



WATCHTOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.

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January 22, 1998

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Dear Brothers:

As elders, all of you have been entrusted with precious privileges. At 1 Peter 5:2, the apostle was inspired to write: "Shepherd the flock of God in your care." Among other things, this requires that you diligently prepare for meetings and keep striving to improve your teaching ability when handling meeting parts. This requires much time. You need time also for personal and family study as well as time to care for other Scriptural responsibilities.

In view of this, steps have been taken to simplify the work of elders so that you will have the time needed to "make sure of the more important things." (Phil. 1:10) It is believed that the nine adjustments described below, which were presented at the Kingdom Ministry School, will serve to this end.

1. Literature Campaign Offers: Only two or three basic publications will be featured in literature campaigns starting with the 1999 service year. These will include the *Knowledge* book, the *Require* brochure, various tracts, and current magazines. Emphasis will be placed on starting and conducting home Bible studies. As appropriate, other publications can be placed when making return visits on interested persons. From time to time, direction will be provided in *Our Kingdom Ministry*.

2. Reappointment of Elders and Ministerial Servants Who Move: When an elder or a ministerial servant moves and a favorable letter of recommendation is received from the elders of the former congregation, it will no longer be necessary to wait until the next visit of the circuit overseer to recommend his appointment. The body of elders in the congregation to which the brother has moved may send a written recommendation signed by the Congregation Service Committee to the branch office for his immediate appointment if that is the decision of the body of elders. A copy of the letter of recommendation from his former congregation should be included. His appointment should *not* be announced to the congregation until an appointment letter (S-52) is received from the branch. If there is any question about his qualifications, the elders should wait until the circuit overseer's visit before recommending his appointment.

When an elder or a ministerial servant moves to another congregation, the letter of introduction that accompanies his Congregation's Publisher Record card should plainly state whether the body of elders recommends that he continue to serve as such. It would also be helpful to indicate how long he has served and what assignments he has handled. If there is any reservation about his continuing to serve, this should be clearly explained. This letter should be signed by all three members of the Congregation Service Committee, not just the secretary. (ks91 75) Of course, if the body of elders does not recommend that a brother continue serving as an elder or a ministerial servant, they should meet with him before he leaves and explain the reason for their decision.—See the Society's letter to all bodies of elders dated June 15, 1992.

3. Congregation Service Committee: This committee is being given increased latitude to make decisions in certain matters that were previously considered and decided upon by the entire body of elders. The committee will approve the use of the Kingdom Hall for weddings

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and funerals. When considering a request, the service committee may ask the appropriate Congregation Book Study conductor for his comments.—See the Society's letter to all bodies of elders dated May 15, 1988.

The service committee will have the responsibility of assigning publishers to Congregation Book Study groups. As needed, the service overseer will present recommended adjustments in book study groups to the service committee for approval. Book study conductors whose groups are affected may be consulted individually, but it will no longer be necessary for the entire body of elders to meet to review such adjustments.

The service committee will continue to approve applications for regular and auxiliary pioneer service, Bethel, Gilead, Ministerial Training School, and the Kingdom Hall Construction Worker Questionnaire. Before applications are approved, comments should be obtained from the appropriate book study conductor.

While the Congregation Service Committee is being given additional authority to care for these matters, this does not mean that it now dominates the body of elders. Presiding overseers will need to coordinate matters for the smooth functioning of the congregation.—Eph. 4:16. See also *Organized to Accomplish Our Ministry*, page 42, paragraph 2.

4. Compiling the Congregation's Field Service Report: While the secretary has the responsibility of compiling the report, all Congregation Book Study conductors should assist in training and assisting publishers in their group to turn in their field service reports promptly. (om 106-8) They should also assist the secretary in obtaining missing reports before the congregation's report is sent to the branch office each month. The secretary may call upon book study conductors to contact individual publishers and obtain their field service reports.

5. Limit the Number and Length of Elders' Meetings: There are just four regular elders' meetings scheduled annually, which include the two meetings attended by the circuit overseer when he visits the congregation. Other elders' meetings can be arranged when necessary. (ks91 68) Just prior to the circuit overseer's visit, for example, the body may need to meet to discuss proposed recommendations and/or deletions along with perhaps a few other matters needing consideration in preparation for his visit. Other situations may arise that require a brief meeting of the body. However, such additional meetings of the entire body of elders should be limited to the specific purpose for which they are called.

Regular elders' meetings should last no more than two hours. When the circuit overseer visits the congregation, his meeting with the elders, including the portion attended by the ministerial servants, will be limited to two hours. This can be accomplished by providing an agenda in advance and by allotting a certain amount of time for each point to be considered. Good planning and skillful coordination will be needed on the part of the presiding overseer. Each elder can contribute by good advance preparation and by speaking on points under consideration only when he has something meaningful to add.—See 1991 Kingdom Ministry School textbook, page 71.

6. Shepherding Publishers Who Have Chronic Problems: These individuals can demand much of your time and attention. Try to be supportive yet balanced in the amount of time you spend on those with chronic problems. As elders you are exhorted by the Scriptures to shepherd the *entire* flock of God in your care. (1 Pet. 5:2, 3) Congregation Book Study conductors have a basic responsibility to shepherd and train all those assigned to their group. Of course,

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other elders can assist. Beginning in March 1998, the circuit overseer's schedule is being adjusted to allow him more time to accompany elders on shepherding calls.

While there are no rigid rules as to how arrangements for shepherding should be handled, the following suggestions may be helpful. Elders, either individually or as a group, may set aside one evening each month to make calls. Some bodies of elders find it helpful to schedule all publishers needing personal attention to receive a shepherding visit at appropriate times. (w96 3/15 27) Shepherding calls at publishers' homes can be planned in conjunction with your field service in the territory. And, of course, shepherding can be done before and after meetings and while working with individuals in the ministry. For those difficult to contact, encouragement through telephone calls might suffice.

7. Assignments in Connection With Congregation Meetings: The number of elders in many congregations is limited, and it is appreciated that you may have many assignments. Therefore, it is generally not necessary for elders to be assigned student talks—that is, talks number two, three, or four—on the Theocratic Ministry School. Also the presiding overseer and Theocratic Ministry School overseer should try to coordinate matters so that, to the extent possible, brothers are not given assignments on both the Theocratic Ministry School and Service Meeting on the same evening.

8. Continue to Train and Use Ministerial Servants: Qualified ministerial servants can be used to conduct meetings for field service even when elders are present. Working under the direction of either the presiding overseer or another elder assigned by the body of elders, a ministerial servant can assist in the scheduling of public talks. A qualified ministerial servant can be used to conduct a secondary Theocratic Ministry School where there are a limited number of elders. A ministerial servant can also be used to help with paperwork related to the school. Other ways in which ministerial servants may be used to care for congregation responsibilities are found on pages 57-9 of *Organized to Accomplish Our Ministry*.

9. Correspondence From the Society: The various departments at the branch office will try to avoid burdening elders with forms to be completed and requests for information. Effort will be made to monitor such material closely.

In time it is hoped that additional helpful suggestions can be made to lighten the load of congregation elders. Please be assured that your diligence in serving the needs of the congregation is greatly appreciated. We take this opportunity to send a warm expression of our Christian love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

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