

# Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses

124 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, New York 11201, U.S.A.

December 1, 1971

## TO THE CONGREGATION COMMITTEE

Dear Brothers:

This past summer at the "Divine Name" District Assemblies careful consideration was given to what the Bible says about elders. As to how the "body of elders" in each congregation would be selected, it was pointed out that the governing body would send out a letter of instruction to each congregation committee with further information. We are pleased to provide that information now.

Sometime during the next few weeks it would be beneficial for the congregation committee to meet together to discuss briefly who in the congregation evidently are qualified to be "older men," and these prospective ones can be invited to prepare themselves for participation in a discussion as to who in the congregation meet the Scriptural qualifications of elders. In some congregations it may turn out that only those on the congregation committee will share in these discussions. Elsewhere, the committee may realize that there are a number of others in the congregation who evidently are mature Christian men and who could beneficially share in these discussions, and so the group may come to total six, eight, ten or more persons.

It should be understood that one's being on the congregation committee at present does not necessarily mean that he is Scripturally an elder and will be recommended to the governing body for appointment as such. Similarly, no other brother should presume that he will of necessity be recommended as an elder simply because he is invited to share in this meeting; but his brothers on the congregation committee do recognize that he has many of the qualifications of an elder and so they would like to have him share in the discussion.

It would be beneficial for all these brothers who are going to participate in the discussion to meet together as soon as possible. At that time they should read together this entire letter so that they all understand what is to be done at the other meetings outlined in this letter and can prepare themselves to participate fully.

The principal preparation that is needed is for each one to become thoroughly acquainted with what the Bible says about elders and ministerial servants in the congregation of Jehovah's people. With this in view, it is recommended that each one of these brothers study carefully, and look up all the scriptures, in the November 15, 1971, *Watchtower* articles on "Theocratic Organization Amidst Democracies and Communism" and "Appointed Officers in the Theocratic Organization," also the article "A 'Body of Elders' with Rotating Chairmanship," in that same issue. They should likewise study very carefully the January 1, 1972, *Watchtower* articles entitled "Who Is Wise and

Understanding Among You?" and "Appointed Elders to Shepherd the Flock." Additionally, to the extent that time permits, they will find it helpful to read the material in *Aid to Bible Understanding* under the headings "Older Man," "Overseer" and "Minister." Recognizing the importance of the discussions in which they are being invited to participate, the brothers should be diligent to do this personal study and to be sure that they have a clear understanding of this material before they meet to consider the recommending of elders.

### DETERMINING WHO SHOULD BE RECOMMENDED FOR APPOINTMENT AS ELDERS

If the circuit servant's visit is during February, March or April, he will review with you the qualifications of those being recommended to the governing body. So sometime before his visit—and, in any event, no later than April—you should meet together to determine who in your congregation meet the Scriptural qualifications. Some congregations will find it necessary to have these meetings toward the latter part of January. Others, not being visited by the circuit servant until later, will be able to schedule their meetings for a later time, thus allowing more opportunity for study of the material mentioned earlier. But do not put off your meetings too long so that you feel compelled to rush through matters that deserve more deliberate consideration.

When the members of the congregation committee, along with any other qualified brothers, meet together, prayer should be offered, seeking Jehovah's direction so that what is done will be in full accord with his will. After the prayer you should read together from the Bible the qualifications for elders and for ministerial servants, as set out at 1 Timothy 3:1-10, 12, 13; Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-5. Also, review together the information in the January 1, 1972, *Watchtower* article entitled "Appointed Elders to Shepherd the Flock." Having done this, consider each dedicated and baptized male who is twenty years old and upward and who is an active minister associated with the congregation. (See Ezra 3:8.) Compare each one individually with the requirements for elders as set out in the Bible. Remember, all those requirements are important; none are to be minimized or overlooked. If you believe that the individual measures up to the Scriptural qualifications for an elder, notation should be made to that effect. However, if he does not qualify as an elder, consider whether he measures up to the requirements set out in God's Word for ministerial servants. If so, that should be noted. Of course, if he is being recommended for appointment as an elder, he will



not also be recommended as a ministerial servant. So, at this meeting two lists will be drawn up: the first will show the names of those being recommended as elders in the congregation, and the second will show those being recommended as ministerial servants.

