for discernment in evaluating his repentance. On the other hand, if the judicial committee discerns that his mental condition is so severe that others generally regard him as not being responsible for what he does, they may recommend to the body of elders that no judicial action be taken, explaining the reasons for their recommendation.

If Repentance Is Unclear

13. If the wrongdoer's degree of repentance is unclear, the committee should invite him back into the room for further discussion. They should use God's Word to help him understand why his conduct was wrong and how it has affected his relationship with Jehovah and the congregation. It is possible that even as late as the judicial hearing, he will demonstrate repentance to the point that mercy by the judicial

committee may be warranted. In most cases the individual will show some repentance, but is it commensurate with the degree of his wrongdoing? The judicial committee should be modest and keep in mind that if the wrongdoer has demonstrated few or no works of repentance before the judicial hearing is held, it may not be possible during the hearing to move him to demonstrate sufficient repentance to justify extending mercy. Even if it is determined that he must be disfellowshipped, their efforts to lead him to repentance may help him to begin making straight paths for his feet and work toward reinstatement. (Heb. 12:13) After trying to help him and hearing his further expressions, the judicial committee may excuse him from the room and deliberate.

14. In complex cases, if the judicial committee is not sure of the Bible's direction or the organization's counsel, the hearing may be adjourned and reconvened a *few days* later. However, an additional meeting should *not* be scheduled just to give the accused time to stop the wrongdoing or to demonstrate works of repentance. If he has demonstrated little or no repentance during the initial hearing, there would generally be no basis on which to prolong the case and schedule a second meeting.

15. At times, **complicated judicial cases may necessitate consultation** with an experienced mature elder *in another congregation* or the circuit overseer. In such a situation, inform the wrongdoer that the *decision is pending*. Do not inform him that you will be consulting with parties outside of the judicial committee, which may at times include the branch office. While pertinent details may be discussed, names should not be used when discussing the case with another elder. However, when the circuit overseer is consulted or when circumstances require that the branch office be contacted, the judicial committee should reveal the names.

16. Generally, those serving on a judicial committee should endeavor to be unanimous in their decision. Any difference of opinion can usually be resolved by discussing matters thoroughly as a judicial committee, researching the Scriptures and Christian publications, praying for wisdom and direction, and even consulting with an experienced elder outside the congregation. However, if the committee is unable to reach a unanimous conclusion, the minority should give support to the decision reached by the majority.

17. Anything submitted in writing to the committee by the alleged wrongdoer or by witnesses should be kept in strict confidence. If it is necessary to continue the matter later, the members of the committee should submit to the chairman any personal notes they have taken. The chairman will keep these notes in a secure place to prevent breaches of confidentiality. The notes may be returned to the individual elders for consultation before the hearing resumes.

If the Decision Is to Reprove

18. If the elders on the judicial committee determine that the wrongdoer is genuinely repentant, they should inform him of the decision, the judicial restrictions, and whether the reproof will be announced. They should also give reproof from the Scriptures, showing the seriousness of the wrongdoing and the minor sins that may have led up to it. Reproof is defined as “that which is designed to convince others of their having erred, in order to move them to acknowledge their mistakes and correct these.” (*it-2* p. 780) Hence, administering judicial reproof includes more than just making a decision or announcing it. It involves reinforcing the wrongdoer’s resolve to do what is right. The original-language word for reproof comes from a verb meaning ‘to show plainly, point out by facts, demon-

strate, show by evident or convincing reasons or arguments.’ Helpful suggestions should be given to help him make needed adjustments. If witnesses testified during the hearing, they may be invited to hear the Scriptural reproof. In this way the accused is reproved “before all onlookers.” (1 Tim. 5:20) The judicial committee should pray with the repentant wrongdoer before concluding the hearing.

19. In all cases of judicial reproof, the wrongdoer is disqualified from special privileges. These include pioneering, offering congregation prayer, and sharing in any parts on the Service Meeting until he has made further spiritual progress. This also includes other congregational assignments that might be given to those who are exemplary. In addition, **some judicial restrictions** will be imposed in all cases of judicial reproof. Judicial restrictions may include not commenting at congregation meetings and not giving student talks in the Theocratic Ministry School. However, the judicial committee determines what judicial restrictions to impose. When the elders inform a repentant wrongdoer of restrictions, it would be helpful to tell him the date of the next meeting, at which his progress will be reviewed. It may be discouraging to the repentant wrongdoer if restrictions are imposed for a prolonged period of time. It would be an exceptional case when many months have passed and restrictions have not been gradually lifted.

20. The judicial committee should **determine whether the reproof should be announced** to the congregation. (w88 11/15 p. 18; w81 9/1 pp. 26-27) If the individual thereafter moves, no announcement of such previous judicial reproof is made in the new congregation.—*km* 3/75 p. 4.

- The reproof should be announced if the sin is widely known or will likely become known in the congregation or community. An

announcement will safeguard the reputation of the congregation.

For example, in a case of adultery, an innocent mate may lean toward forgiveness but is not ready to resume sexual relations at the time that the judicial committee concludes the case. *If the possibility of a Scriptural divorce still exists*, an announcement would protect the reputation of the congregation and the innocent mate.

See October 1, 2012, letter to all bodies of elders regarding child abuse.

- The judicial committee may have specific reasons to believe that the congregation needs to be on guard concerning the repentant wrongdoer. Perhaps he ignored previous counsel several times concerning steps leading to the same wrongdoing.

For example, in a case involving wrongdoing that could be viewed as child sexual abuse, announcing the reproof of a repentant wrongdoer will serve as a protection for the congregation.

See September 7, 2011, letter to all bodies of elders for direction on filing confidential material.

