Jehovah’s Witnesses &

Child Sex Abuse

A Brief Handbook for Attorneys
and Media Outlets

(Third Edition)

All the information needed to help litigate liability cases against the Watchtower Corporation and its many legal entities for cases of child sex abuse within their organization.
DISCLAIMER: The information contained in this handbook is provided with the understanding that the authors and reviewers are not herein engaged in rendering legal, medical, psychological, or other professional advice and/or services. Accordingly, the information provided in this handbook is for educational purposes only and not for the purpose of providing legal, medical, psychological, or other professional advice. You should contact an attorney to obtain legal counsel with respect to your particular legal needs. If you are in need of counseling, therapy, medical treatment, or psychological treatment of any sort, consult with a physician immediately. If you are feeling suicidal, contact emergency services at once.

The opinions expressed in this handbook are the opinions of the individual authors and may not reflect the opinions of Exodus or any other contributors. The authors of this handbook wish to express their gratitude to all those who helped compile this information.
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Purpose of This Handbook

References

A Brief Overview of Jehovah's Witnesses

Understanding the Judicial Process of Jehovah's Witnesses

The “Two Witness” Rule

When the Accused Moves to a New Congregation

Pedophilia as a “Sin”

Lack of Reporting

Putting Known Pedophiles in Positions of Authority

Minors “Consenting” to Sexual Conduct With Adults

“Jehovah's Witnesses' Scripturally Based Position on Child Protection”
SECTION 1: PURPOSE OF THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook has been created to help lawyers and other legal professionals better understand the challenges in dealing with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society and all other entities of the religion of Jehovah’s Witnesses, in litigating, addressing, and treating matters of child sexual abuse. Those outside of this religion who are unfamiliar with its beliefs and practices may find that information and resources for such litigation are scarce and/or difficult to understand.

By using this handbook, we hope that those who are fighting for justice for the victims of child sex abuse within the religion of Jehovah’s Witnesses can better prepare their cases, and better understand those abuse victims.

Media outlets, victims, and others may also find this information helpful for compiling stories of abuse that occur within the confines of this religion.

This handbook is meant for free and public distribution, but no part of its contents may be altered without the express written consent of the copyright holder.

This handbook is not intended for resale.

Information may be updated and edited as needed.

We welcome your feedback about this handbook as well as suggested edits and improvements.
SECTION 2: REFERENCES

The following references will be used repeatedly throughout this booklet:

*The Australian Royal Commission Inquiry Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*

The Australian Royal Commission Inquiry Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse questioned members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses religion during July and August, 2015 (case study 29), and again as a follow-up in March of 2017 (case study 54).

According to the website for this Inquiry:

“The scope and purpose of the public hearing is to inquire into:
- The experience of survivors of child sexual abuse within the Jehovah’s Witnesses Church in Australia.
- The response of the Jehovah’s Witnesses Church and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Australia Ltd to allegations, reports or complaints of child sexual abuse within the Church.
- The systems, policies and procedures in place within the Jehovah’s Witnesses Church and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Australia Ltd for raising and responding to allegations of or concerns about child sexual abuse within the Church.
- The systems, policies and procedures in place within the Jehovah’s Witnesses Church and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Australia Ltd to prevent child sexual abuse within the Church.
- Any related matters.”

While this Inquiry was limited to Jehovah’s Witnesses in Australia, the information revealed may be very helpful to litigators in other countries, as the practices and policies of this religion are typically applied to all members worldwide.

This Inquiry will be referred to throughout this handbook as “Australian RC.”

The Inquiry’s Submission of Senior Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission will be referred to as “SSCARC.”

To reference the original Inquiry of Jehovah’s Witnesses, August, 2015:


**October 1, 2012, Letter to All Elders Worldwide**

On October 1, 2012, a letter to elders in the congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses was distributed worldwide, addressing the matter of child sexual abuse. That letter is attached to the end of this booklet.

**August 1, 2016, Letter to All Elders Worldwide**

On August 1, 2016, a letter to elders in the congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses was distributed worldwide, addressing the matter of child sexual abuse, to replace the October 1, 2012, letter mentioned above. That letter is attached to the end of this booklet.

**September 1, 2017, Letter to All Elders Worldwide**

On September 1, 2017, a letter to elders in the congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses was distributed worldwide, addressing the matter of child sexual abuse, to replace the August 1, 2016, letter mentioned above. That letter is attached to the end of this booklet.

“**Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Scripturally Based Position on Child Protection**”


This pamphlet is discussed in full in Section 11, and will be referred to throughout this handbook as “**Child Protection**.”

“**Shepherd the Flock of God in Your Care**”

Elders in congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses receive a handbook titled, “Shepherd the Flock of God in Your Care,” published in 2010, and this book addresses, among other issues, reasons for disfellowshipping (excommunication)
and the handling of child sex abuse allegations. This handbook will be referred to as the “Shepherd Book.”

All other reference material is published by Jehovah’s Witnesses unless otherwise noted.
SECTION 3: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES

The Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society of New York (herein referred to as Watchtower) and The Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses (CCJW) comprise the two legal divisions of the religion commonly known as Jehovah’s Witnesses. The religion is also registered under various charitable names around the world (i.e., the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain, and the International Bible Students Association in the UK). Watchtower oversees administrative aspects of the organization, including real estate management, while CCJW oversees religious and doctrinal matters.

A. Religious Structure

Jehovah’s Witnesses receive their direction from a governing body, a small group of men (eight, as of this writing) who work from the state of New York, U.S.A. This governing body makes all final decisions as to the beliefs, teachings, and practices of the religion.

Throughout the world, there are several branch offices that exist to serve the more localized needs of Jehovah’s Witnesses in various countries; one branch office might oversee a number of countries, not just the country where the branch is located. These branch offices might have some authority over legal matters that affect Jehovah’s Witnesses, as they pertain to local laws and regulations.

Persons who work in these branch offices must adhere to direction given to them by the governing body; however, they may alert their New York headquarters to potential conflicts when it comes to local legal issues, such as building plans, restrictions against public proselytizing, etc.

Various departments exist within these branch offices, including:

- a Legal Department to administer legal advice
- a Service Department or Service Desk, to administer (although not originate) various internal, congregational instructions to overseers and elders

Groups of several local congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses form what is called a circuit. A “circuit overseer” will receive direction from the local branch office and the headquarters in New York, and regularly visits each congregation in his circuit, typically twice per year.
Local **bodies of elders** direct each congregation on many matters, although being required to follow instructions from the religion’s headquarters.

Within each congregation, members are often referred to as **publishers**.

Each member of a congregation is expected to participate in proselytizing, often called “field service.” Publishers are required to record details of their proselytizing and submit this monthly record to local elders. This record is referred to as their **field service report**.

Each congregant has a **publisher card** or **publisher record**, a long-term record of these monthly numbers. This card is referenced in determining cases of potential wrongdoing (see Section 6: When the Accused Moves to a New Congregation).

A person is officially considered one of Jehovah’s Witnesses when he or she is
baptized. While Jehovah’s Witnesses do not practice infant baptism and teach that being baptized is a decision that each person must make for themselves, very young children, including those as young as six years old, are allowed to be baptized into the religion.

Baptism puts a person at risk for disfellowshipping (excommunication) and subsequent shunning.

B. Authority of Elders

Elders receive direction from the religion’s headquarters in New York, most specifically found in the *Shepherd Book*.

This book is kept confidential from other congregants.

Other direction to elders may come in the form of letters, also to be kept confidential from other congregants, as well as direction from their circuit overseer or branch office.

Beyond these instructions, local elders have tremendous autonomy in making decisions that affect the lives of everyday Jehovah’s Witnesses, including the decision to excommunicate members for various perceived sins, if elders feel there is not sufficient “repentance” on that congregant’s part.

While congregants are told to train and use their own conscience on individual, private matters, elders give instruction and counsel that may greatly influence a congregant’s decisions. Jehovah’s Witnesses have said that elders are appointed by god’s “holy spirit,” so everyday congregation members typically defer to their authority and opinions, as they are directed to do in the literature of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Congregants are also often told that the elder body should be consulted in order to clear one’s conscience of wrongdoing.

C. Leaving the Religion

A person may leave the religion of Jehovah’s Witnesses in one of three ways:
They may be “disfellowshipped” for a perceived sin.
A person who officially leaves the religion by writing a letter to their congregation stating that they no longer wish to remain in the religion is referred to as “disassociated.”

These forms of excommunication are followed by a public announcement that “so-and-so is no longer one of Jehovah’s Witnesses.” This announcement is made in their local congregation, but may also be made in any congregation where he or she was well known, such as the congregation where they grew up.

A person who simply stops going to regular meetings of Jehovah’s Witnesses and out in their preaching work, without going through the process of being disfellowshipped or of disassociating themselves, is called “inactive.” Inactive ones are still typically regarded as needing to abide by the principles of the religion, since they have not officially left. If an inactive person were to be found breaking any serious rules of the religion, they may face disfellowshipping.

D. Disfellowshipping and Reproof

Instructions for handling the disfellowshipping process are taken from the Shepherd Book, pages 58-80.

A person may be disfellowshipped for a variety of recognized sins, including smoking, gambling, and speaking out against the religion itself or disagreeing with its teachings.

Elders in local congregations are given instruction as to how they handle hearings and investigations into these matters, but are also given great leeway in determining innocence or guilt when it comes to accusations of serious sins.

When a person is disfellowshipped and an announcement is made to the congregation that they are no longer considered one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, there is typically no information given as to their “sin” or conduct that led to this decision.

A person who has been found to be guilty of certain sins may show “repentance” and be “reproved” rather than disfellowshipped.
This reproof may be public, and would include a brief announcement to the local congregation that such a reproof has been administered, with no information given about their particular “sin.”

The reproof may also be administered in private, given as an official statement by the elders to the congregant only. This reproof process, either public or private, then allows such a person to continue to associate with others in the congregation, albeit with some slight restrictions, rather than being shunned.

E. Secluded Life

While everyday Jehovah’s Witnesses do not live on any type of commune or in a secluded, sequestered area, they do live very isolated lives. Jehovah’s Witnesses are consistently counseled to avoid association with those who are not Jehovah’s Witnesses. Children are typically not allowed to participate in extracurricular activities, and may even be homeschooled.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are strongly counseled against marrying or even dating non-Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Those who are not Jehovah’s Witnesses are referred to as being in “the world” or “worldly,” and these ones are spoken of in very unfavorable terms.

This attitude toward those who are not Jehovah’s Witnesses can make it difficult for congregants to approach or trust police and other authority figures regarding child molestation allegations, especially when young ones need to make such reports on their own. Note the testimony of one victim during the Australian RC (Transcript, Day 148, pages 15282-15283):

“I was always terrified of being kicked out of home or disfellowshipped because I feared what Jehovah would do to me. I was taught from a young age that people outside the Church (referred to by Jehovah’s Witnesses as ‘worldly people’) were bad and not to be trusted and they served Satan. Even the prospect of speaking to the police was extremely scary as they were also considered to be very bad people.”

F. Shunning

Jehovah’s Witnesses practice a severe and harsh form of shunning. Those who are disfellowshipped are avoided and shunned, even family.
This is also true for those who officially leave the religion on their own, having disassociated themselves. These ones who leave are often referred to as “apostates” and have been called “mentally diseased.”

Those who become inactive or fade from the religion may not face this official shunning, but association with them is often limited, if not completely cut off.

Within the congregation, persons who are perceived as being “spiritually weak” or who may have committed sins not serious enough to merit disfellowshipping can be “marked,” meaning that other congregants limit socializing with that person, although not officially or completely shunning them.

**G. Family Structure**

Jehovah’s Witnesses follow a patriarchal family arrangement, with the husband being the “head” of his wife; she is counseled to be “submissive” to his direction and defer to his authority on all matters.

Fathers have prime responsibility and decision making for how children are disciplined.

Corporal punishment is neither forbidden nor outright endorsed by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Personal experiences of extreme physical discipline abound from former Jehovah’s Witnesses, including spankings, paddling, smacks, and the like.

**H. Women in the Religion**

Women are not allowed to hold any positions of authority or responsibility in the religion; elders, circuit overseers, and others in positions of responsibility are always men, without exception.