In carrying out this work it is important to put ~~loyalty to Jehovah~~ above everything else. There may be members of the committee who do not measure up to the Scriptural requirements for elders. They should be ~~humble and honest~~ with themselves about the matter, and the other brothers present should make sure that they are being ~~honest with Jehovah and with his organization~~ in the recommendations that they make. Personal friendship should not be the basis for determination. Nor should recommendations be made with a view to "encouraging" a brother; they should be made only when a person measures up to the qualifications set out in God's Word. If someone who feels that he does qualify to be an elder or a ministerial servant is not recommended as such, then, instead of putting pressure on the others to recommend him, it would be beneficial for the individual to ~~ask the other~~ brothers wherein they feel that he needs to make progress in order to qualify. If he really works at it, with a desire to be used by Jehovah and to be of service to his brothers, perhaps he will be recommended next year.

In some small congregations it may turn out that there are none who qualify to be recommended as elders. Elsewhere there may be only one or two brothers who are being recommended, though there may be a number who are recommended as ministerial servants. If there are none recommended as elders, this does not mean that the congregation will cease to function, but it is important to adhere to the Scriptural requirements.

#### RECOMMENDING THE FIVE PRINCIPAL SERVANTS

Before the visit of the circuit servant—and, in any event, no later than April—another meeting should be held, this one to be attended only by the brothers whose names were finally listed in the earlier meeting for recommendation as elders. However, if there are only one or two brothers being recommended as elders, they should request the other members of the congregation committee to sit with them so that there will be a group of at least three. At this meeting a list should be drawn up showing who are being recommended to occupy the five principal servant positions in the congregation, that is, the positions of congregation servant, assistant congregation servant, Bible study servant, *Watchtower* study servant and Theocratic Ministry School servant. In some cases the one who is now assistant congregation servant will be recommended to be the new congregation servant. The Bible study servant may be recommended to become the assistant congregation servant. The *Watchtower* study servant may be recommended as Bible study servant, and the Theocratic Ministry School servant may be recommended as the *Watchtower* study servant. If there are only five being recommended as elders, then

the present congregation servant might be recommended as the Theocratic Ministry School servant. ~~However, this arrangement does not have to be strictly followed.~~ Then, too, if there are less than five different brothers recommended as elders, those who are recommended can fill more than one of the five official positions. The congregation servant could also be recommended as the *Watchtower* study servant, and maybe the assistant congregation servant could also be the Theocratic Ministry School servant.

If the brothers handling these recommendations believe that some readjustments should be made so that someone other than the present assistant congregation servant is recommended to be the congregation servant starting October 1, 1972, they should feel free to make such a recommendation. If any other shifting around of servant recommendations appears to be beneficial, because of local conditions or situations involving the brothers being recommended, then the recommendation should be made in accord with what will be best for the congregation. In every case, however, if there is more than one individual being recommended as an elder in the congregation, a new congregation servant will be recommended and all those being recommended as elders who are now holding certain positions will be recommended for new positions in the congregation. If the one or more brothers being recommended as elders are able to care for the servants' positions that require them to be up in front of the congregation regularly as teachers, it would certainly be beneficial for them to do so. If possible, of course, all of the five principal servant positions should be occupied by elders, but it is recognized that circumstances will not always permit this.

In some cases ministerial servants will, of necessity, be recommended for appointment as a temporary assistant congregation servant and a temporary Bible study servant. If there are no elders being recommended for servant positions, a ministerial servant will be recommended even as temporary congregation servant. In such cases, of course, these brothers would not constitute part of the congregation judicial committee, but others who are elders, whether from the local congregation or elsewhere, would be called on to handle judicial matters.

If there is even one elder in the congregation, but the one recommended to care for the work of the assistant congregation servant is not an elder, then, of course, the temporary assistant congregation servant would not rotate into the position of congregation servant on October 1, 1973. But if the one recommended for the position of assistant congregation servant is an elder, then it should be kept in mind that he will undoubtedly become the congregation servant when the next shift in the "body of elders" takes place.

You may find that you have certain men who qualify as elders but who are limited because of old age, poor health or other factors. Perhaps they cannot handle the work that goes with being chairman of the "body of elders." They may not even be able to care for any of the five principal servant positions. That does not have to bar them from



being appointed as elders, if they truly qualify according to the Scriptures. Perhaps their abilities can be used in caring for a congregation book study, and then, when future recommendations are made to the governing body as to the rotation of elders, these brothers would not be recommended for rotation into assignments that they are not able to handle, though they might possibly be assigned by the local "body of elders" to other book study groups. Nevertheless, the congregation can benefit from their ability as shepherds and teachers.