21. The coordinator of the body of elders should approve the announcement before an elder reads it to the congregation. It should read as follows: **“[Name of person] has been reproved.”** *Restrictions are not announced.*

22. The judicial committee should monitor the spiritual progress of the repentant wrongdoer and be alert to **remove judicial restrictions** progressively as he recovers spiritually. It is not necessary for the entire body of elders to decide on the removal of restrictions, except in unusual cases. The committee should inform the body of elders when any restrictions are removed. When an elder serving on the original committee moves or is no longer serving as an elder, the body of elders will select a replacement to monitor the wrongdoer’s progress. If the wrongdoer moves before the committee lifts all of his restrictions, the new congregation should receive sufficient

details so that the elders can evaluate his true spiritual condition. Provide the type of information and details you would appreciate receiving if the individual was moving into your congregation. The elders of the new congregation should choose two or three elders to continue to monitor the wrongdoer's progress and lift the remaining judicial restrictions.

23. In some cases the **elders may feel that it is necessary to warn the congregation** by means of a Scriptural talk about the type of conduct practiced. A member of the judicial committee should generally give the talk. He should explain the wrongness of the conduct and how to avoid it but without saying anything that would connect the wrongdoer with the type of sin under discussion. In the case of an announced reproof, the elders should wait a few weeks before giving such a talk; when the reproof is unannounced, there is no need to wait.

24. **Once the case has been concluded, no further judicial action is taken** unless the wrongdoer again engages in gross wrongdoing. However, in rare cases there may be an exception if *within a few days* of the decision new information comes to light that makes it obvious to the judicial committee that the wrongdoer was not repentant, perhaps because he gave misleading testimony or purposely omitted important facts during the hearing. In such instances there may be a basis for the judicial committee to reconsider its decision and decide to disfellowship, especially if no announcement of reproof had been made. When the hearing resumes, the individual would be given opportunity to hear any new evidence and to present his side of the matter. In cases of this nature, it is best to inquire of the branch office for direction before proceeding.

25. If **the wrongdoer again engages in serious wrongdoing** after the judicial committee renders a decision and completes the case, the judicial

committee that handled the previous case will not automatically handle the new case. The body of elders should meet and select the judicial committee. In most cases, the elders will choose the same elders to serve on the new judicial committee, but the body of elders may decide to use different brothers or to add another elder to the committee.

If the Decision Is to Disfellowship

26. If the wrongdoer *lacks genuine repentance*, he should be disfellowshipped. (See 7:8) The committee should inform him of its decision and endeavor to help him see how he can use the time he is disfellowshipped in a way that will repair his damaged relationship with Jehovah. The committee may share with him scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 7:10, 11 and Hebrews 12:5-7. The judicial committee should be kind and positive, assuring him that forgiveness is possible if he truly repents.

27. The following information should be conveyed **orally** to the wrongdoer after informing him of the committee's decision:

- Outline the steps necessary for future reinstatement.
- Inform the wrongdoer that he may appeal in writing within seven days if he feels a serious error in judgment has occurred. (*od* pp. 153-154) He should address his letter of appeal to the judicial committee.

28. The judicial committee should neither encourage him to appeal nor discourage him from doing so. Before dismissing him, the elders should ask if he has any questions. The judicial committee will conclude with prayer *after* dismissing the wrongdoer.

29. If the unrepentant wrongdoer did not attend the judicial hearing, the judicial commit-

tee should make reasonable efforts to inform him orally of their decision, his option to appeal, and so forth. The elders should not leave a message of a confidential nature on a telephone answering machine or by means of voice mail or by way of e-mail. If he does not cooperate with the efforts to inform him, the judicial committee should contact the branch office.

30. Allow the seven-day appeal period to elapse even if the person states he does not wish to appeal or if he failed to appear for the judicial hearing.

31. The coordinator of the body of elders should check the announcement to make sure that it conforms to the guidelines outlined by the organization. An elder should read the announcement. The wording should be as follows: “[**Name of person**] is no longer one of Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

32. Disfellowshipping takes effect at the time of making the announcement to the congregation. In the interim before the public announcement, the wrongdoer should not comment or offer prayers at congregation meetings or care for any special privileges of service. (*od* p. 154) Make the announcement in only one congregation.

33. The judicial committee should **promptly inform the branch office** of the disfellowshipping using the appropriate forms. When making the report, read and carefully follow the instructions on the form.

34. Upon conclusion of the case, the chairman should place only necessary notes and documents, a detailed summary of the case, and the S-77 forms in a sealed envelope for the congregation’s confidential file. Elders on the committee should preserve nothing outside of this sealed envelope (including personal notes). On the outside of the envelope

See September 7, 2011, letter to all bodies of elders for further direction on filing confidential material.

should be written the wrongdoer's name, the names of those who served on the judicial committee (with the chairman indicated), the action taken, and the date of the action.

Chapter Eight

Appeal Hearing Procedure

The appeal committee should be modest in working with the judicial committee

The appeal committee should determine whether the accused is guilty of serious wrongdoing and whether he was repentant when he met with the judicial committee

1. If the judicial committee receives a letter of appeal within seven days from the time the wrongdoer received notification of the decision to disfellowship, the chairman should promptly call the circuit overseer, who will arrange for an appeal committee. Arrangements should be made for the appeal hearing even if there seems to be no valid basis for it. He should select the most qualified elders available to rehear the case. To the extent possible, he will select brothers from a different congregation who are impartial and have no ties or relationship to the accused, the accuser, or the judicial committee.

2. If a person appeals *after* the seven days, immediately contact the branch office for direction.

3. The chairman of the judicial committee will make the completed S-77 forms and all other related material on the case, including the judicial committee's notes, available to the appeal committee.

Objective and Approach of the Appeal Committee

4. The elders chosen for the appeal committee should approach the case with modesty and **avoid giving the impression that they are judging the judicial committee** rather than the accused. While

the appeal committee should be thorough, they must remember that the appeal process does not indicate a lack of confidence in the judicial committee. Rather, it is a kindness to the wrongdoer to assure him of a complete and fair hearing. The elders of the appeal committee should keep in mind that likely the judicial committee has more insight and experience than they do regarding the accused.