Women are not allowed to have access to the same information as men in the religion, including information regarding judicial processes.

Women are expected to defer to the authority of baptized males in the congregation; this is generally true even if that baptized male is a preteen.

Women have historically not been part of the investigative process when it comes to matters of sexual abuse of children, or any other judicial matter. Note the SSCARC, page 78:

“It is submitted that the current process of investigation doesn’t provide for,
or even allow, the involvement of women as investigators or even to receive a complainant’s statement and pass it on to the investigating elders. Further, in the light of [governing body member] Mr Jackson’s evidence that an elder, and therefore not a woman in the congregation, must determine the credibility of a witness, there is limited scope for the involvement of women in the investigation.”

This arrangement was slightly modified in the August 1, 2016, letter to all elders worldwide, and the September 1, 2017, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 13 of both:

“The elders may learn of an allegation of child sexual abuse directly from the victim, through her parents, or through a trusted confidant of the victim.”

The Child Protection handbook also stated, paragraph 9:

“Elders never require victims of child abuse to present their accusation in the presence of the alleged abuser. However, victims who are now adults may do so, if they wish. In addition, victims can be accompanied by a confidant of either gender for moral support when presenting their accusation to the elders.”
SECTION 3 ENDNOTES

3:1 “Complete immersion in water is a fitting symbol of this personal dedication...”
“Worship the Only True God” (2006), page 110-119*

3:2 “Such a dedication is a personal vow. It is followed by water baptism.”
January 15, 2010, Watchtower*

3:3 “A branch office or the local congregation elders do not have the authority to make medical decisions for a Christian, even if he asks what to do. (Galatians 6:5) However, the elders can share what Jehovah says in order to help a Christian make a wise decision.”
September 15, 2015, Watchtower (simplified)*

3:4 “These “gifts in men” are overseers, or elders, appointed by Jehovah and his Son, through holy spirit, to shepherd the sheep with tenderness. ... Our heavenly Shepherds, Jehovah God and Jesus Christ, expect us to be obedient and submissive to the undershepherds whom they have placed in positions of responsibility within the congregation.”
April 1, 2007, Watchtower*

3:5 “When Anne was in her late teens, she served as a regular pioneer. However, she began to live a double life. This affected her greatly. She states: “What was left of my conscience felt guilty. I was unhappy and depressed all the time.” What did she do? She states that one day at the meeting, James 5:14, 15 was discussed. Anne realized that she needed help and went to the elders for assistance.”
April 15, 2013, Watchtower (simplified)*

3:6 “Consider what happened to one Christian. He says: “I secretly viewed pornography. I created a fantasy world that I thought was disconnected from the world where I served Jehovah. I knew that this practice was wrong but told myself that my service to God was still acceptable.” What changed this brother’s thinking? He states: “Although it was the most difficult thing I have ever done, I decided to tell the elders about my problem.”
February 15, 2011, Watchtower*

3:7 The exception to living in a “commune” would be volunteers who are housed full-time at various headquarters and other such branch facilities the world.
According to the 2016 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses, there were 26,011 “ministers” staffing their branch facilities worldwide.

3:8 “Though unavoidably living in the midst of that society of worldly persons, including those engaging in fornication, idolatry, extortion, and similar practices (1Co 5:9-13), such Christians must keep themselves clean and unspotted by that world’s corruption and defilement, not entering into friendly relations with it, lest they be condemned with it.”

“Insight on the Scriptures”, Volume 2, pages 1205-1210*

3:9 “Nonetheless, if he is dating with a view to marrying someone who is unbaptized, he is not obeying the Bible’s counsel at 1 Corinthians 7:39 to marry ‘only in the Lord,’ and loving counsel should be given. Elders will use reasonableness and discernment in determining whether a particular situation is sufficiently serious and disturbing to require a warning talk.”

Shepherd Book, page 125

3:10 “The world’ Jesus mentioned refers to all of mankind who are alienated from God, ruled by Satan, and enslaved to the selfish, prideful spirit that emanates from him. (John 14:30; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19) Indeed, ‘friendship with [that] world is enmity with God.’”

“Keep Yourselves in God's Love,” page 50

June 1, 2005, Watchtower*

3:12 Shepherd Book, page 60, the subheading “Offenses Requiring Judicial Decisions” includes the bullet point, “Willful, continued, unnecessary association with disfellowshipped nonrelatives despite repeated counsel.”

3:13 “Do not look for excuses to associate with a disfellowshipped family member, for example, through e-mail.”

January 15, 2013, Watchtower
3:14 “If members of the congregation are known to have undue association with disfellowshipped or disassociated relatives who are not in the household, elders should counsel and reason with those members of the congregation from the Scriptures. ... If it is clear that a Christian is violating the spirit of the disfellowshipping decree in this regard and does not respond to counsel, it may be that he would not qualify for congregation privileges, which require one to be exemplary.”

Shepherd Book, page 116

3:15 “So from where do false teachers come? They may arise from within the congregation. Such ones are apostates. ... Well, apostates are “mentally diseased,” and they seek to infect others with their disloyal teachings.”

July 15, 2011, Watchtower*

3:16 During a discourse presented at the 2016 summer conventions of Jehovah’s Witnesses, an example was shared of a man and his siblings who quit associating with their inactive mother, referring to their decision as “loyalty to Jehovah.”

http://jwvictims.org/2016/05/28/in-shocking-public-discourse-jehovahs-witnesses-are-told-to-shun-inactive-members-even-parents/

3:17 “At times it may be necessary to mark those who display a flagrant disregard for theocratic order though not practicing a grave sin that would result in judicial action. ... If the disorderly one becomes ashamed of his ways and is moved to change, then as elders of the congregation see the adjustment, they can individually decide to end the limitation they have put on personally socializing with him.”

Shepherd Book, pages 124-125*

3:18 “When his decisions are not to her liking, she may respectfully express her thoughts, but she remains submissive.”

“Keep Yourselves in God’s Love”, page 43

3:19 “Fathers in particular are instructed to provide their children with moral guidance and loving discipline.”

April 1, 2007, Watchtower

3:20 “However, not all children need physical punishment. Proverbs 17:10 tells us: “A rebuke works deeper in one having understanding than striking a stupid one a hundred times.””

November 1, 2006, Watchtower

An August 23, 2010, letter accompanying distribution of the Shepherd Book said:

“Since the release of the new Shepherding textbook, several elders have asked about the possibility of having their textbook spiral bound. There is no objection if an elder personally spiral binds or laminates his own textbook or does so for other elders. If he has another baptized brother who is not an elder do the work for him, the elder must watch while the work is being done. Outside companies, unbelievers, or sisters [meaning women in the congregation] are not permitted to do this work. The material in the book is confidential, and confidentiality must be preserved.”*

“If a baptized brother joins the meeting after it has started, the sister would normally invite him to finish the meeting. The service overseer should try to anticipate unusual situations and give appropriate instructions so as to minimize awkwardness. For example, a very young, perhaps preteen, baptized brother might attend when a sister is assigned to conduct, but the elders feel that he is not yet qualified to conduct the meeting. In such a case, the service overseer can inform those involved that the assigned sister should conduct the meeting, but the brother should say the prayer if the elders feel that he is qualified.”

Our Kingdom Ministry, March 2015

*Bold added for emphasis
SECTION 4: UNDERSTANDING THE JUDICIAL PROCESS OF JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES

When one of Jehovah’s Witnesses has been accused of, or confesses a sin worthy of, disfellowshipping, reproof, or some sort of counsel, an initial investigation may be conducted; elders then decide if a “judicial committee” is warranted.

This committee consists of three or more elders who hear accusations, confessions, and other such information, and then decide if a person should be disfellowshipped or reproved, or if no action should be taken.

Note some detailed information about the process itself, especially as it applies to cases of child sexual molestation.

A. Confidentiality of Rules Governing Judicial Process

It is important to note that the judicial process of Jehovah’s Witnesses is conducted according to the guidelines set out in the Shepherd Book, and through letters originating from the governing body of the religion; however, only elders are allowed access to this book and other such guidelines.

An August 23, 2010, letter accompanying distribution of the Shepherd Book said:

“We would like to emphasize the importance of keeping these new textbooks secured and confidential, both before and after they are distributed. ... The information is designed for use by the elders only, and other individuals should not have any opportunity to read the information.”

This lack of transparency can result in congregants not understanding the information needed by elders to fully weigh accusations made regarding child sexual abuse, the processes they must go through when bringing about those accusations, or even the purpose of various steps in those processes.

Note the testimony offered by one victim during the Australian RC (Transcript, Day 148, page 15287):

“I remember meeting with the Elders (Dino, Ron and Kevin) by myself on a number of occasions for a couple of hours at a time. On one occasion, they brought my father into the room so that I could tell him...
what I had told the Elders. I cannot recall exactly how many times I had to meet with the Elders. I didn’t want to be there and I felt so uncomfortable. I had nobody to support me. I don’t remember anyone really explaining the purpose of the Committee Meetings to me, but I understood at the time that the Elders were investigating what I had alleged.” (Bold added for emphasis.)

B. Confronting Abuser

Jehovah’s Witnesses are often counseled to speak personally with someone who has committed an offense against them. During the Australian RC, one victim stated in her testimony that the elders instructed her that she needed to first speak directly to her father, her molester, before they could assist.

If elders do become involved in matters between congregants, the religion’s arrangements have required that the accuser face or confront the person whom they are accusing, if there is no confession. This has included allegations of child sex abuse.

From the Shepherd Book, page 72:

“If the accused denies the accusation, the investigating elders should try to arrange a meeting with him and the accuser together. (Note: If the accusation involves child sexual abuse and the victim is currently a minor, the elders should contact the branch office before arranging a meeting with the child and the alleged abuser.)”

Also from pages 89-90:

“The chairman should invite the accused to make a personal statement. If the accused contends that he is innocent, the witnesses to the wrongdoing should be presented and their testimony should be given in the presence of the accused. It is best that the witnesses give their testimony in person. However, it may be that the witnesses live a great distance away or for some reason are not able to be physically present. If so, their testimony may be presented in the hearing of the accused by a secure phone call or perhaps submitted in writing and read to the accused.”

This instruction was modified in the August 1, 2016, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 13:
“Elders should remember that during the investigation process and during the judicial committee process, a victim of child sexual abuse is not required to make her allegation in the presence of the alleged abuser.”

The word “remember” is somewhat deceitful, as this was the first instance of elders being told that accusations did not need to be made in front of the accused.

This new instruction was repeated in the September 1, 2017, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 13:

“During the investigation process and during the judicial committee process, a victim of child sexual abuse is not required to make her allegation in the presence of the alleged abuser.”

The Child Protection handbook states, paragraph 9:

“Elders never require victims of child abuse to present their accusation in the presence of the alleged abuser. However, victims who are now adults may do so, if they wish. ... If a victim prefers, the accusation can be submitted in the form of a written statement.”

C: Support for Victims During Judicial Process

The Shepherd Book instructs that judicial meetings should take place between the accused, their accuser, and elders alone, and noted that moral support should be purposely withheld from those involved in this process; from page 90:

“Observers should not be present for moral support.”

This instruction was only modified in the Child Protection pamphlet, paragraph 9:

“...victims can be accompanied by a confidant of either gender for moral support when presenting their accusation to the elders.”

D: Lack of Questioning Guidelines or Restraint for Elders

As brought out, elders in congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses are always, without exception, men.

During the Australian RC, victims said that having to speak to a panel of all
male elders not only made them uncomfortable, but also resulted in them not disclosing the full extent of their abuse.

From the SSCARC, page 33:

“[Victim] BCB told the Royal Commission that it was very distressing for her to have to discuss her abuse in front of a room full of men, including her abuser. BCB said that she felt unable to report the full extent of Bill Neill’s abuse at the meeting.”

Elders in congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses have no formal training as to rape crisis counseling, child abuse counseling or investigation, psychology, psychotherapy, or any criminal investigations. They are not told what questions to ask, and what questions to avoid, during this entire judicial committee process.

