

WATCHTOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.

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April 5, 2000

TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Dear Brothers:

1. Today we see many evidences of Jehovah's blessing on his people. Fine increases are taking place worldwide, and congregations are being strengthened. We surely appreciate what our traveling overseers have contributed toward these accomplishments. Obviously their visits are of great benefit to the brothers. An earlier letter concerning matters with regard to traveling overseers' accommodations and expenses was dated October 1, 1989, so it is now appropriate to update that letter.

Reimbursements

2. Circuit and district overseers and their wives receive a small monthly reimbursement from the Society for some personal items. Currently the reimbursement is \$50 a month. This is adjusted from time to time to reflect changes in living costs. In addition to the monthly reimbursement, currently each one is given credit from \$240 to \$360 annually on a personal expense account, according to the number of years in full-time service:

Accommodations

3. It is interesting to observe what *The Watchtower* said on this matter many years ago in its issue of March 1, 1916, under the heading "Entertainment of the Pilgrims": "All friends of the Truth properly feel it an honor and a privilege to entertain the Pilgrim Brethren during their brief stays. However, the interests of the Truth and the comfort of the Pilgrims should also be considered. The Elders, or, under their direction, the Class Secretary, should see to it that Pilgrims are entertained in homes where they will not be a burden and where they will be comfortable. Those who travel and preach continuously are more or less under a nervous strain and need comfort, proper rest, and some degree of privacy for meditation. All having the interests of the work at heart should, therefore, cheerfully cooperate that the Pilgrim may be entertained in a home where accommodations are suitable. The entire Class would surely be disgraced if the Society's representative were otherwise treated. We are sure that only thoughtlessness on the part of some has made this suggestion necessary."

4. When you open up your hearts and your homes and provide suitable accommodations for your traveling overseers and their wives (if married) during their stay with you, it is deeply appreciated. While they do not expect or desire to be an expensive burden, traveling overseers do appreciate and need clean places in which to stay. Some have health problems or allergies, and it is good for the presiding overseer to inquire of the traveling overseer as to any needs in this regard.

5. It would be beneficial for the presiding overseer and another elder to check out the accommodations to be offered to the traveling overseer to make sure all is in good order and is in

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accord with what is considered herein. Traveling overseers have a full week of theocratic activity in each congregation. Careful advance arrangements to provide appropriate accommodations will help them fulfill their responsibilities in a fine way. It is good to realize that it is not easy to live in a different place each week, year after year. However, there are little things we can do that will make their stay pleasant.

6. Each of us needs privacy so we can study, meditate, and get necessary work done. Accommodations in a private home should be selected accordingly. And while all of us enjoy the company of the traveling overseer and his wife, and they enjoy ours, they need adequate time to themselves. Sufficient rest is vital if they are to do their assigned work the next day. Traveling overseers follow a schedule that allows them to serve best the spiritual interests of the entire congregation.

7. Arrangements should be made for them to have a place to hang up their clothes. Clean dresser drawers should be made available if at all possible. A chair, a writing table upon which a typewriter may be placed, and good lighting are helpful. (2 Kings 4:10) Traveling overseers very much appreciate this.

8. As to meals, nothing elaborate need be arranged. Traveling overseers deeply appreciate your hospitality and will gladly eat what you provide. Wholesome, nourishing food enables them to feel well physically and to keep up with their schedule. (g95 3/8 5-7; g89 12/8 8-9) Of course, if they are ill or have health problems, they may not be able to eat certain foods.

9. A number of thoughtful presiding overseers have made it a point at the end of the traveling overseer's stay to ask him about the accommodation that had been arranged for him. This is a good practice, and we commend you brothers for showing this extra concern. It is not necessary, and may not be wise, to have the circuit overseer stay in a different home each time he visits the congregation. For example, if there is only one home that is truly suitable, then it may be best for him to stay there each visit if the householder is willing and it is convenient rather than 'rotating' him to different homes where the facilities may be inadequate.—3 John 8.

