

## UNITED STATES BRANCH EXECUTIVE OFFICES

GSC:AD December 31, 1998 No. 164S

Via CompuServe

Watch Tower Society  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Brothers:

Consideration has been given to a number of questions that have been raised about how we deal with those who have been guilty of child abuse. We are providing the branches with comments on a number of the questions that have been asked. No doubt similar questions have arisen in your area. This will supplement the letter and guidelines that were sent to the branches in 1997. These guidelines are for branch use only to help your service desk(s) in deciding on cases that come to your attention.

1. **Question:** When reviewing the qualifications of a former child abuser *who is already serving* as an elder or ministerial servant or *who is being recommended* for this privilege, we understand that the branch office could consider *retaining* or *appointing* him if the wrongdoing occurred many years ago and there is no evidence that he has repeated the sin since then and presently has the congregation's respect. Do we have the correct understanding on this matter?

**Answer:** In the situation described above, repentance and forgiveness are important factors to be considered when the recommendation is to retain one who is already serving or to recommend him, if the sin occurred many years ago. Of course, one must have the respect of the congregation and his pattern of life must harmonize with Bible principles since the wrongdoing occurred. It is best to wait at least 20 years since the last incident of child abuse was committed before retaining or appointing former child abusers.

2. **Question:** Would there be exceptions to the above guideline? (Would it make a difference, for example, if 20 years had not passed but he had engaged in the sin before his baptism? Would it make a difference if 20 years had not passed but the elders unanimously recommend his appointment and his victim(s) have forgiven the abuser, perhaps even writing a letter to the branch showing support of him or objecting to his removal? Would it make a difference if 20 years had not passed but the degree of wrongdoing was restricted to a few "abusive acts," as noted on page 10 in the footnote to the October 8, 1993, *Awake!*, but *porneia* was not involved?)

**Answer:** There may be exceptions if a period of twenty years has not yet passed and the individual engaged in the sin before his baptism. It would be well to consider what

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the apostle Paul wrote at 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 in dealing with such cases. In reference to whether it would make a difference if twenty years had not passed but the elders unanimously recommend the appointment, the individual has been forgiven for his sin, and the one that was wronged even writes a letter to the branch indicating his support for the individual, then the direction given in *The Watchtower* of May 1, 1996 would apply. The Questions from Readers, explained the application of Philippians 3:13 and this would have a bearing on the matter. Would it make a difference if twenty years had not passed but the degree of wrongdoing was restricted to what is defined as loose conduct? If a long time has elapsed, but less than twenty years, if the brother has been making straight paths for his feet, leading to healing, consideration could be given to such recommendation. (Hebrews 12:12, 13; James 5:15, 16) In other words, if it is clear that the individual has been restored and his pattern of life over the years shows that he has measured up to Scriptural requirements, it may be that he can serve, providing there is no current outcry. Each case may be decided on its own merits and the circumstances involved.

3. **Question:** If the wrongdoing occurred over 20 years ago and in general there is no public outcry, would we prevent a former child abuser from serving solely on the basis of the victim's (or relatives') strong feelings against him?

**Answer:** If the wrongdoing occurred over twenty years ago and there are still some strong feelings against him by either the one wronged or his relatives, it would be better to wait as long as such strong feelings persist.

4. **Question:** If it is decided that a former child abuser could not serve because a period of 20 years has not passed, might he be appointed after 20 years if recommended and the circumstances are favorable?

**Answer:** If it was decided that a former wrongdoer could not serve because the period of twenty years had not passed, he might be appointed after that, if he is recommended and the circumstances are favorable.

5. **Question:** If the branch decides that a former child abuser could not serve, could he be given some privileges in the congregation whether or not a period of 20 years has passed? If so, what might these privileges include? (Some have equated a former child abuser with being in the same position with regard to privileges as one who entered into an adulterous marriage. Is such appropriate? Might a former abuser at some point in time qualify to carry the microphones, conduct a meeting for field service, or offer a prayer? If not normally assigned, might he conduct a meeting for service when it is only attended by sisters?)

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**Answer:** If he has the respect of the congregation and there are no complaints against him, then he may be extended certain privileges if he has been endeavoring to make himself available.

6. **Question:** The March 14, 1997, letter to "Bodies of Elders," a copy of which was sent to all branches, requires that the elders of the former congregation send information about a former child abuser to the new congregation. Is it possible to qualify what is stated there if the sin took place 20 or more years ago and the branch has judged that he can remain in a position of trust? Must the elders of the new congregation be informed of his background in these situations? Or would it be better for the elders of the old congregation to follow the direction in the March 14, 1997 letter, to send this information to the new congregation, regardless of how long ago the sin occurred and regardless of the fact that the Society views him as qualified by appointing or retaining him as a servant?

**Answer:** If the branch has judged that he remains in a position of trust, there is no need to pass on information regarding his past wrongdoing or reveal details. The branch office generally knows the details anyway. So if he is viewed as one qualified and is retained as a servant, then the elders in the new congregation would likely be getting a favorable letter of recommendation, but without any reference to what occurred twenty or more years ago.

It is hoped that this information will be helpful to you in dealing with questions that may occasionally arise in your branch territory. This is to be used by those on the service desk as guidelines for answering correspondence. However, when writing, you should not mention this 20 year period. These guidelines are given simply to assist the branch to make decisions in these matters. Thank you very much.

Your brothers,

Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society  
of Pennsylvania

For the Service Committee