This is despite the fact that questioning children regarding sexual abuse, if not done by a trained professional, may upset the [alleged] victim mentally and emotionally; from the Australian RC (Transcript, Day 148, page 15295):

“I thought that Jehovah and the Elders would protect me and my sisters. Instead I felt that rather than protect me as the victim, the Elders primarily sat in judgment of me and my credibility as a witness.”

Being questioned by an untrained investigator may also contaminate the testimony of a victim, if they were later called on in a court of law.3

Elders are given free reign to ask any question or discuss any type of subject when investigating these abuses. One victim interviewed during the Australian RC stated in her testimony (Transcript, Day 148, page 15288):

“The elders asked me questions like, ‘Did you enjoy it?’ … “At times, it felt as though they were getting off on what I was telling them.”

Responding to children making accusations of sexual abuse is a “specialist area” but roles of elders could not be given up to “a professional outside of the church,” referring to counselors or a psychiatrist, as was testified to during the Australian RC (Transcript, Day 148, page 15241).
E: Lack of Questioning Guidelines or Restraint for Accused

There are no guidelines as to how an accused person may respond to such accusations during the judicial committee process, when such allegations are made in the presence of the accused, or at any other time:

- During the **Australian RC**, one victim who was accusing her father of sexual abuse stated that he became angry and belligerent, and even threatened bodily harm to her during the judicial meeting. The elders present did nothing to stop such threats, until the man began making physical advances toward the girl.4

- In 2014, in the UK, a man by the name of Mark Sewell was being investigated for raping a girl in his local congregation, and, during his judicial committee meeting, it was said that he demanded the girl note how far apart her legs were spread during the alleged attack. This was so that Sewell, a rather large man, could demonstrate with his own wife that he could not have raped her without her legs being even further apart.
  

- In 2014, also in the UK, a man by the name of Jonathan Rose was allowed to “grill” his victims of child sexual assault even after having served time in prison for the offense. It was reported that his victims were asked if they had “enjoyed it at all.”
  
SECTION 4 ENDNOTES

4:1 “What can we do to solve the problem? Matthew 18:15 says: “If your brother commits a sin, go lay bare his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.” Even though Matthew 18:15-17 talks about a serious sin, we could use the principle, or lesson, in verse 15 in other situations. So when we have a problem with someone, it is best to talk to him alone about it. We should talk to our brother kindly and try to have peace with him again.”
August 15, 2011, Watchtower

4:2 Australian RC, Transcript, Day 148, page 15286:
“I also tried speaking to another Elder called Dino Ali. ... Dino said to me, 'No, you have to talk to your father first or he must be present'. I said to him, 'I can't do that'. ... I called Dino to try to talk to him about my father at least twice.”

4:3 “When established protocols are not followed or when real questions arise as to the context of the allegations and the techniques implored in the questioning process, then we as defense lawyers need to consider filing a "taint" motion and seek a hearing to explore whether the complainant’s memory has been so compromised that it is no longer reliable as required by Rule 602 of the Federal Rules of Evidence.” And, “The capacity of a child to tell the truth can be damaged, if not destroyed, through the use of suggestive, leading, and repetitive questions because a child’s memory is so fragile and receptive to undue suggestive questioning techniques and other influences such as domestic proceedings and motivations.” (Bold added for emphasis.)
“Taint Hearings and Strategies in Child Sex Cases”
Jaffe, Hanle, Whisonant, & Knight, P.C.

4:4 Australian RC, Transcript, Day 148, page 15289:
“My father got very angry and said to me, 'I will kill you.' He stood up and started to move towards me, but the Elders stopped him. I felt very intimidated and anxious about the threats that he had made and I didn't feel at all protected by the Elders.”
SECTION 5: THE “TWO WITNESS” RULE

Jehovah’s Witnesses adhere to a “two witness” rule when it comes to acting on accusations of sinful conduct, including child molestation, meaning that they require a second witness to an incident before they will remove an accused (and “unrepentant”) person from their congregation, if the accused person does not confess to the allegations.

From the Shepherd Book, pages 71-72:

“There must be two or three eyewitnesses, not just people repeating hearsay; no action can be taken if there is only one witness. … If the accuser or the accused is unwilling to meet with the elders or if the accused continues to deny the accusation of a single witness and the wrongdoing is not established, the elders will leave matters in Jehovah’s hands.”

From the October 1, 2012, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 11:

“...in evaluating the evidence for internal congregational purposes, [elders] must bear in mind the Bible’s clear direction: “No single witness should rise up against a man respecting any error or any sin ... At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses the matter should stand good.” (Deut. 19:15) This requirement to consider testimony of two or three witnesses was confirmed by Jesus. (Matt. 18:16) Thus, although they investigate every allegation, the elders are not authorized by the Scriptures to take congregational action unless there is a confession or there are two credible witnesses.”

A. Dismissing Witnesses

During the Australian RC, it was revealed that, in one case in particular, four daughters of the same man all said that they had been molested by their father, the man’s wife said that he had confessed to sexually abusing the daughters, and the man himself confessed to the actions. However, elders in the case dismissed the testimony of the family, and the man himself, as being unreliable.1

This would be in direct conflict with their direction that two witnesses can be satisfactory to establish guilt; in this case, there were four victims and two adults (the man and his wife) who testified to his behavior, and the allegations
were still dismissed.

The *Shepherd Book* also allows the testimony of other witnesses to be dismissed by elders; page 72:

> “The testimony of youths may be considered; it is up to the elders to determine whether the testimony has the ring of truth. ... The testimony of unbelievers and disfellowshipped or disassociated ones may also be considered, but it must be weighed carefully.” (Bold added for emphasis.)

### B. Destroying Notes Regarding Past Victims/Allegations

Jehovah’s Witnesses consider a previous witness to, or a past victim of, the same type of wrongdoing as their required “second witness” to a current allegation. From the *Shepherd Book*, pages 71-72:

> “If there are two or three witnesses to the same kind of wrongdoing but each one is witness to a separate incident, the elders can consider their testimony. While such evidence is acceptable to establish guilt, it is preferable to have two witnesses to the same occurrence of wrongdoing.”

Watchtower has given elders some instruction regarding retaining records of allegations of child sexual abuse; note the **August 1, 2016, letter** to all elders worldwide, paragraph 20:

> “Filing: Information concerning individuals associated with the congregation and accused of child sexual abuse (established or not), including letters of introduction, should be placed in an envelope labeled with the individual’s name and marked “Do Not Destroy.” This envelope should be kept indefinitely in the congregation’s confidential file. This would include Notification of Disfellowshipping or Disassociation (S-77) forms on individuals who have committed child sexual abuse, even if later reinstated.”

Also, the **September 1, 2017, letter** to all elders worldwide, paragraph 20:

> “Filing: Information concerning individuals associated with the congregation and accused of child sexual abuse (established or not), including letters of introduction, should be placed in an envelope labeled with the individual’s name and marked “Do Not Destroy.” This
envelope should be kept in the congregation’s confidential file. This would include Notification of Disfellowshipping or Disassociation (S-77) forms on individuals who have committed child sexual abuse, even if later reinstated.”

Despite this direction, during the Australian RC, it was revealed that congregation elders habitually destroyed their own notes and records regarding allegations of various sins, including child sexual abuse.²

Also, in November of 2015, elders in congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses received notice that they should perform an “Audit of File.” (A copy of this instruction is attached at the end of this section.)

This Audit of File said that elders should destroy from their personal files:

“All agendas and minutes of elders’ meetings (other than business meeting minutes). …
All personal notes taken at elders’ meetings (except those based on discussions of outlines from “the faithful and discreet slave” and that do not mention any particular individual). …
Any other personal records, notes, or correspondence that refer to particular individuals. …”

Notably, this Audit of File instruction was distributed after the UK Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse [IICSA] (https://www.iicsa.org.uk/) issued “retention instructions” on August 19, 2015, that said, in part:

“The Inquiry has issued retention instructions to a range of institutions requesting the preservation of all records relating to the care of children so that they remain available for inspection by the Inquiry …
It is also an offence for a person, during the course of an Inquiry, to destroy, alter or tamper with evidence that may be relevant to an Inquiry, or deliberately to do an act with the intention of suppressing evidence or preventing it being disclosed to the Inquiry …
Institutions therefore have an obligation to preserve records for the Inquiry for as long as necessary to assist the Inquiry.”³

BBC’s Radio 4 program for Sunday, February 14, 2016, featured a 10-minute segment regarding this issue. The host noted that any concerns a congregation may have about their records “are trumped” by the order from the Inquiry. He also asked, “Why then were Jehovah’s Witnesses told last year to destroy all those
documents by the end of December?” A legal analyst on the program was also quoted as saying, “It looks as if the Jehovah’s Witnesses have a certain amount of explaining to do.”

This habitual and purposeful destroying of notes all but eliminates any opportunity elders have to compare previous allegations of child sexual assault with current allegations. In turn, this necessary “second witness” to the “same type of wrongdoing” would not be discovered.

See also Section 6: When the Accused Moves To a New Congregation, for additional instructions given to elders regarding whether or not they should forward allegations of child sex abuse to a new congregation when an accused person moves.

C. Hypocrisy of Judging Adult Rape Victims and Potential “Fornicators”

While Jehovah’s Witnesses state that “no action can be taken if there is only one witness,” note their direction to elders when it comes to cases of “porneia,” or sexual immorality, in the Shepherd Book, page 59:

“One who was raped would not be guilty of porneia. Discernment is needed in considering claims of rape, taking into consideration such factors as the mental disposition of the person, the circumstances that led up to the incident, and any delay in reporting.” (Bold added for emphasis.)

The July, 2018, Watchtower study edition, in a “Question From Readers” section posed the question, “If an unmarried couple spend the night together under improper circumstances, would that constitute a sin meriting judicial action?”

The response said, in part, that “a judicial committee would be formed on the basis of strong circumstantial evidence of sexual immorality.” (Bold added for emphasis.)

The point being, Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that there is scriptural precedent for requiring two witnesses to any accusation against another person, including cases of child sexual abuse, in order to take judicial action against the accused.
However, elders are also told to use “discernment” in taking into account claims of an adult woman being raped, without requiring two witnesses to her conduct or to the incident in question.

Elders are also told to judge the case of two adults who spent the night under “improper circumstances” based on “circumstantial evidence” of the case, not based on two witnesses to their conduct.
SECTION 5 ENDNOTES

5:1 **SSCARC**, page 44:
“[Abuse victim] BCG said that although she told the elders about her sisters’ sexual abuse allegations against BCH [her father and molester], the elders did not take those allegations into account in their consideration of BCG’s allegation against BCH. BCG said that [elder] Mr. De Rooy told her that the elders could not consider the evidence of her sisters’ abuse as they were too young to know what they were talking about and were not witnesses to the ‘same event’.”

5:2 **Australian RC**, Transcript, Day 147, page 15185:
“There are brief notes kept in the file, but all other notes are destroyed. ... we don’t want them to fall into the wrong hands and other people to find them and they go through them.”


5:4 [http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0709v34](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0709v34)
2015 CHECKLIST FOR AUDIT OF FILE

The Congregation Service Committee should carry out this audit before December 31, 2015.

Everything stated below relates to information stored on paper or electronically.

Tick the boxes as you accomplish each task.

☐ Check with all elders to confirm that each one has destroyed from his personal files:
  • All agendas and minutes of elders’ meetings (other than business meeting minutes). Note:
    No elder should be given a personal copy of elders’ meeting minutes. Checking for minutes
    has been included in case there has been an oversight in this regard and an elder has a
    set of minutes in his possession in error.
  • All personal notes taken at elders’ meetings (except those based on discussions of outlines
    from “the faithful and discreet slave” and that do not mention any particular individual).
  • Any other personal records, notes, or correspondence that refer to particular individuals. If
    an elder believes something needs to be retained in the congregation file he should hand it
    to the Congregation Service Committee.

The above three points do not apply to the congregation file.

THE FOLLOWING APPLIES TO THE CONGREGATION FILE:

☐ Make sure that judicial records are in line with direction found in the following references: *ks10*
  2:16, points 2, 3; 2:21, point 8; 5:39, 41, 62; 7:34; 9:2, 3.

☐ Make sure all records relating to child molestation are in harmony with *ks10* 2:16, point 3, and
  5:39.