10. The Society and the traveling overseers and their wives appreciate very much your hospitality. (Rom. 12:13) Truly this is a Christian course and enables the traveling overseers to get the most accomplished and to enjoy a warm relationship with the brothers.

11. If a congregation is unable to provide a room and meals and cannot assist in caring for expenses of accommodations, food, and so forth, the traveling overseer may submit his expenses for these items to the Society for reimbursement.

Circuit Apartments

12. In some metropolitan areas, suitable and convenient accommodations may not be available in the homes of the brothers for the traveling overseer and his wife. In these areas the collective body of elders in the circuit or district may decide that it would be more advantageous for the circuit or district to provide a modest, reasonably-priced apartment for the use of the traveling overseer. Likewise, in some densely-populated areas where cities are fairly close

together, it may be more convenient and cost effective for the circuit or district to provide a modest apartment for their traveling overseer.

13. Where the distance between congregations or circuits is relatively great, the use of an apartment by a traveling overseer may be impractical. It may be that a number of congregations in an area would be hard-pressed to provide the funds necessary to maintain an apartment for their traveling overseer. In such cases the traveling overseer can stay in suitable homes in the circuit. Some brothers have lovingly made their homes available for two or more weeks at a time where circumstances make this practical.

14. Where congregations are willing and able to provide accommodations in the homes of the brothers, as outlined above, it would not be appropriate for traveling overseers to suggest or encourage the brothers to provide an apartment. If, after prayerfully considering the factors involved, the collective body of elders in the circuit or district decides that an apartment for the traveling overseer is practical and cost effective, the Society has no objection if the elders make such arrangements.

15. A congregation or several congregations may have in mind building a new Kingdom Hall or renovating one, and they may wish to include an apartment that could be used by a traveling overseer. This is a matter for the collective body(ies) of elders using the Kingdom Hall to determine. While construction expenses would be the responsibility of the congregation(s) directly involved in the project, others may assist. In any event, no solicitation should be made of other congregations, the circuit, or individuals to fund the construction. Before an apartment for a traveling overseer is included in a project, the congregation(s) using the hall would need to consider this matter by resolution. If the circuit desires to support the project with work and funds, this is left up to the collective body of elders in the circuit.

16. If the collective body of elders in the circuit or district wishes to work out arrangements with the elders of a congregation(s) owning an apartment so that expenses can be covered, this may be done. It is usually best for such matters to be discussed by the collective body of elders of the circuit at the time of their business meeting in connection with an assembly rather than to present such a proposal by means of a letter. This allows for a more thorough discussion of all the factors involved.

17. It would not be proper for a traveling overseer to suggest or request that the circuit rent an apartment and thus put an unnecessary financial burden on his brothers. This would also preclude his suggesting major renovations on an existing apartment or pressuring others to make changes on plans for a proposed apartment.

Trailers Owned by Traveling Overseers

18. The Society prefers that traveling overseers stay in the homes of the brothers. However, some circuit and district overseers who have been in traveling work for a long time have personal trailers that they have obtained with their own funds, and they prefer to live in these. If a traveling overseer and his wife have been serving many years and, after carefully weighing their circumstances, they wish to begin using a trailer, they may write to the Society about this. If permission is granted, however, all expenses incurred in connection with the purchase of the

trailer, insurance, maintenance, towing the trailer, and so forth must be cared for by the traveling overseer himself. It is likewise the responsibility of the traveling overseer to care for all expenses for any tow vehicle. It is not the responsibility of a congregation, circuit, or district to share in the burden of trailer expenses, and neither congregation funds nor circuit funds should be used for this purpose. If a brother who has been in the traveling work for many years has a trailer, the circuit may decide to pay for the expense of parking the trailer. This would be the only exception to what is outlined above. The Society requests that newly appointed traveling overseers not use trailers.