All the matters outlined above (that is, the making up of the tentative lists of recommendations) should be handled before the visit of the circuit servant that starts on or after February 1, 1972. If his visit will not be until after April, do not wait beyond April to draw up the lists.

#### REVIEWING RECOMMENDATIONS WITH THE CIRCUIT SERVANT

If the circuit servant is visiting your congregation during February, March or April, then on some evening convenient to all concerned he will meet with those brothers whose names have been listed by the local servants for recommendation as elders. The congregation servant will preside at this meeting. If there are only one or two brothers who were listed for recommendation as elders, the circuit servant will sit with them as well as the others who shared with them in drawing up the list of recommendations for the five principal servant positions. The meeting should be opened with prayer. Again, they should review together the requirements for overseers and ministerial servants as found at 1 Timothy 3:1-10, 12, 13; Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-5. Then, together, they will go down the list of those who are being recommended as elders and ministerial servants, discussing their qualifications in the light of the Scriptural requirements.

The circuit servant will review the names along with the local servants on the basis of the Bible requirements, probing with questions to help everyone present to view the matter clearly. He will not overrule the local brothers in their recommendations; he will not add to the list any name that they do not approve, nor will he delete any name that they believe should be retained. But it is believed that discussion of the recommendations with a mature brother who is not as closely associated on a day-to-day basis with those recommended may help to get certain matters in clearer perspective. It is important to be sure that God's Word, and not any personal favoritism, guides in the recommendations that are made. When the mature brothers decide on their recommendations, they will be sent to the governing body.

If the circuit servant feels that, in any case, the local servants are shutting their eyes to the requirements of God's Word, he should, of course, write a letter to the governing body giving his observations, and a copy of that letter should be left with the local brothers with whom the matter was discussed.

However, if there is ~~general agreement~~ as to the recommendations being made, even though

no circuit servant is present during these three months, a letter should be drawn up setting out the recommendations. It should be addressed to ~~Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, 124 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, New York 11201~~. Show clearly, at the top of the letter, the name of your congregation, giving the full address, street, city, state, etc. The letter should state, briefly, that the Scriptural arrangement for appointment of elders and ministerial servants has been thoroughly studied and discussed by qualified brothers in the congregation. It should be stated that those recommended below meet all the qualifications set out in the Bible for the positions for which they are being recommended. Those being recommended as elders should be listed first, and the letter should clearly indicate that this is what they are being recommended for, saying: "The following brothers are recommended for appointment as elders:—" For each one show clearly the last name, the first name and initial or middle name, the age of the individual, the date of baptism, whether he professes to be of the anointed class or one of the "other sheep," and if he is being recommended to take one of the five principal servant positions as of October 1, 1972, the position should be clearly indicated right there. Here is an example:

Shepherd, John F. 67 July 4, 1928 A. Congregation Servant  
Goodwill, Paul T. 52 June 10, 1956 O.S. Assistant Congregation Servant

In the case of the one recommended as congregation servant, please show his complete mailing address and telephone number. After the list of those recommended for appointment as elders, along with what you think should be their official position for the next year in the case of the five principal servants, there should be another list, introduced as follows: "The following brothers are recommended for appointment as ministerial servants:—" The same details should be provided in connection with each of them as were provided for the elders, that is, the name, age, date of baptism, and whether the individual professes to be of the anointed class or one of the "other sheep." Next to the name of anyone being recommended to do the work of one of the five principal servants in the congregation (and *only* these positions) it should be specifically stated which servant position it is recommended that the brother occupy as a temporary servant. This letter should be signed by the present congregation committee of mature brothers.

#### AFTER APPOINTMENTS ARE RECEIVED FROM THE GOVERNING BODY

Probably after August 1, 1972, your congregation will receive its appointments of elders and ministerial servants, as well as of the five principal servants, from the governing body. Following that, those who have been appointed as elders should meet together to handle the matters outlined below. If there are at least two elders, they may handle the matters together. However, if only one brother has been appointed as an elder, it is recommended

\* In other ~~branches~~ will be sent in care of the branch office at its local address.



that he ask the ministerial servants who have been appointed as temporary assistant congregation servant and temporary Bible study servant to discuss the matters with him. If no one in the congregation has been appointed as an elder, then the mature brothers who are the temporary congregation servant, temporary assistant congregation servant and the temporary Bible study servant should meet together to handle these matters.