☐ Destroy all agendas of elders’ meetings. Make sure that minutes are no more than simple notes
  of decisions in line with *ks10* 2:6.

☐ Check the file to make sure that it does not contain any unnecessary letters or documents.

_________________________  __________________________  __________________________  __________________________
Date                      Coordinator of the body of elders  Secretary  Service overseer

DO NOT SEND THIS FORM TO THE BRANCH OFFICE. Make it available to the circuit
overseer with the congregation file for his inspection during his visit that falls between February
and August.
SECTION 6: WHEN THE ACCUSED MOVES TO A NEW CONGREGATION

The following instructions were given to elders for when an accused child molester moves to a different congregation, from the Shepherd Book, pages 132-133:

“In a case in which a brother denies an allegation of child abuse and he has been accused by only one witness, the following direction is given if he moves to another congregation. The elders should consult the branch office before sending any information regarding the accusation to the elders in the new congregation. It would be helpful if your letter to the branch office provided a detailed summary of the matter and explained the spiritual condition and personal circumstances of the accused and the accuser. With regard to the accused, the following questions should be answered: (1) What is his interaction with children? (2) Does he admit to any activity with the accuser that could have been misinterpreted by the accuser as sexual abuse, or does he claim to have a poor memory of the accusation? (3) What is his response to why the accuser has made the allegation? (4) Has he had to be counseled for any other matters of a sexual nature, such as inappropriate conduct with adult sisters or pornography? (5) What is the level of his spirituality? (6) Do all the elders on the body believe that he can be trusted with children? The following questions should be answered with regard to the accuser: (1) What is the level of maturity of the child or youth? (2) Is he (or she) describing conduct that one his age would not normally know about? (3) Is the child or his parents known to be serious, mature? (4) Is his memory consistent, or is it intermittent, or does it involve repressed memories? (5) What is the reputation of the parents? (6) Are they spiritually and emotionally mature? After carefully considering the matter, the branch office will then give you direction as to what information about the allegation should be shared, if any, with the elders of the new congregation.”

Note a few key points from these instructions:

- “Does he admit to any activity with the accuser that could have been misinterpreted by the accuser as sexual abuse...”

It is immediately suggested that children may misinterpret actions of the accused as being sexual molestation. As said, elders of Jehovah’s Witnesses have no formal training in child psychology or criminology so as to be able to discern this.

- “...inappropriate conduct with adult sisters or pornography?”
Sexual relations with adults and viewing of pornography in and of themselves are not indicators of potential danger to children; only the viewing of child pornography would indicate a risk factor for pedophilia.

- “What is the level of his spirituality?”

A person’s activities within a religion are not in and of themselves indicators of potential danger to children, or lack thereof. If the majority of elders feel that the accused is very “spiritual,” this may simply indicate that a molester has been successful in “grooming” their victims or in deceiving other adults as to their overall nature and personality.

Note The National Association of Adult Survivors of Child Abuse, regarding this process of grooming:

> “Many pedophiles are extremely clever, often charming, patient people, frequently thought of as among the most valued of community members. That’s because they spend a lot of time grooming the parents, friends and neighbors of the children around them.”

- “What is the level of maturity of the child or youth?”

This question is ambiguous; note, too, that a child who is relatively immature may not be offering incorrect, dishonest, or untrustworthy testimony regarding sexual abuse.

- “Is the child or his parents known to be serious, mature?”

The maturity level, spirituality, and seriousness of the parents are not a determining factor for discerning allegations of child molestation. The “seriousness” of a child or his parents is also ambiguous, and is not a determining factor for discerning allegations of molestation.

- “Is his memory consistent, or is it intermittent, or does it involve repressed memories?”

Only trained experts can and should evaluate memories of traumatic events, as studies suggest that these may not always be consistent, even though they may be reliable.

There is also debate among experts as to the subject of repressed memories and if “guided imagery” may be a contributing factor; this, too, is why such questioning
is best left to trained professionals who can discern the trustworthiness of a child’s memories.

- “What is the reputation of the parents?”

This question endorses hearsay and gossip, and leaves the elders open to involve their own opinion of the parents; as stated above, a parent’s reputation may also have little to no bearing on the trustworthiness of a child’s statements.

- “Are they spiritually and emotionally mature?”

Children in families where one or both parents experience mental health challenges are actually at an elevated risk for abuse. Such families might be discriminated against while the children remain at a higher risk of continued abuse.

These directions offer the potential that information regarding child sex abuse allegations are not shared with a new congregation when an alleged abuser moves. In turn, parents in the new congregation would not be alerted as to the allegations against a potential pedophile.

This also eliminates the possibility of elders acting on their own counsel of needing a second witness to the same conduct, if elders in the second congregation are not told that a person faced allegations of the same conduct in their previous congregation.

The August 1, 2016, letter to all elders worldwide modified this instruction. That letter instructs two elders from the individual’s current congregation to call the Legal Department of the branch office when such an individual moves to a new congregation; from paragraph 21:

“Moving to Another Congregation: When an individual who has been accused of child sexual abuse (established or not) moves to another congregation, two elders from the congregation the individual moves from should immediately call the Legal Department. The elders should be prepared to provide the name of the new congregation, if known. …”
And:

“The Congregation Service Committee should not send any information to the new congregation until after receiving legal advice from the Legal Department and direction from the Service Department.”

This letter also instructed elders to “cross out” the information stated above in their copy of the Shepherd Book.

Note, this letter does not state what information or criteria elders would receive to determine whether or not such allegations would be forwarded to a new congregation; this same criteria may very well be followed or advised, only with less transparency.
SECTION 6 ENDNOTES

6:1  http://naasca.org/2012-Articles/040512-GroomingWillingVictims.htm


6:3  McNally, Richard J., Department of Psychology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts  
http://www.psychologicalscience.org/journals/cd/12_1/McNally.cfm

6:4  Australian Institute of Family Studies, NCPC Issues No. 33 – December 2010:  
“Children are also at risk of sexual abuse from extra-familial perpetrators, especially when the child is at risk of supervisory neglect.”  

6:5  National Association of Adult Survivors of Childhood Abuse: 
“Children from broken homes and troubled families are easy targets. The more unlovable the child feels and appears, the less likely the child is to tell on someone who displays love and the less likely anyone is to believe the child if the child ever tells.”  
http://naasca.org/2012-Articles/040512-GroomingWillingVictims.htm
SECTION 7: PEDOPHILIA AS A “SIN”

Jehovah’s Witnesses have referred to child molestation as a “sin,” equivalent to adultery, fornication, and other forms of immorality. As examples (bold added for emphasis):

“Shocking as it is, even some who have been prominent in Jehovah’s organization have succumbed to immoral practices, including homosexuality, wife swapping, and child molesting.” (Bold added for emphasis.)
January 1, 1986, Watchtower

And:

“Child sexual abuse reveals an unnatural fleshly weakness. Experience has shown that such an adult may well molest other children. True, not every child molester repeats the sin, but many do. And the congregation cannot read hearts to tell who is and who is not liable to molest children again. (Jeremiah 17:9) Hence, Paul’s counsel to Timothy applies with special force in the case of baptized adults who have molested children: ‘Never lay your hands hastily upon any man; neither be a sharer in the sins of others.’ (1 Timothy 5:22).” (Bold added for emphasis.)
January 1, 1997, Watchtower

Also, a December 3, 1993, letter from the religion’s headquarters to elders in a congregation in California addressed the situation of a man, Jonathan Kendrick, who had been caught fondling his teenage stepdaughter’s breasts while she slept. The instructions for handling this situation stated, in part:

“Uncleanness includes an intentional momentary touching of sexual parts or caressing of breasts. Such minor uncleanness can be handled at the discretion of an elder or two; it does not require a judicial committee hearing.” (Bold added for emphasis.)

See the end of this section for a copy of that letter in full.

A. “Repentant” Molesters in Congregation

Because child molestation is considered a sin from a congregation’s point of view,
those who have been found guilty of this conduct through the internal judicial committee process may be deemed “repentant.” In turn, they would not be removed from the congregation. Someone who has been disfellowshipped for these actions can also be deemed repentant at a later date and then reinstated back into the congregation.

From the **October 1, 2012, letter** to all elders worldwide, paragraph 12:

>“Loving elders should take steps to protect children, especially when a judicial committee determines that the one who has sexually abused a child is repentant and will be allowed to remain a member of the Christian congregation. The same concern would be shown when one who has sexually abused a child is disfellowshipped, later cleans up his life, and is reinstated.”

From the **August 1, 2016, letter** to all elders worldwide and the **September 1, 2017, letter** to all elders worldwide, paragraph 14 of both letters:

>“On the other hand, if the wrongdoer is repentant and is reproved, the reproof should be announced to the congregation.”

**B. Confidentiality Granted to Known Child Molesters**

If “repentant” child molesters are allowed to remain in the congregation, no information is given to other congregants; as mentioned in section 3:D, a public “reproof” to the congregation simply states that “so-and-so has been reproved,” with no mention of their sinful conduct.

The only slight exception to this is noted in the **October 1, 2012, letter** to all elders worldwide, paragraph 22:

>“Not every individual who has sexually abused a child in the past is considered a “predator.” The branch office, not the local body of elders, determines whether an individual who has sexually abused children in the past will be considered a “predator.” **If the branch office determines that an individual will be considered a “predator,” parents with minor children will need to be warned of the danger that exists so that they can protect their children. In such a case, and only after receiving direction and instructions from the Service Department, two elders should be assigned to meet with the parents of minor children in order to provide a warning.**” (Bold and underline added for emphasis.)
The August 1, 2016, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 18, reiterated this information:

“In some cases, the Service Department may specifically direct elders to inform parents of minors within the congregation of the need to monitor their children’s interaction with an individual.” (Bold added for emphasis.)

The September 1, 2017, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 18, also emphasized this point:

“The Service Department will direct the elders to inform family heads of minors within the congregation of the need to monitor their children’s interaction with the individual. The elders would take this step only if directed to do so by the Service Department.” (Bold added for emphasis.)

Note:

- Only when elders are directed by a branch office will a warning be given to any congregation member regarding allegations or proven cases of child sexual molestation. This branch office relies on information provided by local elders; the branch itself may not even be located in the same country as the individual in question, much less will persons from that branch know the [alleged] abuser in question.

- If a warning is given, only parents of “minor children” and “minors” are included. This information is ambiguous, as it doesn’t state if this refers to the legal definition of “minor.” Elders may, at their discretion, assume that “minor children” refers to preteens, perhaps assuming that older children are not at risk from a sexual predator.

- As only parents of minor children may be warned, this can put other children at risk. As an example, a childless woman may begin to unwittingly date a child molester in her congregation, not being warned of his past behavior; this would put her underage relatives and non-familial children at risk of becoming victims of his behavior. Should the couple marry and have children of their own, those children might also be at risk for becoming victims of molestation.
BODY OF ELDERS
NORTH CONGREGATION OF
JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES, FREMONT, CA
C/O MICHAEL J CLARKE
32852 BASS LAKE ST
FREMONT CA  94536

Dear Brothers:

Your letter dated November 15, 1993, has been received. As you will note from the enclosed S-52 form, Brother Jonathan Kendrick has been deleted from serving as a ministerial servant on the grounds of "uncleanness."

Your letter states: "He confessed to touching the breasts of his stepdaughter while she was sleeping. She was awakened instantly and knew what had happened." Since this incident is known by outside members of the family, it is appropriate that Brother Kendrick be deleted from serving as a ministerial servant with your congregation.

On page 92 of the Kingdom Ministry School textbook the following is stated: "Uncleanness includes an intentional momentary touching of sexual parts or caressing of breasts. Such minor uncleanness can be handled at the discretion of an elder or two; it does not require a judicial hearing. There is a need for strong counsel, admonition, and assistance to help the individual to maintain chaste conduct in the future."

In harmony with the above, it will not be necessary for a judicial committee to handle the "uncleanness" committed by Brother Kendrick. However, it would be appropriate for two elders to meet with him and provide him with strong Scriptural counsel so as to avoid a repetition of such a serious offense.