How Expenses Are Handled

19. If a congregation wants to share in contributing toward the traveling overseer's expenses during the week of his visit, how would this be handled? The presiding overseer, or one of the other elders, can approach the traveling overseer and invite him to submit his expenses for that week. The elders will want to help each other remember to care for this matter before the traveling overseer concludes his visit. What might these expenses include? Expenses could be for gasoline, oil, dry cleaning, shoe repair, haircuts, and so forth. Reasonable food expenses may also be submitted if the traveling overseer has some meals at a circuit apartment or in his personally owned trailer. If the congregation is not in a position to cover all or part of the traveling overseer's expenses, he can submit these to the Society for consideration. At no time does the Society wish the traveling overseer and his wife to be a financial burden to any congregation. —2 Cor. 11:9; 1 Thess. 2:9.

20. The traveling overseer should be considerate and discerning in submitting his expenses. Some personal expenses could likely be covered by the monthly reimbursement from the Society or from personal contributions he may have received from individuals in the congregation. It would not be appropriate to submit expenses for personal long-distance telephone calls and faxes or for the purchase of computer equipment, photocopiers, trailer or tow vehicle expenses, and so forth.

21. When submitting his weekly expenses to the elders, the traveling overseer should include receipts on items purchased. If the body of elders feels the congregation would like to cover any or all of these expenses, a resolution should be presented to the congregation for approval at the first Service Meeting following the visit. (See *Our Kingdom Ministry* "Question Box" of February 1994.) If the resolution is approved, the funds should be forwarded promptly to the traveling overseer. Money should not be taken from congregation funds without this approval.

22. Some expenses are usually considered by the collective body of elders in the circuit in connection with the business meeting held during the week of a special assembly day or a circuit assembly. For example, there may be minor expenses of \$100 or less for maintenance of the Society-leased car and for such things as gasoline, oil changes, and tire rotations. There may be travel expenses incurred in moving to a new circuit or district assignment (but not expenses for shipping or transporting items that cannot be taken in the Society's lease car) or those incurred during Pioneer Service School weeks or during an assembly host week. It is the privilege of the collective body of elders to consider if the circuit account has funds sufficient to reimburse the traveling overseers and whether such funds are to be used for that purpose.

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Traveling Overseers' Health-Care Support and Automobile Leasing Arrangement

23. In the United States, the Society has made arrangements to provide health-care support and reliable leased automobiles for traveling overseers. These costs are covered from the Society's general funds as supported by donations to the worldwide work. The Society and the traveling overseers have appreciated this very much.

Proper Use of Congregation and Circuit Funds

24. In handling congregation and circuit funds, it is always good to remember that our brothers contribute money for Kingdom interests, for defraying congregation and circuit expenses. So if such funds were used to make money gifts to traveling overseers, special assembly day speakers, or others for things beyond their actual expenses (for example, to purchase a trailer or tow vehicle, repairs for such, a personal vacation trip, and so forth), this would undoubtedly disturb or stumble some of our brothers. We should rightly be concerned that this does not happen. Money gifts should not be made from congregation or circuit funds. Likewise, it is not appropriate for individuals in a congregation or circuit to solicit money from brothers and sisters and then provide this as a gift to a traveling overseer.—2 Corinthians 8:20.

25. Is it in harmony with theocratic principles for individual publishers to give traveling overseers personal gifts? If one is moved by appreciation and has a heart desire to make such a contribution, that is for the individual to decide. Such genuine Christian generosity on the part of the giver and acceptance on the part of the traveling overseer are private matters that need not concern others. However, soliciting of funds from others, even on a personal basis, should not be done.

26. Circuit and district overseers are doing a marvelous work. The Society appreciates the spirit congregations and circuits have shown in lovingly and generously providing traveling overseers with their daily needs. (2 Cor. 9:7) We deeply appreciate all that you brothers are doing. Please be assured of our warm Christian love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

Watchtower B. I. Society

OF NEW YORK, INC.

cc: Traveling Overseers

NOTE: It is recommended that the body of elders meet and read this together. Thereafter, it should be placed in the file of the congregation for future reference and should be reviewed by the presiding overseer and secretary before each visit of the circuit overseer.