5. Generally, there is no arrangement to hold an appeal hearing outside the circuit; if the accused has moved, he must be willing to travel back to the area so that the judicial committee can be present for the appeal hearing. If the accused deliberately fails to appear at the appeal hearing, the disfellowshipping should be announced after reasonable efforts have been made to contact him.—*od* p. 154.

6. The appeal committee should first read the written material on the case and speak with the judicial committee. Afterward, the appeal committee should speak to the accused. Since the judicial committee has already judged him unrepentant, the appeal committee will not pray in his presence but will pray *before* inviting him into the room.

7. Conduct the hearing in a manner similar to the first judicial committee hearing. It may be necessary to rehear all the evidence relevant to the case, including that which was presented originally and any new evidence now available. For instance, if the accused continues to contend that he is innocent, the witnesses should again give their testimony in his presence, he should be given opportunity to respond, and the appeal committee should hear any additional witnesses he wishes to present to prove his innocence.

8. The judicial committee should be present to hear any testimony. If they or the accused believes that earlier testimony or evidence is being changed, this can be stated following the presentation of evidence that was allegedly altered.

9. After gathering the facts, the appeal committee should deliberate in private. They should consider the answers to two questions:

- **Was it established that the accused committed a disfellowshipping offense?**
- **Did the accused demonstrate repentance commensurate with the gravity of his wrongdoing *at the time of the hearing with the judicial committee?***

10. The appeal committee may find that while the original basis for disfellowshipping was invalid, other valid grounds for disfellowshipping exist. If so, the appeal committee should give the individual sufficient time, even several days if needed, to present any evidence or witnesses that he feels will disprove the new allegations. If the new allegations are nonetheless established and if the person does not demonstrate genuine repentance, the appeal committee may decide to uphold the disfellowshipping on these new grounds. ~~If so, the appeal committee should prepare a new report for the branch office showing the new grounds for disfellowshipping. The appeal committee should submit this along with the report composed by the judicial committee and should tell the original committee to announce the disfellowshipping.~~

If the original committee agrees with the new grounds, they should adjust the S-77 form, announce the disfellowshipping, and submit the form to the branch office. The appeal committee's brief summary should be retained in the confidential file along with a copy of the S-77 form and the brief summary of the original committee.

If the Appeal Committee Agrees With the Judicial Committee

11. If the brothers on the appeal committee feel they can accede to the judgment of the judicial committee, the appeal committee should inform the wrongdoer of the final decision in the presence of the judicial committee.

12. The judicial committee should allow seven days to pass before arranging for the disfellowshipping to be announced at the next Service Meeting.

~~13. The appeal committee should compose a report and send this to the branch office along with the report given them by the judicial committee. The appeal committee should make sure that the report from the judicial committee is complete, including the date of announcement of the disfellowshipping.~~

14. When the disfellowshipping is upheld, there is no further arrangement for appeal. However, **if an individual persists in believing a serious error in judgment has occurred**, the appeal committee should inform him that he may submit his allegations in writing to the appeal committee within seven days for transmittal to the branch office. *The appeal committee should not mention this provision unless the individual indicates that he believes a serious error in judgment has occurred.*

15. If he indicates a desire to submit a letter of appeal to the branch office, the announcement of disfellowshipping should be delayed. The appeal committee should submit the wrongdoer's letter, the report from the judicial committee, and a report from the appeal committee to the branch office. No announcement should be made until a reply is received from the branch office.

If the Appeal Committee Disagrees With the Judicial Committee

16. The appeal committee should meet privately with the judicial committee to discuss matters and explain the reason for disagreeing.

17. The accused should be invited back into the room, and the appeal committee should inform him that further consideration will be needed. He can be assured that the case will be concluded as soon as possible. **Neither the judicial committee nor the appeal committee should give any indication of their differing decisions to the individual.** After

The original committee should submit the completed S-77 form to the branch office. The appeal committee's brief summary should be retained in the confidential file along with a copy of the S-77 form and the brief summary of the original committee.

he is dismissed, the hearing can be concluded with prayer.

On the other hand, if both committees now agree not to disfellowship the individual, the appeal committee should inform him of the final decision in the presence of the judicial committee. The appeal committee's brief summary should be retained in the confidential file along with the brief summary of the original committee.

18. If the judicial committee does not agree with the conclusions of the appeal committee, the elders on the judicial committee should promptly compose a letter clearly expressing their reasons for disagreement and give this to the appeal committee. The appeal committee will include this letter along with their report to the branch office. ~~On the other hand, the judicial committee may now agree with the appeal committee. If so, their letter should explain why. Even if both committees agree not to disfellowship the individual, they will not advise him of their decision; rather, they will simply tell the person that the decision is pending.~~ The appeal committee will send to the branch office separate letters from both the original committee and the appeal committee that supply sufficient details to give a clear picture of the reasons for the conclusion.

19. The appeal committee should promptly compose a letter explaining the appeal committee's conclusion and the reasons. The appeal committee should send this letter along with the S-77 report given to the appeal committee by the judicial committee at the beginning of the appeal hearing and the judicial committee's letter explaining the judicial committee's thinking on the decision of the appeal committee to the branch office. The branch office will thereafter provide written direction to assist both committees with bringing the case to a conclusion.

20. After the two committees have considered the observations of the branch office and made a final decision, the original committee should inform the person involved. If the decision is to disfellowship, the judicial committee will arrange to make an appropriate announcement in the congregation and inform the branch office of the date of the announcement.

Chapter Nine

Implications of Disassociation

Disassociation is action taken by the individual
A committee is appointed to provide assistance
if possible
Announce and report disassociation if estab-
lished

See September 7,
2011, letter to all
bodies of elders
for further
direction on filing
confidential
material.

1. Whereas disfellowshipping is an action taken by a judicial committee against an unrepentant wrongdoer, disassociation is an action taken by an individual who no longer desires to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses. (1 John 2:19) The body of elders should appoint a committee of three elders to consider the facts.