We trust the above comments will be helpful to you. With this letter we are pleased to send you an expression of our warm Christian love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

[Signature]

cc: R. Rainer, CA #40

[Signature]

OF NEW YORK, INC.
SECTION 8: LACK OF REPORTING

Jehovah’s Witnesses report accusations of child molestation to law enforcement only when required by law.

The October 1, 2012, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 4:

“Most states have child-abuse reporting laws that, depending on the facts, mandate elders to report an accusation to the authorities. Thus, when elders learn of an accusation of child abuse, two elders from their congregation should immediately call the Legal Department for legal advice.”

The August 1, 2016, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraphs 5-6:

“In some jurisdictions, individuals who learn of an allegation of child abuse may be obligated by law to report the allegation to the secular authorities. ... To ensure that elders comply with child-abuse reporting laws, two elders should immediately call the Legal Department for legal advice when the elders learn of an accusation of child abuse.”

The September 1, 2017 letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 5-6:

“In some jurisdictions, individuals who learn of an allegation of child abuse may be obligated by law to report the allegation to the secular authorities. ... To ensure that elders comply with child-abuse reporting laws, two elders should immediately call the Legal Department at the branch office for legal advice when the elders learn of an accusation of child abuse. A call should be made even when both persons involved are minors.”

Note that elders are instructed to first call the Legal Department of their local branch office for legal advice; they are not instructed to immediately call the police and report this crime.

A: Australian RC Findings Regarding Reporting

Note one key finding from the Australian RC regarding the failure of elders to report allegations of child sexual abuse to law enforcement; from the SSCARC, page 22:
“Since 1950, the Jehovah’s Witness organisation in Australia has received allegations of child sexual abuse against 1,006 of its members relating to at least 1,800 victims, and has in that period not reported a single allegation to the police or other authorities, even though 579 of those against whom allegations were made confessed to having committed child sexual abuse.”

Note, however, that these numbers only include allegations recorded by elders; as said in section 4:B, one victim of abuse was repeatedly “rebuffed” by local elders, being told that she needed to speak to her father, her molester, on her own before they could intervene.

**B: Threats to Victims Regarding Reporting**

Elders in the religion of Jehovah’s Witnesses have been given the following instructions regarding victims reporting these incidents to law enforcement:

*Shepherd Book*, pages 131-132:

> “Child abuse is a crime. Never suggest to anyone that they should not report an allegation of child abuse to the police or other authorities. If you are asked, make it clear that whether to report the matter to the authorities or not is a personal decision for each individual to make and that there are no congregation sanctions for either decision. Elders will not criticize anyone who reports such an allegation to the authorities. If the victim wishes to make a report, it is his or her absolute right to do so.”

August 1, 2016, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 5:

> “In all cases, the victim and her parents have the absolute right to report an allegation to the authorities.”

September 1, 2017, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 3:

> “Therefore, the victim, her parents, or anyone else who reports such an allegation to the elders should be clearly informed that they have the right to report the matter to the secular authorities. Elders do not criticize anyone who chooses to make such a report.”

The *Child Protection* pamphlet, paragraph 4:
“In all cases, victims and their parents have the right to report an accusation of child abuse to the authorities. Therefore, victims, their parents, or anyone else who reports such an accusation to the elders are clearly informed by the elders that they have the right to report the matter to the authorities. Elders do not criticize anyone who chooses to make such a report.—Galatians 6:5.”

These instructions, to not criticize those who wish to report and to proactively inform victims and/or parents that they have the right to report, are new to these correspondences. Note one victim’s testimony during the Australian RC (Transcript, Day 148, page 15291):

“After [elder] Ron de Rooy told me about my father’s reinstatement, I said to Ron, ‘Well, I want to take it to the police because the congregation is not safe. Children are at risk.’ Ron replied to me, ‘He is now a Brother again’ and he quoted me the scripture that says that we don’t take brothers to court. Ron said to me, ‘So if you take it to the police, you will bring reproach upon Jehovah’s name and you can be disfellowshipped for doing that.’”

Note also these instructions given to elders, in the Shepherd Book, page 133:

“At 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, the apostle Paul gave strong counsel that Christians should not take other Christians before secular courts to settle personal disputes that should be settled with the help of the congregation elders ... If an individual ignores God’s Word on this matter, it may affect his congregation privileges.”

While elders may not always officially “criticize” or “sanction” anyone who decides to report child molestation accusations to secular authorities, this directive may be the guidance they give an individual who approaches them for advice about reporting. In turn, this may result in many cases of child molestation not being reported to police.

Victims and even elders themselves have also made statements to media outlets about such prohibitions on reporting; from the Telegraph UK, November 20, 2017, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/20/jehovahs-witnesses-claim-told-not-report-child-sex-abuse-organisation/:

“...Louise Palmer ... said that she had been told not to report being raped by her brother, Richard Davenport, who was also a Jehovah’s
Witness. Ms Palmer ... said she was discouraged from alerting the authorities by members of the organisation. Davenport was eventually jailed for 14 years in 2014, later reduced to ten. ... “Their words were that they strongly advised me not to go to the police because it would bring reproach on Jehovah.”


“A former elder, who was asked to investigate a child abuse case in 2007, claimed he was urged not to contact the police, although it was decided that the perpetrator should not be assigned to work with children. ... However, the then elder – who left in 2012 over how the case was handled – said that this rule was not followed by everyone and when he raised this as a concern he was told to back off.”

C. Destroying Notes and Records of Confession

As brought out in Section 5:B, elders may destroy notes and files that contain records of child sexual abuse allegations. This may include confessions heard from the accused.

This destroying of records might also be considered a lack of reporting; if a victim were to report their allegations of abuse to authorities, those records of the accused person’s confession to elders would not be available as evidence in any subsequent criminal case.
SECTION 9: PUTTING KNOWN PEDOPHILES IN POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY

Known pedophiles may be given positions of authority or privileges in the congregation. While Jehovah’s Witnesses have changed their stance on this practice over the years, they have never said that a child molester may not have authority over others in the congregation.

The *October 1, 2012, letter* to all elders worldwide, paragraph 22:

> “It cannot be said in every case that one who has sexually abused a child could never qualify for privileges of service in the congregation. However, the elders will certainly want to be very cautious, especially when dealing with one who had repeatedly engaged in this kind of wrongdoing or who had been disfellowshipped for such an offense. Before privileges can be extended, such a man must meet the Scriptural qualifications of being “self-controlled” and “irreprehensible.” He must “also have a fine testimony” from individuals inside and outside the congregation. (Titus 1:6-8; 1 Tim. 3:2, 7) Elders should keep in mind what is stated in the January 1, 1997, Watchtower article “Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked,” page 29, paragraph 2: “Child sexual abuse reveals an unnatural fleshly weakness. Experience has shown that such an adult may well molest other children. True, not every child molester repeats the sin, but many do. And the congregation cannot read hearts to tell who is and who is not liable to molest children again. (Jeremiah 17:9) Hence, Paul’s counsel to Timothy applies with special force in the case of baptized adults who have molested children: ‘Never lay your hands hastily upon any man; neither be a sharer in the sins of others.’ (1 Timothy 5:22).”

Hence, privileges of service should never be extended hastily. *Considerable time should always pass before one who has sexually abused a child is recommended, if ever.* It would be up to the local body of elders to determine whether such a recommendation should be made to the branch office, taking into account all factors in each individual case.” (Bold added for emphasis)

The *August 1, 2016, letter* to all elders worldwide, paragraph 19:

> “One who has engaged in child sexual abuse does not qualify to
receive any privileges in the congregation for many years, if ever. This includes seemingly minor privileges. Therefore, if the body of elders believes that one who has engaged in child sexual abuse decades ago may now qualify for minor privileges, such as carrying or adjusting microphones, operating audio/video equipment, or assisting with accounts, literature, magazines, or territories, they should assign two elders to call the Service Department. The assigned elders should call the Service Department before any congregation privileges are extended.” (Bold added for emphasis.)

The September 1, 2017, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 19:

“One who has engaged in child sexual abuse does not qualify to receive any privileges in the congregation for many years, if ever; this includes minor privileges. Therefore, if the body of elders believes that one who has engaged in child sexual abuse decades ago may now qualify for minor privileges, such as carrying or adjusting microphones, operating audio/video equipment, or assisting with accounts, literature, magazines, or territories, they should assign two elders to call the Service Department. The assigned elders should call the Service Department before any congregation privileges are extended.” (Bold added for emphasis.)

The Child Protection pamphlet, paragraph 12:

“A person who has engaged in child sexual abuse does not qualify to receive any congregation privileges or to serve in a position of responsibility in the congregation for decades, if ever. —1 Timothy 3:1-7, 10; 5:22; Titus 1:7.”

Note that it is stated that a man who has sexually abused a child could be given positions of authority or privileges in the congregation.

Those with authority in the congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses can have a great impact on other members; as said, congregants may defer their own opinions and obey these men and their counsel, direction, or opinions. Please see Section 3:B for more information.

As congregation members are outright directed to be obedient to local elders, this can create difficulties in protecting children from pedophiles. For example, a man may use his position as an elder to “groom” a prospective victim, insisting that a child accompany him in the religion’s preaching work or come to his home under
the pretense of studying the bible together. Unsuspecting parents, or even those warned about the molester’s past behavior, may accommodate the elder’s wishes, in order to be obedient to his authority, as instructed.

This position of authority in the congregation may also make it very difficult for victims to discuss their abuse or make allegations heard. Note one victim’s testimony during the Australian RC, regarding an elder who was sexually abusing her (Transcript, Day 147, page 15159):

“"I respected Bill because he was an elder. He was also [BCE]'s dad and head of the Neill household. But I had also come to fear him. Because of his position as an elder, I felt that I couldn't tell anyone about what he was doing to me. I felt that if I told someone, it would upset Bronwyn [the man’s wife] and [BCE] as well as the members of the congregation."
SECTION 10: MINORS “CONSENTING” TO SEXUAL CONDUCT WITH ADULTS

Note the following instructions to elders regarding allegations of child sexual abuse; from the October 1, 2012, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 8:

“We are not discussing a situation wherein a minor who is a willing participant and who is approaching adulthood has sexual relations with an adult who is a few years older than the minor nor, generally speaking, are we discussing situations in which only minors are involved.”

From the August 1, 2016, letter to all elders worldwide, and the September 1, 2017, letter to all elders worldwide, paragraph 10 of both letters:

“When discussing child sexual abuse from a congregation standpoint, we are not discussing a situation in which a minor who is a willing participant and who is approaching adulthood is involved in sexual activity with an adult who is a few years older than the minor.”

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

“Only 12 states have a single age of consent, below which an individual cannot consent to sexual intercourse under any circumstances, and above which it is legal to engage in sexual intercourse with another person above the age of consent. ... In the remaining 39 states, other factors come into play: age differentials, minimum age of the victim, and minimum age of the defendant.”


Despite these variables that may affect the criminality of child molestation, there is no further information provided to elders regarding the relevant ages of victims and defendants. In turn, it may be possible for elders to take it upon themselves to assume the meaning of the term “minor ... approaching adulthood” and “a few years older,” and they may fail to call their Legal Department to receive instruction about notifying authorities in these cases.

Note, also, that this may overlook the “grooming” process followed by many child
molesters, as explained by the National Center for Victims of Crime, from this website, https://victimsofcrime.org/media/reporting-on-child-sexual-abuse/grooming-dynamic-of-csa:

“Perpetrators of child sexual abuse (CSA) may gain the trust of potential child victims and their caregivers by methodically “grooming” them. ... A perpetrator may manipulate and use those power differences to gain the youth’s trust and confidence, ... Perpetrators may offer the victims special attention, understanding and a sympathetic ear, and then engage the child in ways that eventually gain their friendship and trust ... The perpetrator may reinforce the special connection with the victim when they are alone or through private communication with the victim ...” (Bold added for emphasis.)

Suggesting that a minor may be a “willing participant” to their sexual abuse does not allow for this grooming process, wherein a child molester manipulates and exploits the minor and his or her vulnerabilities and sexual inexperience, and may convince the minor that he or she somehow consented to their sexual contact.