Since the principal responsibilities of elders include shepherding and teaching in the congregation, they should discuss ~~how they can arrange~~ matters most ~~effectively~~ so as to concentrate on this work.

Much teaching is done each week at the congregation ~~book studies~~. Is it possible for the elders to preside at these meetings? If they are able to arrange their affairs so as to have the time to do so, this would certainly be beneficial. Of course, that may not be possible in all cases. In some congregations the elders may decide that more good could be accomplished if certain ones of the congregation book studies were combined so that more of the brothers could benefit from the teaching being done by one of the elders. However, these study groups should not be more than twenty publishers. In other cases it may be that an elder can conduct more than one of these studies, doing so at different times during the week, and someone else can assist in caring for field service arrangements for the groups. Do not lose sight of the benefit of having the smaller study groups scattered throughout the congregation territory, but keep in mind, too, the importance of using qualified teachers. If the elders in the congregation are not able to care for all the congregation book studies, then arrangements can be made for certain ones of the ministerial servants who are making fine progress toward qualifying as elders to help out in this work. At this meeting of the elders it should be decided which ones of the elders—and, if necessary, ministerial servants—will conduct the individual congregation book studies.

At this time consideration should also be given to the ~~Theocratic Ministry School~~. Is the school divided into more than one group for student talks? If so, is it possible for an elder to preside over the second group? That would certainly be beneficial.

The list of those being used as ~~public speakers~~ in the congregation should be reviewed too. Those who truly are elders, being appointed as such, are the ones who should be used to give spiritual instruction to the congregation. Could arrangements be made to use them more fully? Are some of them in position to work up additional talks from time to time? If it is possible for elders to give the public talks each week, that certainly is the best arrangement and most fully in harmony with what the Bible says about the work they are to do. However, if the elders in the congregation, with their many responsibilities, are not able to handle the public talks each week, then you may decide to use other mature brothers who are making notable progress toward becoming elders. Such brothers should be used only in their own congregation. When it comes to sending speakers to other

congregations, only elders should be used in this way.

While you brothers are meeting together, you should also discuss what ~~work~~ there is in the congregation that calls for ~~the assistance of ministerial servants~~. The work may be divided up according to what seems to be advantageous locally. If there are only a few who qualify and have been appointed as ministerial servants, they may be asked to handle more than one type of assignment. And in some congregations it may be found that ministerial servants are required for assignments that do not appear to be necessary in other congregations. This may be worked out on a local basis by the "body of elders." For example, one ministerial servant may be assigned to care for the accounts. Another brother may be assigned to care for the ~~magazines~~. Yet a third may be assigned to care for the ~~territory~~ files. Someone else may care for the ~~literature~~ supplies. A brother may be assigned to care for the ~~sound~~ equipment; another to be an ~~attendant~~ to welcome new ones and take the attendance. Some may be good readers, and so can be assigned to ~~read the paragraphs~~ at the *Watchtower* study. **It may also be necessary to assign certain ministerial servants to help in keeping records that come under the supervision of the elders.** The local situation will determine the number of different assignments handled by ministerial servants. Each of these appointments to specific work in the congregation will be made, not by the governing body, but by the local "body of elders," and the brothers so assigned may be ~~rotated~~ from one assignment to another, year by year, in whatever way the local "body of elders" believe to be most advantageous.

In all that we do, if we look to Jehovah for guidance, and ~~adhere closely to the counsel~~ that he has set out in his Word, we can be assured of his continued blessing upon our efforts.—Prov. 3:5, 6.

All of us should keep foremost in mind that the entire organization with which we are associated ~~belongs to Jehovah~~ God and that it serves to his glory and to the accomplishment of his purpose. He has appointed his Son Jesus Christ as the Head of the Christian congregation, and we look to him for direction, examining carefully the things that he said and did as recorded in the Bible, and responding fully to the direction that he is providing us through the "faithful and discreet slave" that he as Master has appointed "over all his belongings." (Matt. 24:45-47) He himself set for us an example of ~~humility~~ and willingness to serve the people and his brothers. May we all manifest those same qualities as we work together unitedly to advance the interests of pure worship by publicly proclaiming the Kingdom good news everywhere and making disciples of as many people as we can, and by conscientiously caring for the flock of God that is entrusted to our care.

Be assured of our warm Christian love.

Your fellow servants,

*Governing Body of Jehovah's witnesses*

P.S. Copies of this letter are being sent both to your circuit servant and to your district servant.