2. A judicial committee should not continue an investigation into alleged wrongdoing if the accused person makes known his decision to disassociate himself. (w84 7/1 p. 31) However, at no time should the elders ask the accused if he desires to disassociate himself. If the elders are handling a particularly difficult case and there is a question about whether the person has disassociated himself, it would be best for the committee to contact the branch office for further direction. If an individual is determined to disassociate himself, then the committee would prepare a summary of the alleged offense(s) and the evidence of such. This would be kept along with information regarding the disassociation. If the person later requests reinstatement, these matters would need to be considered with him at that time.

3. Actions that may indicate disassociation include the following:

- **Making known a firm decision to be known no longer as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses.** If the individual is agreeable, the committee should first try to speak with him and provide spiritual assistance. (Gal. 6:1) Does he really desire to disassociate himself, or does he simply no longer want to associate actively with the congregation? Is the desire to disassociate prompted by doubts or discouragement? If he is adamant in his position, he should be encouraged to put his request in writing and sign it. If he does not, then the witnesses to his request should prepare a statement for the confidential files and sign it.
- **Joining another religious organization and making known his intention to remain with it.** If it is learned that a person has taken up association with another religious organization and thus is identified with it, a committee (not judicial) should be selected to investigate matters and endeavor to provide spiritual assistance. If the individual has joined another religious organization and intends to remain with it, he has disassociated himself.
- **Willingly and unrepentantly taking blood.** If someone willingly takes blood, perhaps because of being under extreme pressure, the committee should obtain the facts and determine the individual’s attitude. If he is repentant, the committee would provide spiritual assistance in the spirit of Galatians 6:1 and Jude 22, 23. Since he is spiritually weak, he would not qualify for special privileges for a period of time, and it may be necessary to remove certain basic privileges. Depending on the circumstances, the committee may also need to arrange for an announcement to the congregation: **“The elders have handled a matter having to do with [name**

See November 6, 2014, letter to all bodies of elders regarding procedures when legal issues are involved.

of person]. You will be glad to know that spiritual shepherds are endeavoring to render assistance.” On the other hand, if the elders on the committee determine that he is unrepentant, they should announce his disassociation.

- **Taking a course contrary to the neutral position of the Christian congregation.** (Isa. 2:4; John 15:17-19; w99 11/1 pp. 28-29) If he joins a nonneutral organization, he has disassociated himself. If his employment makes him a clear accomplice in nonneutral activities, he should generally be allowed a period of time up to six months to make an adjustment. If he does not, he has disassociated himself.—*km* 9/76 pp. 3-6.

4. The coordinator of the body of elders should approve the announcement before an elder reads it to the congregation. The announcement should be as follows: “[**Name of person**] is no longer one of **Jehovah’s Witnesses.**”

5. Since disassociation is an action taken by the publisher rather than the committee, there is no arrangement for an appeal. Therefore, the announcement of disassociation can be made on the occasion of the next Service Meeting without waiting seven days. A report of the disassociation should promptly be sent to the branch office, using the appropriate forms.—See 7:33-34.

Chapter Ten

Matters Related to Disfellowshipped and Disassociated Ones

Make yearly visits on those who qualify

Permit them to obtain personal literature at the Kingdom Hall

Assist those having undue association with disfellowshipped or disassociated relatives

1. **Once a year** the body of elders reviews a list of those in the congregation territory who are disfellowshipped or disassociated. They will **call on each one they select in order to see if he wants to return.** (w91 4/15 pp. 22-23) Calls should not be made on those who are active apostates, on those who are trying to lead others into sin, or on those who have made it known that they want nothing to do with God's people. The body will assign two elders to make each call, preferably elders familiar with the case. During a brief visit, the elders may kindly explain what the individual can do to return. In some cases there may be good reason for a follow-up visit. They will report the results to the Congregation Service Committee, and the body will be informed at the next meeting of the elders.

2. **If the elders learn that a disfellowshipped or disassociated person has moved,** they should not send his *Congregation's Publisher Record* (S-21) cards or the confidential file to the congregation where he lives or attends meetings. Since he cannot share in the ministry, the congregation that took disfellowshipping action or acknowledged the disasso-

ciation should retain the cards. However, a brief letter should be sent to the body of elders in whose territory he lives to inform them that a disfellowshipped or disassociated person lives in their territory and to provide his address. This will enable the local elders to follow through and make yearly visits on this one if he qualifies. Generally, there would be no need for the letter to include specific information on the details of the judicial case. However, if the elders are aware of a situation that would disqualify him from yearly visits or there is reason for the elders in the new congregation to be especially on guard, this can be explained in the letter.

3. **If someone gives evidence of repentance and a desire to be reinstated** by changing his course or asks about reinstatement, the authorized elders may speak with him and kindly explain what he needs to do in order to be reinstated.

4. Disfellowshipped and disassociated ones may obtain a personal copy of the **magazines and other literature** at the magazine and literature counters at the Kingdom Hall. *Our Kingdom Ministry* is *not* distributed to such ones. If someone is an active apostate and known to misuse our literature to oppose the organization, the local elders may decide not to make literature available to him.

5. Disfellowshipped and disassociated ones are generally expected to make their own arrangements for **transportation to and from congregation meetings**. However, in some instances a disfellowshipped or disassociated individual who is making a determined effort to regain a right standing with Jehovah may be in a situation that prevents him from obtaining transportation. It may be that he has no car and that family members or others are not able to help him. Perhaps he cannot afford public transportation, or it is not available in his area. It may be that the distance involved, personal safety, or severe

weather make it inadvisable to walk. In cases of such desperate need, the elders can determine whether some assistance may be provided. (w81 9/15 p. 18 par. 14) Such assistance would be viewed as similar to public transportation in that there should be no fraternizing or conversing with the disfellowshipped or disassociated person. (2 John 10, 11) The elders should monitor the situation to make sure that any arrangements made are not abused.