Also, this instruction or caveat may allow elders to question victims of alleged abuse in order to “look for” supposed signs of such willingness, or to even outright suggest to the minor that he or she consented to the contact. In turn, minors may be subject to disfellowshipping and subsequent shunning, if elders deem them as being “willing.”
SECTION 11: “JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES’ SCRIPTURALLY BASED POSITION ON CHILD PROTECTION”

In April of 2018, Jehovah’s Witnesses released an information packet titled, “Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Scripturally Based Position on Child Protection,” through the Legal Resources page of their website.

That web page says, “The welfare of children is of utmost concern to Jehovah’s Witnesses. This document provides an explanation of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ response to allegations of child abuse.”

Note the information presented in this packet and a response:

“1. Children are a sacred trust, “an inheritance from Jehovah.”—Psalm 127:3.”

“2. The protection of children is of utmost concern and importance to all Jehovah’s Witnesses. This is in harmony with the long-standing and widely published Scripturally based position of Jehovah’s Witnesses, as reflected in the references at the end of this document, which are all published on jw.org.”

A) Jehovah’s Witness elders are instructed to call their branch office when presented with allegations of child sex abuse, to be advised if they are legally obligated to notify authorities; many areas of the world do not have mandatory reporting laws, and such laws can sometimes be set aside in favor of clergy-penitent privilege. In turn, the vast majority of these allegations are not reported to authorities by elders. See Section 8: Lack of Reporting for more information. This betrays the claim that “protection of children is of utmost concern and importance.”

B) Jehovah’s Witnesses allow corporal punishment for children, and personal stories of beatings and other such “discipline” abound in the religion, also betraying their claim that “protection of children is of utmost concern.” See Section 3:G for more information.

C) As a minor child can be disfellowshipped and face shunning, even while still living at home, this betrays the claim that children are a “sacred trust.”

“3. Jehovah’s Witnesses abhor child abuse and view it as a crime.”
(Romans 12:9) We recognize that the authorities are responsible for addressing such crimes. (Romans 13:1-4) The elders do not shield any perpetrator of child abuse from the authorities.”

A) While the Shepherd Book referred to child abuse as a crime, the October 1, 2012, letter to all Jehovah’s Witness elders worldwide, and the August 1, 2016, letter to all Jehovah’s Witness elders worldwide, regarding the sexual abuse of children, refer to this conduct as a “sin” and not a crime. See Section 7: Pedophilia as a Sin for more information.

B) “Elders do not shield any perpetrator of child abuse from the authorities” is demonstrably false:


California’s Superior Court levied a $4000 sanction against Watchtower for every day they refused to comply with the order.

For some two years, Watchtower continued to defy the court and refused to produce these records; instead, Watchtower appealed this sanction several times, eventually settling with the plaintiffs and terminating the sanction. This betrays their claim that the religion “does not shield perpetrators of child abuse from authorities.”

C) Phoning the branch office to be informed if an elder is legally obligated to report an allegation of abuse also betrays the claim that elders do not shield a perpetrator from the consequences of their actions. By withholding information about such allegations from authorities, elders are, in effect, shielding that person from the potential legal consequences of their actions.

“4. In all cases, victims and their parents have the right to report an accusation of child abuse to the authorities. Therefore, victims, their parents, or anyone else who reports such an accusation to the elders are clearly informed by the elders that they have the right to report the matter to the authorities. Elders do not criticize anyone who chooses to make such a report.—Galatians 6:5.”

A) During the Australian RC, it was revealed that elders threatened a victim of
child sex abuse, who wanted to report the abuse to authorities, with disfellowshipping. (Transcript, Day 148, page 15291):

“After [elder] Ron de Rooy told me about my father’s reinstatement, I said to Ron, ‘Well, I want to take it to the police because the congregation is not safe. Children are at risk.’ Ron replied to me, ‘He is now a Brother again’ and he quoted me the scripture that says that we don’t take brothers to court. Ron said to me, ‘So if you take it to the police, you will bring reproach upon Jehovah’s name and you can be disfellowshipped for doing that.’”

See also Section 8: Lack of Reporting.

B) The instructions for elders to notify victims and parents that they have the right to inform only first appeared in the September 1, 2017, letter to elders.

“5. When elders learn of an accusation of child abuse, they immediately consult with the branch office of Jehovah’s Witnesses to ensure compliance with child abuse reporting laws. (Romans 13:1) Even if the elders have no legal duty to report an accusation to the authorities, the branch office of Jehovah’s Witnesses will instruct the elders to report the matter if a minor is still in danger of abuse or there is some other valid reason. Elders also ensure that the victim’s parents are informed of an accusation of child abuse. If the alleged abuser is one of the victim’s parents, the elders will inform the other parent.”

A) “Compliance with child abuse reporting laws” is of no consequence if there are no such mandatory laws in a particular area. Failure to report abuse for any reason does nothing to protect potential victims from the alleged abuser.

B) Elders in local congregations, and representatives at the branch office of Jehovah’s Witnesses, are in no position to determine if a child is still in danger of abuse; this is a matter best left to properly trained authorities.

C) Instructions to inform a second parent has never been included in any letters to elders, or elsewhere.

D) If an abuser is the victim’s parent, reporting the matter to a second parent may do little to protect the child if the second parent:
   1) doesn’t believe the child
   2) is a victim of abuse themselves and is afraid of reporting the matter to authorities or of confronting the abusing parent
3) is not mentally and emotionally capable of reporting the abuse and protecting the child
4) would be afraid of their spouse leaving them and withdrawing financial support because of reporting, and so refuses to report
5) already knows of the abuse and is complacent or complicit

E) The religion of Jehovah’s Witnesses requires women to be “submissive” and “obedient” to husbands, even if he is physically abusive, so that a mother may feel it is not her place to defy her husband and report his abuse. See Section 3:H for more information.

“6. Parents have the primary responsibility for the protection, safety, and instruction of their children. Therefore, parents who are members of the congregation are encouraged to be vigilant in exercising their responsibility at all times and to do the following:
• Have direct and active involvement in their children’s lives.
• Educate themselves and their children about child abuse.
• Encourage, promote, and maintain regular communication with their children. —Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; Proverbs 22:3.
Jehovah’s Witnesses publish an abundance of Bible-based information to assist parents to fulfill their responsibility to protect and instruct their children.”

While protecting children is primarily the responsibility of the parents, any organization or religion that:
  a) brings strangers into direct contact with children, such as through bible studies and preaching activities apart from their parents, and therefore exposes them to the risk of being abused by those strangers
  b) teaches parents and children that they are required to “be obedient” and “submissive” to other individuals in the organization, even if they disagree with these ones or are being abused by that person (as in the case of elders or abusive husbands)
  c) teaches congregants that those outside the organization or religion are bad or not to be trusted for any reason
  d) has put known abusers in positions of authority over others
  e) requires victims of abuse to discuss that abuse in detail with untrained, unqualified, often unsympathetic men
  f) requires its members to be in consistent contact with other members, even members who are alleged or known child molesters
  g) fails to adequately warn members of their organization of any credible danger to their children from other members
  h) threatens members who do not stringently obey all that is required of
them with shunning, including minor children and including being shunned by their own family members, must also bear responsibility for the consequences of their own actions.

“7. Congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses do not separate children from their parents for the purpose of instruction or other activities. (Ephesians 6:4) For example, our congregations do not provide or sponsor orphanages, Sunday schools, sports clubs, day-care centers, youth groups, or other activities that separate children from their parents.”

This is demonstrably false:

A) Congregation members who wish to engage in the religion’s preaching activity will meet in one large group, often at a Kingdom Hall of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and smaller car groups are then arranged. A man in the congregation will typically have oversight as to how these smaller car groups are formed, and he can readily ask that a certain child accompany him in his car, separate from his or her parents.

B) A congregant, especially an elder, may offer to study the bible with a child, separate from his or her parents. As congregation members trust other members, and are outright told to be obedient to elders especially, a parent may not hesitate to allow their child to be alone with another congregation member for these and other such occasions.

C) When someone wishes to be baptized as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, they meet alone with an elder to cover a series of questions, to ensure that person “qualifies” for baptism; the only exception is that elders do not meet alone with females. This questioning is usually conducted over at least three separate sessions, each session with a different elder, and each conducted in private.

These sessions are held with any minor child who wishes to be baptized, which then also separates that child from his parents, and puts them in private proximity with various elders in the congregation.

“8. Elders strive to treat victims of child abuse with compassion, understanding, and kindness. (Colossians 3:12) As spiritual counselors, the elders endeavor to listen carefully and empathetically to victims and to console them. (Proverbs 21:13; Isaiah 32:1, 2; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; James 1:19) Victims and their families may
decide to consult a mental-health professional. This is a personal decision.”

A) Jehovah’s Witnesses have published a bible storybook for children that blamed a bible character for her own rape, have blamed women for rape in general and for raising rapists, and have told women to treat a potential rapist “respectfully” and “understandingly.”

Jehovah’s Witnesses have also stated publicly that accusations of being permissive to pedophilia in the religion are “apostate-driven lies and dishonesties,” and the religion demands a second witness to the crime of child sexual abuse before the abuser is removed from the congregation.

These actions all demonstrate a systemic lack of “compassion, understanding, and kindness” when it comes to the matter of sexual assault and abuse as a whole.

B) Elders in local congregations have:
   1) reportedly asked child rape victims if they enjoyed their abuse
   2) have demanded that a rape victim demonstrate how far apart her legs were spread during her rape, in front of her own attacker
   3) dismissed the occasion of a father examining his underage daughter’s vagina despite knowing that the man went on to otherwise molest the child
   4) allowed an accused father to scream threats against his daughter while counseling that same daughter to “respect” her abuser
   and other such behaviors, all demonstrating a lack of “compassion, understanding, and kindness” to victims.

C) The “two-witness” rule that is used by Jehovah’s Witnesses, wherein they insist on a second witness to such abuse before taking action against the accused, is itself a demonstration of their lack of “understanding.” In all but the rarest of cases, child sex abuse is committed privately, without the potential for a second witness.

D) Despite the religion’s stubborn insistence that demanding this second witness is necessitated by bible commands, Jehovah’s Witnesses do not demand two witnesses to “discern” if a woman is telling the truth about being raped versus having committed fornication, and don’t demand two witnesses to decide if adults committed fornication because they spent the night together under the same roof. This hypocrisy alone also betrays a lack of “compassion, understanding, and kindness” to child sex abuse victims. See Section 5:C.

E) While Jehovah’s Witnesses are allowed to consult with a mental health professional as needed, they are also instructed, “Christians should be sure that
any treatment they pursue does not conflict with Bible principles.” (Awake, December 2014) This may cause a conflict for many victims; for example, if the perpetrator is the victim’s father, a mental health professional might advise that the man be put out of the home. A wife might see this as conflicting with the bible principle that she must be submissive to the man’s headship. In these and other such similar scenarios, the demands of the religion may then trump the advice of a mental health professional, to the detriment of the abused child.

“9. Elders never require victims of child abuse to present their accusation in the presence of the alleged abuser. However, victims who are now adults may do so, if they wish. In addition, victims can be accompanied by a confidant of either gender for moral support when presenting their accusation to the elders. If a victim prefers, the accusation can be submitted in the form of a written statement.”

The Shepherd Book stated specifically that accusations should be made in the presence of the accused; this directive was first changed in the August 1, 2016, letter to elders. The Shepherd Book also specifically stated that moral support should be withheld from those involved in these allegations. Please see section 4:B for more information.

“10. Child abuse is a serious sin. If an alleged abuser is a member of the congregation, the elders conduct a Scriptural investigation. This is a purely religious proceeding handled by elders according to Scriptural instructions and is limited to the issue of membership as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. A member of the congregation who is an unrepentant child abuser is expelled from the congregation and is no longer considered one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. (1 Corinthians 5:13) The elders’ handling of an accusation of child abuse is not a replacement for the authorities’ handling of the matter.—Romans 13:1-4.”

That Jehovah’s Witnesses view child abuse as a “serious” sin is false, as demonstrated by their lack of response to these allegations when presented to elders.

