



WATCHTOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.

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TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Dear Brothers:

Shortly you will receive the April 15, 1991, *Watchtower*, featuring the articles "Will You Imitate God's Mercy?" and "Imitate God's Mercy Today." We here provide information to help the elders in applying the directions there given.

CONFIDENTIAL: No copies of this letter should be made. The presiding overseer should read it to the elders at their next meeting, and then it should be put in the congregation file.

Meeting to review disfellowshipped (disassociated) ones: As *The Watchtower* states on page 23, paragraph 13, this can be part of a normal meeting of the body of elders. (During 1991, have this review between June 1 and the end of September; in following years, it can be during a meeting of the elders after the start of the service year in September.) Normally this review will not be scheduled during the visit of the circuit overseer, as there are other matters for the elders to consider when meeting with him.

Review each disfellowshipped person known to live in the territory. No extended discussion of each is necessary. If one is an active apostate, is trying to lead others into sin, is known to be in a sexually immoral living arrangement, or has made it known that he wants nothing to do with God's people, a note that no call is necessary should be made on the outside of the sealed envelope containing the disfellowshipping record. In following years the meeting likely will be briefer, as you will not have to discuss any who are known to be unworthy of a visit.

Who will be asked to make a visit? The two elders assigned to make a visit should, if possible, be ones who were on the committee that handled the disfellowshipping. When it is necessary to have a newer elder share in a visit, he should accompany an elder with more experience. (If there is only one elder in the congregation, a traveling overseer who is visiting--or a ministerial servant who serves as a substitute elder on the congregation service committee--can accompany him.) The presiding overseer should note which elders the body assigns to make visits and on whom. He should check to see that the assignments are completed. Later he will include on the agenda for the next elders' meeting a report of what occurred with each of the assignments. A notation of the date of the visit should be made on the envelope; thus no further call may need to be made for a while.

What to discuss: When the two elders contact a disfellowshipped individual (perhaps initially by phone), they should make it clear

that they want to be helpful. They may inquire whether the person has read the articles in *The Watchtower* of April 15, 1991, providing a copy if he desires to read it. (Elders may want to set aside a few copies for this use when the supply arrives.) When making a visit, the elders should be warm but remember it is not a social call. (1 Corinthians 5:11) They can tactfully draw out the person about his attitude and desire to receive God's mercy. Instead of reviewing the past case, they can discuss briefly Isaiah 1:18; 55:6, 7; James 5:20 or some points from the article "Will You Imitate God's Mercy?" They should remind the person of the steps to be taken for reinstatement. (See *Organized to Accomplish our Ministry*, page 149.)

If the disfellowshipped one is a minor child, the two elders may contact the parent(s) to arrange for the visit. It would be proper for the parent(s) to be present during the visit.

Extent of the visit: The visit is not to be of great length, but the two elders should evidence their genuine interest and desire to be helpful. In some cases there may be good reason for a follow-up visit. Perhaps on the initial visit the individual is ill, occupied with some task, or has other visitors, and it is not convenient to talk about the purpose of the visit. The elders will not visit regularly nor hold a study with the disfellowshipped person. However, literature may be placed as appropriate. If it is evident that the person lacks Biblical knowledge and understanding, after he is reinstated the elders can have a mature Witness (possibly an elder) study with him, and this would be reported as field service. (See *Organized to Accomplish our Ministry*, page 103; *Our Kingdom Ministry*, April 1987.)

Need for caution: The articles in *The Watchtower* of April 15, 1991, show why the shepherds may fittingly take the initiative to contact some disfellowshipped or disassociated ones who may be repentant or disposed toward regaining Jehovah's favor. However, the elders making these calls should bear in mind the need for caution. Not all who are visited will respond favorably. We do not want to listen to smooth talk from individuals intent on justifying themselves or trying to mislead others. (Compare 1 Timothy 6:3, 4.) Especially where the elders have no background on the person's wrongdoing or attitude, they should exercise special caution.
--Compare Proverbs 18:17; Romans 16:18.

The provision of making these calls is certainly in line with God's mercy that we read of in the Scriptures. May you prayerfully trust in our Father as you cooperate with this merciful arrangement.

Your brothers,

Watchtower B. V. Society
OF NEW YORK, INC.

cc: Traveling overseers