WATCHTOWER
BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.

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TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Dear Brothers:

An increasing number of congregations are now caring for penal institutions located in various parts of the country. Witnessing to inmates housed at these facilities is both challenging and rewarding. Our brothers are having good success in helping some inmates to become active servants of Jehovah.

To assist those carrying out this important aspect of the ministry, we are pleased to offer the following comments. We recommend that this material be reviewed with all publishers who are presently, or who in the future become, involved in prison witnessing.

When dealing with prison officials, consider the following:

- A pleasant, persistent approach is often successful
- Endeavor to keep all appointments with inmates and officials
- Adhere to the various rules and regulations of the institution
- Try to establish all of, any of, or any combination of the following:
  - One-on-one studies
  - Group studies
  - Regular or modified weekly meetings
  - Video showings

Personal contact with inmates:

- Do not
  - Arrange special events at the prison where publishers are invited to mingle indiscriminately with inmates
  - Request that sisters visit or study with male inmates

When disfellowshipped inmates seek reinstatement: (*w*91 4/15 pp. 21-2, pars. 7-15)

- They must submit a letter officially requesting a hearing for reinstatement
- The congregation that is assigned to care for the facility is to form the judicial committee
- Before meeting with the inmate, communicate with the congregation that disfellowshipped him to get all the facts
- If only two elders are permitted to meet with the inmate, the third member of the committee can make his decision based on the testimony of the other two (Matt. 18:16)

- If it is decided that he should be reinstated, write to the congregation that disfellowshipped him with full details on why you believe he is repentant and should be reinstated. Then wait for the response from the congregation elders
- If the decision is that he is not yet qualified, explain to him what he needs to work on to qualify

Correspondence with inmates:

- Be aware that some inmates feign interest in the truth in order to take advantage of our brothers' compassion and generosity
- Make sure that the sole purpose of all correspondence with an inmate is to provide spiritual information and encouragement
- Do not
  - Request that sisters enter into correspondence with male inmates
  - Include money and material gifts in correspondence with inmates

Literature distribution:

- When literature can be supplied by the congregation either directly to the inmate, through the chaplain (or other officials), or by mail, have in mind:
  - Only basic literature should be provided initially. This includes the regular edition of the *New World Translation*, magazines, brochures, and basic study books
  - Special-request items should generally be provided only to:
    - Baptized publishers
    - Unbaptized publishers
    - Those who are progressing well in their studies

    Special-request items include the *Reference Bible*, the *Proclaimers* book, the *Insight* volumes, audiocassettes, videocassettes, and subscriptions on audiocassette

    Special consideration can be given to those who suffer from impaired vision or when there are other extenuating circumstances
  - *Organized to Accomplish Our Ministry* and *Our Kingdom Ministry* should be provided only to:
    - Baptized publishers
    - Those seeking to qualify for baptism
  - When subscriptions are permitted:
    - Six-month subscriptions may be entered in the usual way for a newly interested inmate when some degree of interest is established and there is some degree of certainty that he will be at the address for six months
    - One-year subscriptions may be entered in the usual way for an inmate who has shown interest over a period of time if there is some degree of certainty that he will be at the address for a year

- When videocassettes are permitted:
  - Be aware that only the following five videos are approved for use in correctional facilities: *Jehovah's Witnesses—The Organization Behind the Name*, *Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault*, *Noah—He Walked With God*, *The Bible—Its Power in Your Life*, and *Our Whole Association of Brothers*. If prison authorities already have other videos in their possession, they may continue to use them. Henceforth, however, only the five approved videos should be provided for use in correctional facilities

- When literature must come directly from the publisher, the Watch Tower Society:
  - Inmates should be encouraged to write to the Prison Desk on an individual basis to request basic study items. Only basic literature will be sent to the inmate. You will be notified of what has been sent
  - If you determine that an inmate qualifies to receive a special-request item, please write to the Prison Desk asking that it be provided for him and explaining why he qualifies to receive it
  - If an inmate writes for a special-request item and the Prison Desk does not have your recommendation, the item will generally not be sent to him. You, the elders, will be written in order to verify that the inmate qualifies to receive the special-request item in question
  - When necessary, the Watch Tower Society is willing to mail copies of *Our Kingdom Ministry* to qualified inmates each month. Please send the Prison Desk the name and identification number of any who should be placed on this list, as well as the complete name and address of the penal facility they are housed in

- When paperback literature or audiocassettes with clear (not opaque) shells are required by the institution:
  - Do not remove the hard covers from our publications or attempt to alter the Watch Tower Society's audiocassettes
  - Be aware that any of the Watch Tower Society's publications can be requested in paperback, with the exception of the pocket-size edition of the *New World Translation*. The regular edition of this Bible, however, is available in paperback. Any of the audiocassettes can be requested with clear shells
  - To request specially prepared paperback literature or audiocassettes with clear shells for prison use:
    - Use a separate *Literature Request Form* (S-14), and write at the top "PRISON REQUEST"
    - List *only* specially prepared paperback literature or audiocassettes with clear shells on this form
    - Mail this *Literature Request Form* (S-14) directly to the Prison Desk, separate from the one submitted by the coordinating congregation under the Kingdom Hall Literature Inventory Arrangement

- When our literature is welcome in the prison or chapel library:
  - Either supply (or, when necessary, request that the Watch Tower Society supply) literature for the library
  - Special-request items may be donated to the library, as this will make them available to all who wish to use them for research. In this way, newly interested inmates can have access to these publications without necessarily having a personal copy

Reporting activity in the prison ministry:

- Memorial attendance figures may be added to the total congregation count if the Memorial is held on the same night and if it is under the auspices of the congregation. The Memorial attendance may also be counted if a baptized inmate in good standing conducts it
- Baptisms

  All baptisms in the prison must be reported to the Prison Desk
- Literature Placements

  All literature placed in the prison is to be added to the Congregation Report (S-1)
- Meeting attendance

  If there are regularly established meetings in the facility with at least some baptized persons present, the attendance figures are to be added to the congregation total

In correspondence with the Prison Desk regarding inmates or prison witnessing, <u>always</u>:

- Refer to previous correspondence from the Prison Desk by date and desk symbol
- Provide the complete name and address of the penal institution in question
- Include the inmate's name and, when known, his identification number
- Reply promptly when you receive correspondence from us that requires a response

Please contact the Prison Desk promptly if:

- Circumstances change and the information on the *Prison Information Form* requires updating
- You experience any difficulties in prison witnessing or if you have any questions regarding this aspect of the ministry

For additional information please refer to:

- The article "Witnessing to Prisoners" in the February 1982 *Our Kingdom Ministry*, page 7
- The article "Corresponding With Prisoners" in the December 1989 *Our Kingdom Ministry*, page 7

We realize that you have many personal as well as congregational responsibilities, and we greatly appreciate your interest in prison witnessing. May Jehovah richly bless your efforts in this special field of service.

Your brothers,

Watchtower B. & T. Society
OF NEW YORK, INC.