“11. If it is determined that one guilty of child sexual abuse is repentant and will remain in the congregation, restrictions are imposed on the individual’s congregation activities. The individual will be specifically admonished by the elders not to be alone in the company of children, not to cultivate friendships with children, or display any affection for children. In addition, elders will inform parents of minors within the congregation of the need to monitor their
A) Showing “repentance” to elders in a congregation is not an indicator of the person’s likelihood to re-offend. According to one study presented by Scientific American, “The 15-year recidivism rate is 13 percent for incest perpetrators, 24 percent for rapists, and 35 percent for child molesters of boy victims.” While these rates may be considered relatively low, it does demonstrate that there is a credible risk that a child sex abuser will repeat their crime.

B) Restricting an abuser’s activities in a congregation and “admonishing” that person to avoid children does little to protect children from abuse, especially if the victim was the abuser’s own child or children.

C) Informing other parents in the congregation of the need to monitor their child also does nothing to protect children outside of that congregation.

“12. A person who has engaged in child sexual abuse does not qualify to receive any congregation privileges or to serve in a position of responsibility in the congregation for decades, if ever. —1 Timothy 3:1-7, 10; 5:22; Titus 1:7.”

Please see Section 9: Putting Known Pedophiles In Positions of Authority for more information.

Additional comments:

A) Jehovah’s Witness elders are not instructed to phone police for all allegations of child sex abuse in their religion, and to cooperate with a police investigation, letting trained professionals handle each case. Instead, elders are repeatedly instructed to phone their branch office, to be informed if they are legally obligated to notify authorities; if there is no legal obligation, elders rarely, if ever, report such allegations to authorities.

B) While current instructions note that elders should proactively inform victims and parents that they have the right to notify authorities, elders are not instructed to ask victims if they need assistance in notifying authorities in these matters.

Assistance from a trusted confidant can be vitally important for younger victims and victims of child rape in their own home, and especially when the non-offending parent is not present in the home, is mentally or emotionally incapable of supporting the child, or is complacent about the abuse. This lack of support leaves
victims abandoned to their abuses, and from those who are referred to as their “spiritual counselors.”

C) Jehovah's Witnesses still see little need to protect children outside their own religion from an alleged offender, by not phoning authorities or alerting any parents other than those in their own congregations as to this risk to children.

D) This information does not rescind direction to elders that dismisses “a situation in which a minor who is a willing participant and who is approaching adulthood is involved in sexual activity with an adult who is a few years older than the minor,” as brought out in Section 10: Minors “Consenting” to Sexual Conduct With Adults.

This direction allows elders to determine for themselves if a minor child was a “willing participant,” and also gives no consideration to any type of grooming process that is often prevalent with child sex abuse. In turn, a minor child may face retaliation from the congregation, including being disfellowshipped and shunned, for being deemed “willing.”

E) Elders in congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses have no formal training in child psychology, criminology, counseling, or any other field that would instruct them on the most effective way to discuss matters of child sex abuse with alleged victims, to preserve the feelings of these victims, and to ensure any future testimony they might offer during a legal proceeding is not tainted.

F) These instructions do not change the directive given to elders that allows them to potentially withhold information about abuse allegations if that person were to move to a new congregation; see Section 6: When the Accused Moves to a New Congregation.

G) To date, Jehovah's Witnesses have never offered any type of apology to victims in the religion, or shown any type of acceptance of their responsibility for creating the atmosphere that has allowed pedophilia to flourish. This includes their insistence on a second witness to the abuse before putting such an abuser out of the congregation, and threats made to victims who have wanted to report this abuse.

Jehovah's Witnesses have also offered no apology to victims for the trauma inflicted upon them by being made to sit through overly personal, accusatory, and often obscene questioning at the hands of elders, with no support from any other party, and from being made to confront their abusers in person, even family members who are free to retaliate after such confrontations.
SECTION 11 ENDNOTES


11:3 https://jwvictims.org/2014/03/16/jehovahs-witnesses-tell-women-to-treat-rapists-respectfully-and-understandingly/


11:5 https://jwvictims.org/2014/05/25/jehovahs-witness-elders-ask-pedophile-victims-if-they-enjoyed-it/

11:6 https://jwvictims.org/2014/06/29/jehovahs-witness-elders-ask-child-rape-victim-how-far-apart-her-legs-were-during-her-attack/


11:9 https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/misunderstood-crimes/
TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Child abuse

Table of Contents
Legal concerns regarding accusations of child abuse .................................. Pars. 3-7
Congregational concerns regarding accusations of child sexual abuse ........Pars. 8-20
Helping victims of child sexual abuse ......................................................... Par. 21
Restrictions and privileges ........................................................................... Pars. 22-24

Dear Brothers:

1. This letter updates the letters to all bodies of elders regarding child abuse dated March 23, 1992; February 3, 1993; August 1, 1995; March 14, 1997; July 20, 1998; May 24, 2002; April 1, 2004; June 5, 2006; and May 24, 2010. Those letters should be removed from the congregation permanent file of policy letters and be destroyed. No one should keep originals or copies of any of those letters.

2. Additionally, much fine direction has been included in the Shepherding textbook. Thus, elders should first consult the Shepherding textbook and review the Scriptural principles involved. They should thereafter study the additional points outlined in this letter. As you review this letter, please note that paragraphs 3-7 set forth legal concerns regarding accusations of child abuse. Paragraphs 8-20 set forth congregational concerns. This letter should be carefully consulted anytime a matter involving child abuse arises.

LEGAL CONCERNS REGARDING ACCUSATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

3. What is child abuse from a legal standpoint? Child abuse includes the sexual or physical abuse of a minor (a person less than 18 years of age). It would also include the extreme neglect of a minor by his parent or guardian. Child sexual abuse generally includes sexual intercourse with a minor; oral or anal sex with a minor; fondling the genitals, breasts, or buttocks of a minor; voyeurism of a minor; indecent exposure to a minor; soliciting a minor for sexual conduct; or any kind of involvement with child pornography. Depending on the circumstances of the case, it may also include “sexting” with a minor. “Sexting” describes the sending of nude photos, seminude photos, or sexually explicit text messages electronically, such as by phone.

4. Most states have child-abuse reporting laws that, depending on the facts, mandate elders to report an accusation to the authorities. Thus, when elders learn of an accusation of child abuse, two elders from their congregation should immediately call the Legal Department for legal advice. If the individuals involved are in different congregations, each body of elders should arrange for two of their elders to call the Legal Department. A call should be made even when both persons involved in sexual misconduct are minors. The elders should not ask an alleged victim, the accused person, or relatives of the victim or accused to call the Legal Department. The elders should call the Legal Department even in the following situations:
• The alleged abuse occurred many years ago.
• The alleged abuse is based on the testimony of only one witness.
• The alleged abuse is believed to be a repressed memory.
• The alleged abuse involved perpetrators or victims who are deceased.
• The alleged abuse is believed to have already been reported to the authorities by someone.
• The alleged perpetrator or victim is no longer a member of the congregation.
• The alleged abuse occurred before the alleged perpetrator or victim was baptized.
• The alleged victim is now an adult.
• The alleged abuse occurred in the past, and you are not certain whether the elders involved at the time called the Legal Department for direction.

5. The Legal Department will provide you with legal advice based on the facts and the applicable law. If the individual who is accused of the child abuse is associated with a congregation, please provide the Legal Department with his date of birth and, if applicable, his date of baptism. After a report has been made to the Legal Department, depending on the need, the elders may be directed to contact the Service Department for assistance with questions regarding theocratic or judicial aspects of the case or regarding how to protect children.

6. Two elders should also call the Legal Department regarding any prison inmate who has been accused of child abuse in the past and who is now associating with a congregation, such as by attending congregation meetings held in the prison. This would apply whether he is baptized or not. In some cases, elders may not be authorized to inquire of the offense that an inmate may have committed. But if the elders learn that the alleged offense has to do with child abuse, they should call the Legal Department immediately.

7. If the elders become aware of minors associated with a congregation “sexting” with other minors or of adults “sexting” with minors, the Legal Department should be called immediately. The Legal Department does not need to be called when the elders receive reports of adults (that is, cases in which all parties involved are at least 18 years old) “sexting” one another.

CONGREGATIONAL CONCERNS REGARDING ACCUSATIONS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

8. What is child molestation from a congregational standpoint? Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines “pedophilia” as “sexual perversion in which children are the preferred sexual object.” (See “Questions From Readers” in The Watchtower of February 1, 1997, page 29.) Deuteronomy 23:17, 18 condemns such practices as “detestable.” (See the footnotes to verses 17 and 18 in the Reference Bible. Also, see the footnote on page 10 of the October 8, 1993, issue of Awake!) In harmony with these references, we are herein discussing sexual perversion in which children are the object of sexual abuse, including fondling, by an adult. We are not discussing a situation wherein a minor who is a willing participant and who is approaching adulthood has sexual relations with an adult who is a few years older than the minor nor, generally speaking, are we discussing situations in which only minors are involved. Rather, we are referring to situations in which it is established that an adult brother or sister has been guilty of sexually abusing a young child or has been sexually involved with a minor who is approaching adulthood and who was not a willing participant.
9. As spiritual shepherds, elders should continue to make every effort to protect all in the congregation, especially children, from the unwholesome practices of the world. (Isa. 32:1, 2) One of these is child sexual abuse. We abhor the sexual abuse of children and will not protect any perpetrator of such repugnant acts from the consequences of his gross sin. (Rom. 12:9) Elders should take seriously their responsibility in this matter so that the congregations will be safeguarded from any valid accusation of neglect in protecting children from sexual abuse.

10. Regardless of whether the law requires the elders to report an accusation to the authorities, steps need to be taken to protect children. Elders should help the parents of the children involved to understand that they have the primary responsibility for protecting their children. Obviously, such parents will be keenly interested in taking precautions in this regard. Our publications contain helpful information on how parents can protect their children.—w10 11/1 p. 13; w08 10/1 p. 21; g 10/07 pp. 3-11; lr pp. 170-171; g03 2/8 p. 9; g99 4/8 pp. 9, 11; g97 4/8 p. 14; w96 12/1 pp. 13-14; fy pp. 61-62; g93 10/8 pp. 5-13.

11. In addition, the elders should investigate every allegation of child sexual abuse. When elders learn of an accusation, in addition to this letter, they should carefully review the direction outlined in the Shepherding textbook, chapter 12, paragraphs 18-21. However, in evaluating the evidence for internal congregational purposes, they must bear in mind the Bible’s clear direction: “No single witness should rise up against a man respecting any error or any sin . . . At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses the matter should stand good.” (Deut. 19:15) This requirement to consider testimony of two or three witnesses was confirmed by Jesus. (Matt. 18:16) Thus, although they investigate every allegation, the elders are not authorized by the Scriptures to take congregational action unless there is a confession or there are two credible witnesses. However, even though the elders are not authorized to take congregation action when there is only one witness, the elders should remain vigilant with regard to the conduct and activity of the accused. (See paragraph 12 of this letter.) If two persons are witnesses to separate incidents of the same kind of wrongdoing, their testimony can be deemed sufficient to take judicial action. (1 Tim. 5:19, 24, 25) If the person is not repentant over the gross sin, disfellowshipping action would be warranted. If the decision is to reprove, the reproof should be announced. (ksl0 chap. 7 par. 20, second bullet) This will serve as a protection for the congregation. Information concerning an individual accused of child molestation, proved or otherwise, should be placed in the congregation confidential file and marked “Do Not Destroy” and kept indefinitely. This includes Notification of Disfellowshipping or Disassociation (S-77) forms on individuals who have been disfellowshipped for child sexual abuse and then later reinstated. Because of the delicate nature of handling a judicial case where an adult sexually abuses a child, please contact your circuit overseer. He will designate an experienced elder from your circuit to serve as chairman of the judicial committee.