6. If members of the congregation are known to have **undue association with disfellowshipped or disassociated relatives** who are not in the household, elders should counsel and reason with those members of the congregation from the Scriptures. Review with them information from the “*God’s Love*” book, pages 207-208; *The Watchtower* of April 15, 1988, pages 26-30; or the article “Display Christian Loyalty When a Relative Is Disfellowshipped” in the August 2002 *Our Kingdom Ministry*. If it is clear that a Christian is violating the spirit of the disfellowshipping decree in this regard and does not respond to counsel, it may be that he would not qualify for congregation privileges, which require one to be exemplary. He would not be dealt with judicially unless there is persistent *spiritual* association or he openly criticizes the disfellowshipping decision.

Chapter Eleven

Reinstatement Committee Procedure

Allow sufficient time for a wrongdoer to prove his repentance

Be especially cautious if the individual:

Was deceptive

Secretly practiced sin over an extended period of time

Was reprovved or disfellowshipped previously

Conspired to put away his marriage mate

When a Plea for Reinstatement Is Received

1. The final decision to reinstate a disfellowshipped person is always made by a judicial committee of the congregation that took the disfellowshipping action. If possible, the elders in that congregation who served on the judicial committee should be used for the reinstatement committee. Even if the committee feels that it is much too soon to consider reinstatement, two members of the committee should acknowledge receipt of the request and briefly inform the disfellowshipped one that more time must pass. **Written requests for reinstatement should be responded to promptly.**

2. After offering prayer *without the disfellowshipped person present*, the committee will invite him into the room. The committee should endeavor to put the disfellowshipped one at ease, commending him for his progress and desire to be reinstated. The chairman invites the disfellowshipped one to make a

personal statement. The committee should seek to determine his conduct since the time of disfellowshipping and ascertain his attitude. The disfellowshipped person is then excused from the room while the committee deliberates.

3. The committee should be careful to allow sufficient time, perhaps many months, a year, or even longer, for the disfellowshipped person to prove that his profession of repentance is genuine. (*od* p. 156; *it-2* p. 771) The committee should be especially cautious in some cases. For instance, the wrongdoer may have been deceptive, may have secretly practiced wrongdoing over a long period of time, or may have been repeatedly dealt with judicially in the past for the same or other wrongdoing. Quickly reinstating such a person may embolden others to commit serious sin, as they may feel that little or no discipline will be administered. Where there is evidence of conspiracy between individuals to put away their mates and marry each other, considerable time should elapse for them to prove their repentance and gain reinstatement.—*w83* 3/15 p. 29.

4. The reinstatement committee needs to **be balanced**. Genuine repentance and a turning away from the wrong course—not the attitude of others or merely the time elapsed—are the chief determining factors in deciding when a person may be reinstated.—1 Cor. 5:1, 11-13; 2 Cor. 2:6, 7.

5. The committee should consider the overall pattern of the wrongdoer's life. Does it now show that he is repentant? If so, elders should guard against going to extremes by exacting a point-by-point admission of sins that may not have been clearly proved.

6. **If it is determined that the individual should not be reinstated**, the committee should

explain their reasons and what they expect the individual to do in the future to qualify for reinstatement. After he is dismissed, the committee will conclude with prayer.

7. **If the disfellowshipped person has moved**, a local judicial committee will hear his request for reinstatement where he is now attending meetings. If those elders believe he should be reinstated, they will give the judicial committee of the congregation that disfellowshipped the person their recommendation. They should not let the disfellowshipped one know their recommendation; if the other committee does not agree, knowing that would only cause him frustration. The committee should merely tell him that they must correspond with the elders where he was disfellowshipped and that he will be informed of the decision in due course.

8. The local judicial committee should not pressure the original committee to reinstate the person. The elders on the original committee may be aware of important factors not apparent to others, so it is usually best to respect their judgment. Likewise, the original committee should carefully consider the recommendation of the other committee. Sufficient time may have passed, and the individual may have made drastic changes that the elders on the original committee have not observed. They should keep in mind that the elders making the recommendation have met the individual and have had opportunity to observe his conduct.

9. **If the two congregations are reasonably close to each other**, the committee of the congregation that took the disfellowshipping action should promptly arrange to meet with the disfellowshipped individual after receiving a positive recommendation from the committee of the congregation where he made his plea for reinstatement.

10. **If the elders on the committee of the congregation that took the disfellowshipping action disagree with the recommendation** to reinstate, they should clearly explain their reasons to the other committee.

If the Decision Is to Reinstate

11. If he is being reinstated, the disfellowshipped person can be invited back into the room and informed. At that time Scriptural encouragement and counsel should be given to help him to continue to make spiritual progress. Until the reinstatement is announced, he should continue to conduct himself as a disfellowshipped one. *The committee concludes with prayer with the individual present.* The committee should make sure the branch office is properly informed of the reinstatement.

12. In all cases of reinstatement, **judicial restrictions should be imposed to help** the person see the need for continuing to make ‘straight paths for his feet’ and out of consideration for the congregation’s conscience. (Heb. 12:13) The privilege of sharing in the field service is restored when the individual is reinstated. Other privileges, such as commenting at meetings and giving Theocratic Ministry School talks, can be restored progressively when it is determined that the individual has progressed spiritually to the point that he is qualified and when it is judged by the committee that the extending of such privileges will not be offensive to the congregation. It may be discouraging to the repentant wrongdoer if restrictions are imposed for a prolonged period of time. Therefore, when informing a repentant wrongdoer of restrictions, it would be helpful for the elders to inform him of the date for the next meeting when his progress will be reviewed. The committee may also arrange for a Bible study to be conducted, if needed, which would be reported as field service. It would be

an exceptional case when many months have passed and restrictions have not been lifted.—See 7:19.

See September 7, 2011, letter to all bodies of elders for direction on filing confidential material.

13. **Reinstatement is announced** in the congregation where that person was disfellowshipped as well as in the congregation where he now attends. The coordinator of the body of elders should approve the announcement before an elder reads it to the congregation. The announcement should read as follows: “[Name of person] is reinstated as one of **Jehovah’s Witnesses.**” Judicial restrictions should *not* be announced. The committee where he attends will supervise the gradual removal of restrictions.

