

July 1, 2006

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Letters of introduction

Dear Brothers:

Over the years, guidelines have been given regarding letters of introduction concerning publishers, regular pioneers, elders and ministerial servants, child molesters, and those in a disfellowshipped or disassociated state who move into another congregation's territory. So that these guidelines may be more easily followed, we are listing below some key elements that should be included in all letters of introduction as well as some situations in which additional information should be provided. This letter should be retained in the congregation's permanent file of policy letters.

Format: A letter of introduction should always contain the following information: (1) the date of the letter, (2) the previous congregation's full name and complete mailing address, (3) the new congregation's full name and complete mailing address, and (4) signatures of the Congregation Service Committee, with their names typed or printed underneath their signatures. (*be* p. 71-3) Some also find it helpful to use a regarding line (as shown above) so that the recipient may easily identify the purpose of the letter.

Congregation publisher: When a publisher (active or inactive) moves to another congregation, a letter of introduction and the *Congregation's Publisher Record* (S-21) cards should be promptly sent to the congregation where the publisher moved. (The last record card of an inactive publisher should be retained indefinitely by the congregation where the publisher moved.) If the previous service committee knows where the publisher moved, they may take the initiative and send these items without waiting for a formal request from the new congregation. What information should be conveyed in the letter of introduction? Ask yourself: What information would we want to receive if this person were moving into our congregation? (Matt. 7:12) Clearly state the publisher's full name, the names of any immediate family members, and any privileges the publisher or his family members have enjoyed, such as assignments on the Theocratic Ministry School, working with the Regional Building Committee, auxiliary or regular pioneer service, and so forth. These elements should be included in all letters of introduction.

If the person has recently been judicially reprovved and is still under restrictions, list the restrictions that are still in effect so that the new congregation's elders may monitor the publisher's progress and gradually restore his privileges as appropriate. On the other hand, if the person was reprovved in the distant past but is not presently under restrictions, there may be no need to mention past judicial action unless the offense involved child molestation, adulterous marriage, or some other notorious wrongdoing.

Regular pioneer: In addition to the above guidelines, the regular pioneer appointment (S-202) letter should be forwarded to the congregation where the pioneer is moving, along with a letter of introduction and the *Congregation's Publisher Record* (S-21) cards. The secretary of the

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new congregation will make the needed adjustments to the form and send it to the branch office. A revised appointment letter will then be sent to the new congregation. If a regular pioneer moves out of the branch territory, the pioneer appointment letter should be mailed to *your* branch office with a cover letter providing the date of the move and the name, city, state, and country of the congregation where the pioneer will be associating.

Elder or ministerial servant: If the elders recommend to the new congregation that a brother be reappointed to serve in the same capacity as that which he had been serving, this should be clearly stated in the letter of introduction. It should also state the total length of time he has served in an appointed capacity as well as list the assignments in which he has experience. If the elders do not recommend that he be reappointed, two elders from his current congregation should meet with the brother before he moves to explain to him why he is not being recommended.

Child molester: It is imperative that a letter of introduction be promptly sent when an individual who is known to have molested a minor and whose privileges are still restricted moves to another congregation. This should be done even if the abuse took place many years ago—even before baptism or when the person was in a disfellowshipped state. The letter to the elders in the new congregation should outline the individual's background, what the elders have been doing to protect minors and to assist him, and their present experience with him. In all such cases, a copy of the letter of introduction must be sent to the branch office in a special blue envelope.

If there are restrictions imposed on his theocratic activity, these must be clearly communicated to the new congregation's body of elders. Rather than merely forwarding copies of past letters of introduction, the elders should prepare their own letter of introduction with both the background and the current information regarding the person. If the elders have received a letter from the branch office regarding the individual, they should not send that letter, or a copy of it, to the new congregation. However, the elders should quote pertinent direction received from the branch office in their own letter of introduction for the benefit of the elders in the new congregation and for the protection of minors. The letter of introduction should be retained in the congregation's confidential files where it can be available for review by any elder.

Disfellowshipped or disassociated person: Although a formal letter of introduction and the *Congregation's Publisher Record* (S-21) cards are not sent when a disfellowshipped individual moves into a territory held by another congregation, a letter may be sent to inform those elders of the presence of the disfellowshipped individual, and to provide information that may be helpful to those elders. This will assist those elders to contact the individual annually to offer spiritual assistance.

Carefully following these guidelines will help you to protect the flock and to render needed spiritual assistance to Jehovah's precious sheep. We pray that Jehovah will continue to "give you peace constantly in every way" as you faithfully serve him in these last days.—2 Thess. 3:16.

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

cc: Traveling overseers