14. A committee will deal with a disassociated person similarly if he requests reinstatement.

15. When a person is reinstated, he will still need much spiritual assistance. The committee should continue to monitor the person’s spiritual progress.

Chapter Twelve

Clarifications and Guidelines on Handling Certain Matters

Marking disorderly ones
Weddings
Scriptural freedom to remarry
Adulterous marriage
Child abuse
Taking brothers to court
When disasters occur

Marking Disorderly Ones

1. At times it may be necessary to mark those who display a flagrant disregard for theocratic order though not practicing a grave sin that would result in judicial action. (w99 7/15 pp. 29-31) This could include such things as being grossly lazy or critical or being a profitless talker who is a constant 'meddler with what does not concern him.' (2 Thess. 3:11) It may involve one who schemes to take material advantage of others, indulges in entertainment that is clearly improper, or dates when not legally or Scripturally free.—*od* p. 150-151.

2. If the disorderly conduct is *generally unknown to others* and poses no threat to their spiritual well-being, usually it is best to handle things through admonition and counsel. **The elders should not be hasty in giving a warning talk.** However, if the individual does not see the error of his way but continues to be an unwholesome influence, a warning

talk may be given to the congregation.—2 Thess. 3:6, 14, 15; w99 7/15 pp. 29-31; w85 4/15 pp. 30-31.

- **Example—mark for dating an “unbeliever”:** The elders should first counsel and try to help a disorderly one. If a person *persists* in a way that is disturbing and that has the potential for spreading, they may conclude that there would be reason for a warning talk to be given to the congregation.—2 Cor. 6:14; 2 Thess. 3:11, 14; w99 7/15 p. 31.
- It may be that an individual is dating not an actual ‘unbeliever’ but an unbaptized publisher. In such cases a warning talk may not be needed, depending on the circumstances, on the attitude of the Christian, on the level of disturbance to the congregation, and other factors. Nonetheless, if he is dating with a view to marrying someone who is unbaptized, he is not obeying the Bible’s counsel at 1 Corinthians 7:39 to marry “only in the Lord,” and loving counsel should be given. Elders will use reasonableness and discernment in determining whether a particular situation is sufficiently serious and disturbing to require a warning talk.—*od* pp. 150-151; w04 7/1 pp. 30-31.

3. If the disorderly one becomes ashamed of his ways and is moved to change, then as elders of the congregation see the adjustment, they can individually decide to end the limitation they have put on personally socializing with him. This will indicate to the congregation that he is no longer marked.

Weddings

4. Elders may perform a wedding of two Christians or of two unbaptized publishers who are progressing toward baptism. If the couple have a specific elder in mind, they can personally ask him to

See October 12, 2010, letter to all bodies of elders regarding wedding procedures and Scriptural freedom to remarry.

officiate at their wedding. If the couple have no preference, the body of elders can select one of their number to do this. The elder solemnizing a marriage should make sure that he is legally qualified in the state or locality where the wedding takes place. If the speaker does not legally qualify to administer the vows, another elder who meets such legal requirements could administer the wedding vows after the speaker gives the discourse. The elder who administers the vows would complete the necessary documents. Any elder who is asked to give a wedding talk or administer the vows should conscientiously decide whether he wishes to serve in such capacity. (w97 4/15 p. 24; w84 4/15 pp. 13-14) Elders should not perform the wedding of two persons who are not seriously involved in the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses. Neither should the elders be involved, directly or indirectly, in the wedding of a baptized individual to an unbaptized, disassociated, or disfellowshipped person. (1 Cor. 5:11; 7:39) It would be improper to participate in a second wedding years after the initial ceremony, as this would imply that the first wedding was not binding.—w06 10/15 p. 19 par. 8.

5. Before agreeing to officiate, an elder should personally speak with the couple and tactfully but straightforwardly **inquire about their conduct during courtship**. Make sure that all involved are familiar with and follow the direction in the articles in the November 2008 *Our Kingdom Ministry*, page 3; the October 15, 2006, *Watchtower*, pages 18-31; the April 15, 1997, *Watchtower*, pages 23-26; and the April 15, 1984, *Watchtower*, pages 11-15. If it is learned that they have engaged in sexual immorality that requires assistance from a judicial committee, the couple cannot use the Kingdom Hall. If neither is disfellowshipped, it will be up to the discretion of the elder as to whether he will officiate at another location. He may also want to inquire about some of the plans for the wedding and reception and give kindly reminders if needed to help them demonstrate

reasonableness. However, he should remember that what they choose to do is a personal matter as long as this is not unscriptural. (Phil. 4:5; *w84* 4/15 pp. 11-12) The elder should also **make sure that the bride and groom are legally and Scripturally free to marry**. If either was married before, the elder should ask to see a copy of the divorce decree to make sure that the divorce was finalized. He should also be satisfied that the divorce is Scriptural. If the person's divorce occurred before baptism, the elder should not assume the individual is Scripturally free, as baptism does not dissolve previous marital ties. If either the bride or the groom is from another congregation, the elder should speak or correspond with the elders from that congregation to confirm the person's standing in the congregation, Scriptural freedom to marry, and so forth.

6. **If a couple wishes to use the Kingdom Hall**, they should submit a written request well in advance of the wedding date indicating the specific day and time they desire to use the hall. The Congregation Service Committee should promptly consider the request on behalf of the body of elders. Though it is not a requirement that all in the wedding party be baptized, the wedding party should not include any person whose lifestyle grossly conflicts with Bible principles. (*km* 11/08 p. 3; *w84* 4/15 p. 15) Any decoration of the Kingdom Hall or rearrangement of the chairs must be approved. Only music selected from *Kingdom Melodies* or that is found in our songbook may be used. The elders may permit a rehearsal at the Kingdom Hall as long as it does not interfere with other congregation arrangements.

7. **The marriage discourse** should reflect dignity, honor, and seriousness. (Heb. 13:4) Its purpose is to impress on the minds of the participants, as well as those observing, the God-given responsibilities that married couples must assume and discharge in full harmony with the Scriptures. It is not appropriate to

tell humorous stories or read poems simply to entertain or amuse the audience. If the branch office provides an outline in the local language, it should be used.

8. Since much of the direction outlined above has generally been given only to congregation elders, **appointed elders should be used to officiate at weddings, if available.** (*km* 11/08 p. 3; *w84* 4/15 pp. 13-14) Also, elders are certified teachers of God’s Word, so they are the ones most qualified to highlight the important Scriptural principles that apply on this special occasion.—1 Tim. 3:2.

Scriptural Freedom to Remarry

See October 12, 2010, letter to all bodies of elders regarding wedding procedures and Scriptural freedom to remarry.

9. **Elders should be very careful** when it comes to giving direction on whether an individual is Scripturally free and should **consult with the branch office** on any questions. This is especially true since the decisions a person makes in such matters will affect not only their relationship with their marriage mate but also their relationship with Jehovah. We therefore as elders shoulder a heavy responsibility in such matters and need to be cautious when offering counsel, especially when the answer may not be readily apparent.—Luke 12:48; Jas. 3:1.

10. Scriptural freedom to remarry requires three conditions: *por-nei’a*; a rejection (refusal to reconcile) by the innocent mate; and a legal, final divorce.—Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:9; Heb. 13:4.

11. If a dedicated Christian who accuses his believing mate of adultery and **wishes to establish freedom to divorce and remarry** approaches an elder, the matter should be referred to the body of elders. The accuser is not free unless the evidence establishing wrongdoing is sufficient to warrant the formation of a judicial committee. (Deut. 19:15; John 8:17) If the accused mate is associated with another congregation, the evidence should be presented to

the elders of that congregation for review and a determination. *The publisher should be advised that he is not to view himself as Scripturally free until the elders have investigated and guilt is established.*

12. In some cases adultery is not proved, but it is established by confession or by two or more witnesses that the mate stayed *all night* in the same house with a person of the opposite sex (or a known homosexual) *under improper circumstances*. The elders should carefully consider the situation. Were the individuals together *all night*? Were *improper* circumstances involved? For example, were the two persons alone? Is there evidence of a romantic relationship? What were the sleeping arrangements? Even if adultery is not established, it may be that the Christian was involved in an immoral sleeping arrangement. Although the elders cannot tell the innocent mate that he is free to marry because adultery was not proved, in view of the circumstances, if the innocent mate is convinced that adultery did occur, the elders may allow him to take responsibility before Jehovah for obtaining a Scriptural divorce; if he remarries, no judicial action will be taken.

13. Even **if the accused mate is not one of Jehovah's Witnesses** (disfellowshipped, disassociated, or never baptized), two witnesses are also generally required to establish wrongdoing that would provide a basis for Scriptural freedom. An exception may be made, however, if the unbeliever privately makes an **unambiguous confession of adultery** to the Christian mate. In such a case, if the innocent Christian mate believes that the confession is true and does not wish to reconcile, he can submit a letter to the elders outlining his situation. The body of elders should then consider the letter. Is there any known reason to conclude other than that the unbelieving mate has been immoral? For example, was the confession worded ambiguously? Did the unbeliever

later deny making the confession? If the unbeliever is willing to speak with the elders and matters are unclear, the elders may choose to ask the accused mate directly. If there is no known reason to conclude otherwise, the innocent mate can be allowed to take responsibility before Jehovah for obtaining a Scriptural divorce; if he remarries, no judicial action will be taken.—w77 pp. 607-608.

14. The following constitutes rejection by the innocent mate:

- The innocent mate *initiates* a divorce either before or after learning of the adultery.
- The innocent mate *signs a divorce decree indicating he does not object* to a divorce initiated by the guilty mate, either before or after learning of the adultery. Note: In some lands it is possible for the innocent mate to sign divorce documents that stipulate custody of the children and financial support without indicating he agrees with the divorce; his signing such papers in itself would *not* indicate a rejection.—w00 12/15 pp. 28-29.
- Though verbally expressing forgiveness and not seeking a divorce, the innocent mate *refuses to resume sexual relations for a very prolonged period of time*, a year or even years. Before indicating to the guilty mate that he is free to pursue a Scriptural divorce, the elders should consult with the branch office. Note: The innocent mate is not required to make a quick decision whether to forgive or not.—w74 pp. 671-672.

Adulterous Marriage

15. If a divorced person remarries and he was not Scripturally free to do so—in other words, if *adultery and rejection by the innocent mate* had not occurred—he has entered into an adulterous marriage.

In Jehovah’s eyes, he has married someone while still bound to another. Entering into such a marriage would call for judicial action.

16. If the disfellowshipped one was eventually reinstated, the elders would be very cautious in extending any special privileges. He could share in the cleaning and repair of the local Kingdom Hall. He may eventually give student talks in the Theocratic Ministry School if his doing so would not disturb others. However, **he would not be assigned to help with literature, accounts, magazines, attendants, or similar privileges in the congregation as long as the innocent former mate is alive, unmarried, and has not been guilty of por-nei’a.**—w83 3/15 p. 29.

17. If a Christian did not enter into an adulterous marriage but **deliberately committed adultery in a scheming way so as to end his marriage or he pressured the innocent mate to reject him** and eventually agree to a divorce, he has dealt treacherously with her. (Mal. 2:14-16) His conduct is similar to entering into an adulterous marriage, and he would not qualify for special privileges for *many years*.

See September 7, 2011, letter to all bodies of elders for direction on filing confidential material.

Child Abuse

18. You should **immediately call the branch office** for direction if you learn of an accusation of child abuse, regardless of the age of the victim now or at the time of the alleged abuse, even if it occurred before the alleged perpetrator’s baptism. The branch office will then give direction based on the circumstances involved in each situation.

See October 1, 2012, letter to all bodies of elders regarding child abuse.

19. Child abuse is a crime. **Never suggest to anyone that they should not report an allegation of child abuse to the police or other authorities.** If you are asked, make it clear that whether to report the matter to the authorities or not is a personal

decision for each individual to make and that there are no congregation sanctions for either decision. Elders will not criticize anyone who reports such an allegation to the authorities. If the victim wishes to make a report, it is his or her absolute right to do so. —Gal. 6:5.

20. When a known child molester moves to another congregation, the Congregation Service Committee should send a letter of introduction with full and complete information about his background and current situation. Any letter from the branch office concerning the child molester should not be photocopied or sent to the new congregation. However, the new congregation should be clearly informed of any restrictions imposed by the branch office. A copy of the letter of introduction should be sent to the branch office.

21. In a case in which a brother denies an allegation of child abuse and he has been accused by only one witness, the following direction is given if he moves to another congregation. The elders should consult the branch office before sending any information regarding the accusation to the elders in the new congregation. It would be helpful if your letter to the branch office provided a detailed summary of the matter and explained the spiritual condition and personal circumstances of the accused and the accuser. With regard to the accused, the following questions should be answered: (1) What is his interaction with children? (2) Does he admit to any activity with the accuser that could have been misinterpreted by the accuser as sexual abuse, or does he claim to have a poor memory of the accusation? (3) What is his response to why the accuser has made the allegation? (4) Has he had to be counseled for any other matters of a sexual nature, such as inappropriate conduct with adult sisters or pornography? (5) What is the level of his spirituality? (6) Do all the elders on the body believe that he can be trusted with children?

The following questions should be answered with regard to the accuser: (1) What is the level of maturity of the child or youth? (2) Is he (or she) describing conduct that one his age would not normally know about? (3) Is the child or his parents known to be serious, mature? (4) Is his memory consistent, or is it intermittent, or does it involve repressed memories? (w95 11/1 pp. 25-26) (5) What is the reputation of the parents? (6) Are they spiritually and emotionally mature? After carefully considering the matter, the branch office will then give you direction as to what information about the allegation should be shared, if any, with the elders of the new congregation.

Taking Brothers to Court

22. At 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, the apostle Paul gave strong counsel that Christians should not take other Christians before secular courts to settle personal disputes that should be settled with the help of the congregation elders.—w97 3/15 pp. 21-22; w86 11/15 p. 20; g83 2/8 pp. 13-15; w73 11/15 pp. 703-704.

- If an individual ignores God’s Word on this matter, it *may* affect his congregation privileges.
- There is no difference between taking an individual brother or sister to court and taking to court a corporation whose owners are all Jehovah’s Witnesses. The spirit of 1 Corinthians 6: 1-8 would be violated by relying on the secular courts to settle business disputes among corporations that are made up entirely of brothers.

23. However, there are legal matters over which the congregation does not have authority and which may therefore be taken to a secular court for judgment without violating the principle or the spirit of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. These include:

- Getting a divorce decree, child custody and support, alimony.

- Obtaining insurance compensation. If a person suffers loss or is injured in or by an automobile owned by a spiritual brother, it might be necessary legally to sue the brother in order to obtain compensation from the brother’s insurer.
- Being listed among creditors in bankruptcy procedures.
- Probating wills.
- Certain countersuits. For example, if a *worldly creditor* sues a brother, it might be necessary for the brother, for his own protection, to file a countersuit even though spiritual brothers may be included in the action.
- If a brother takes legal action against another baptized Witness, it would not be a violation of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 for the one being sued to defend himself or to countersue. This is true whether the matter was first taken before the elders or not.

When Disasters Occur

24. When the local congregation is affected by a disaster, elders should assist the publishers in the following ways:

- **Quickly make assessment of the immediate needs of the brothers and sisters.** Group overseers can take the lead to locate each family in their field service group and inquire of their well-being. They will next want to communicate their findings to the coordinator or another elder, if he is not available, even if all is well.
- **Take care of the immediate needs** by arranging for medical treatment and supplies, such as water, food, and shelter. (John 13:35; Gal. 6:10) If advance warning of a disaster is given, as with some major storms, elders should ensure that everyone is in a safe location and if time per-

See January 6, 2012, letter to all bodies of elders regarding disaster preparedness and response.

mits, should obtain and distribute supplies that may be needed.

- **Give spiritual and emotional support** to the congregation, and resume congregation meetings as quickly as possible.—*km* 1/07 p. 4; *g96* 6/22 p. 17.
- In addition to the immediate physical needs of the brothers, is there property damage? Is damage to Kingdom Halls and individual homes major or minor? (For example, major would be roof destroyed, several feet of water in home; minor would be missing shingles on roof, windows broken, and so forth.) To **gather the necessary information**, responsible elders in the area may help in assessing the damage. Once this information is gathered, the coordinator or another elder may **inform the circuit overseer** of the damage and the health condition of the brothers and sisters in the congregation.
- When the **circuit overseer** has received the report from the elders, he **will promptly call the branch office**. The branch office will determine whether there is a need for further assistance.
- **Other assistance** may be provided, such as checking to see what government aid may be available.—*w66* 2/1 pp. 95-96.

25. If the disaster occurs in another area, elders can take the lead in assisting by doing the following:

- Remember the brothers and sisters in your prayers.—2 Cor. 1:8-11.
- If you wish to provide monetary assistance, you may send your donations to the worldwide work in the land in which you live, either through the congregation or directly. In this way, “the faithful and discreet slave,” through the organizational arrangements set in place

by the Governing Body, cares for the needs of the worldwide brotherhood in an orderly manner.—Matt. 24:45-47; 1 Cor. 14:33, 40; *km* 1/05 “Question Box.”

- Do not send materials or supplies to the disaster area unless specifically requested by the brothers in charge. This will assure an orderly relief effort and the proper distribution of goods.
- Please do not telephone the branch office just for information, as this can tie up phone lines that are needed to handle incoming calls from the disaster area.

26. Following a disaster, the publishers can make good use of opportunities to comfort others spiritually and, to the extent possible, to help in practical ways according to the need. Aiding the brothers in these ways takes time and effort. However, love for the whole association of brothers will prompt us to do what we can to help those in need.—2 Cor. 8:1-12.

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