12. Loving elders should take steps to protect children, especially when a judicial committee determines that the one who has sexually abused a child is repentant and will be allowed to remain a member of the Christian congregation. The same concern would be shown when one who has sexually abused a child is disfellowshipped, later cleans up his life, and is reinstated. The elders should be especially mindful of the activity of any who are known to have sexually abused a child in the past. They should also ensure that newly-appointed elders are made aware of this caution. It would be appropriate for elders to talk kindly but very frankly to individuals who have manifested a weakness in this regard, strongly cautioning them to refrain from displaying affection for children, to avoid hugging or holding children on their lap, never to be alone with a child (other than their
own), not to allow children to spend the night in their home, not to work alone in field service (hence, they should always be accompanied by another adult), and not to cultivate friendships with children. This not only serves to protect children but will help to prevent those who have sexually abused a child from putting themselves in the way of temptation, being subjected to an unfounded accusation, or doing things that may cause concern to others in the congregation. (1 Cor. 10:12, 32)

If the individual does not follow this direction from the elders, the elders should immediately call the Service Department for assistance.

13. **If the individual does not follow the above direction from the elders, or if the elders believe he may be a “predator,” the elders should immediately call the Service Department for assistance.** A “predator” is one who clearly lacks self-control and by his actions provides reason to believe he will continue to prey on children. Not every individual who has sexually abused a child in the past is considered a “predator.” **The branch office, not the local body of elders, determines whether an individual who has sexually abused children in the past will be considered a “predator.”** If the branch office determines that an individual will be considered a “predator,” parents with minor children will need to be warned of the danger that exists so that they can protect their children. In such a case, and only after receiving direction and instructions from the Service Department, two elders should be assigned to meet with the parents of minor children in order to provide a warning. At the same time that parents are warned about an individual, it would be appropriate for the elders to inform the individual that parents in the congregation will be discreetly informed.

14. What step should be taken when you learn of an adult who has been viewing child pornography? As stated in paragraph 4 of this letter, two elders should call the Legal Department. After receiving legal direction, the elders will be directed to contact the Service Department for theocratic direction.

15. **Who is considered a known child molester?** The January 1, 1997, *Watchtower* article “Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked” mentions on page 29 that a man “known to have been a child molester” does not qualify for privileges in the congregation. The expression “known to have been a child molester” has reference to how such a man is considered in the community and in the Christian congregation. In the eyes of the congregation, an adult “known” to be a former child molester is not “free from accusation” or “irreprehensible,” nor does he have “a fine testimony from people on the outside.” (1 Tim. 3:1-7, 10; 5:22; Titus 1:7) In view of his past, those in the community would not respect him and congregation members might be stumbled over his appointment. Keep in mind that the branch office, not the local body of elders, determines whether one who has sexually abused a child is considered a known child molester.

16. **When a known child molester moves to another congregation,** the elders should follow the procedure set forth in the *Shepherding* textbook, chapter 12, paragraph 20. If a known child molester is in prison and is transferred to another facility or is released, it is important to inform the appropriate congregation of his situation in writing, if it is possible to do so. This direction also applies when one considered a “predator,” as outlined in paragraph 13 of this letter, moves to another congregation.

17. From time to time, local authorities may inform you that a sex offender is living in your area. The notice usually provides the address of the individual and may state the nature of his
criminal activity. In such a case, the elders should list that address on the appropriate territory card as a “Do Not Call.” Thereafter, two elders can periodically make calls on that address. Following this direction will assist you in protecting the flock.

18. **Sexual misconduct involving only minors:** What steps should elders take when minors (persons less than 18 years of age) engage in sexual misconduct with one another? As stated in paragraph 4 of this letter, two elders should call the Legal Department even when both persons are minors. Minors who have sexual contact with one another are generally not considered as child molesters by the congregation. However, regardless of the ages of those involved, such misconduct is serious. Elders should be alert to render assistance and to protect children. The body of elders should also arrange for the minor(s) to receive assistance in the presence of their believing parent(s), in harmony with the principles and guidelines found in the Scriptures and in our publications.

19. When baptized minors become involved in “sexting,” the elders must use good judgment in determining whether the wrongdoing has escalated to a point warranting judicial action. Helpful information can be found in “Questions From Readers” in the July 15, 2006, issue of *The Watchtower*. Please review this material carefully before concluding that a baptized minor is guilty of gross uncleanness or “brazen conduct, loose conduct.” (*ks10* chap. 5 par. 9) However, if the baptized minor has been previously counseled and persists in the wrong course, in most cases, judicial action is taken. Each case must be evaluated on its own merit. If elders have questions regarding a specific case they should contact the Service Department. Also, keep in mind that Christian parents should be included in any discussions the elders have with a minor who may be involved in “sexting.”

20. The potential serious consequences associated with “sexting” underscore the importance of Christian parents supervising their children’s use of cellular telephones and other means of electronic communication. Excellent suggestions can be found on pages 6-7 of the November 2009 issue of *Awake!* (Matt. 24:45) When a minor has been involved in “sexting,” elders can use such excellent material to offer Scriptural counsel and encouragement to both the parents and the child.—1 Pet. 5:2, 3.

**HELPING VICTIMS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

21. Some Christians may become troubled with memories and feelings associated with past child sexual abuse. When an elder is approached by someone concerned or distraught about such memories, he should “speak consolingly.” (1 Thess. 5:14) Elders should manifest an empathetic, compassionate, patient, and supportive response to those approaching them about such memories. An elder must never be alone with or become the sole confidant of a sister to whom he is not closely related. Helpful suggestions and guidelines can be found in the *Shepherding* textbook, chapter 4, paragraphs 21-28. The elders should carefully review this material when helping victims of child sexual abuse.

**RESTRICTIONS AND PRIVILEGES**

22. It cannot be said in every case that one who has sexually abused a child could never qualify for privileges of service in the congregation. However, the elders will certainly want to be very cautious, especially when dealing with one who had repeatedly engaged in this kind of wrongdoing or who had been disfellowshipped for such an offense. Before privileges can be extended, such a man must meet the Scriptural qualifications of being “self-controlled” and “irreprehensible.” He must “also have a fine testimony” from individuals inside and outside the congregation. (Titus 1:6-8;
1 Tim. 3:2, 7) Elders should keep in mind what is stated in the January 1, 1997, Watchtower article “Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked,” page 29, paragraph 2: “Child sexual abuse reveals an unnatural fleshly weakness. Experience has shown that such an adult may well molest other children. True, not every child molester repeats the sin, but many do. And the congregation cannot read hearts to tell who is and who is not liable to molest children again. (Jeremiah 17:9) Hence, Paul’s counsel to Timothy applies with special force in the case of baptized adults who have molested children: ‘Never lay your hands hastily upon any man; neither be a sharer in the sins of others.’ (1 Timothy 5:22).”

23. Hence, privileges of service should never be extended hastily. Considerable time should always pass before one who has sexually abused a child is recommended, if ever. It would be up to the local body of elders to determine whether such a recommendation should be made to the branch office, taking into account all factors in each individual case. Please note that unless specifically approved by the branch office, one who has sexually abused a child should not be used to conduct any meetings held in the congregation or in a prison, and he does not qualify to work on any Kingdom Hall project other than one involving the congregation where he serves as a publisher.

24. If the elders as a body conclude that one who has sexually abused a child in the distant past may now qualify for privileges, they should assign two elders to call the Service Department.

25. In view of the foregoing, each elder should make the following notation next to chapter 3, paragraph 20; chapter 5, paragraph 10, second bullet; chapter 7, paragraph 20, second bullet; and chapter 12, paragraph 18, of the Shepherding textbook: “See letter dated October 1, 2012, to all bodies of elders.”

26. It is hoped that the direction provided in this letter will help you brothers in handling matters in the congregation so as to protect children from sexual abuse and, at the same time, balance Bible-based justice and mercy. We also hope this direction will assist you to lovingly help victims of child sexual abuse. May Jehovah’s rich blessing continue to be with you in carrying out your many responsibilities as shepherds of the flock. With this letter we send our warm Christian love and best wishes.

Your brothers,

christian congregation
of jehovah’s witnesses

cc: Traveling overseers

PS to secretary:

This letter should be retained in the congregation permanent file of policy letters. You may wish to update the congregation copy of Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders (S-22) at this time as well.
Dear Brothers:

1. This letter replaces the letter dated October 1, 2012, to all bodies of elders regarding child abuse and has been added to the list of policy letters cited in Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders (S-22). Please carefully study the entire letter. While the following information refers to an accused in the masculine gender and to the victim in the feminine gender, it applies equally when the genders are different. Similarly, references to parents apply equally to legal guardians.

2. Child abuse includes the sexual or physical abuse of a minor. It would also include the extreme neglect of a minor by her parent. Child sexual abuse is a perversion and generally includes sexual intercourse with a minor; oral or anal sex with a minor; fondling the genitals, breasts, or buttocks of a minor; voyeurism of a minor; indecent exposure to a minor; or soliciting a minor for sexual conduct. Depending on the circumstances of the case, it may include involvement with child pornography or “sexting” with a minor. “Sexting” describes the sending of sexually explicit messages or images electronically.

3. From the Bible’s standpoint, child sexual abuse is a gross sin. (Deut. 23:17, 18; Gal. 5:19-21; ks10 chap. 5 par. 10; w97 2/1 p. 29; g93 10/8 p. 10, ftn.) Jehovah’s Witnesses abhor child sexual abuse. (Rom. 12:9) Thus, the congregation will not shield any perpetrator of such repugnant acts from the consequences of his sin.

4. The Scriptures place the responsibility on parents for teaching and protecting their children. (Eph. 6:4) As spiritual shepherds, elders can help parents to shoulder their Scriptural responsibility. Our publications and website contain much helpful information to assist par-
5. Legal Considerations: In some jurisdictions, individuals who learn of an allegation of child abuse may be obligated by law to report the allegation to the secular authorities. In all cases, the victim and her parents have the absolute right to report an allegation to the authorities. —Gal. 6:5; ks10 chap. 12 par. 19.

6. To ensure that elders comply with child-abuse reporting laws, two elders should immediately call the Legal Department for legal advice when the elders learn of an accusation of child abuse. (Rom. 13:1-4) A call should be made even when both persons involved are minors. The elders should not ask an alleged victim, the accused person, or anyone else to call the Legal Department on the elders’ behalf. The elders should call the Legal Department even in the following situations:

- The alleged abuse occurred many years ago.
- The alleged abuse is based on the testimony of only one witness.
- The alleged abuse is believed to be a repressed memory.
- The alleged abuse involved perpetrators or victims who are deceased.
- The alleged abuse is believed to have already been reported to the secular authorities.
- The alleged perpetrator or victim is not a member of your congregation.
- The alleged perpetrator is a non-Witness associating with the congregation.
- The alleged abuse occurred before the alleged perpetrator or victim was baptized.
- The alleged victim is now an adult.
- The alleged abuse occurred in the past, and it is unclear whether your congregation elders ever called the Legal Department for direction.

7. The Legal Department will provide legal advice based on the facts and the applicable law. If the individual who is accused of the child abuse is associated with your congregation, the two elders calling should provide the Legal Department with the individual’s date of birth and, if applicable, his date of baptism. After speaking with the Legal Department, the call will be transferred to the Service Department so that the elders can receive further assistance.

8. Two elders should immediately call the Legal Department regarding any prison inmate, baptized or unbaptized, who has been accused of child abuse and who is now associating with a congregation. This would include his attending congregation meetings held in the prison. In some cases, elders may not be permitted to inquire about the offense that an inmate may have committed. However, if the elders learn that the alleged offense has to do with child abuse, they should immediately call the Legal Department.

9. If the elders become aware of an adult associated with a congregation who has been involved with child pornography, two elders should immediately call the Legal Department. Likewise, if the elders become aware of an adult or a minor associated with a congregation who is “sexting” with a minor, the Legal Department should be called immediately. The Legal Dep-
partment does not need to be called when the elders receive reports of adults “sexting” one another.

10. **Congregation Considerations:** When discussing child sexual abuse from a congregation standpoint, we are not discussing a situation in which a minor who is a willing participant and who is approaching adulthood is involved in sexual activity with an adult who is a few years older than the minor. Nor, generally speaking, are we discussing situations in which only minors are involved. (See paragraphs 24-25.) Rather, we are referring to an adult guilty of sexually abusing a minor who is a young child, or an adult guilty of sexual involvement with a minor who is approaching adulthood but was not a willing participant.

11. **Providing Spiritual Assistance to Victims:** As elders provide ongoing spiritual shepherding, it is especially important that they demonstrate empathy and compassion to victims of child sexual abuse and their families. (Isa. 32:1, 2) Helpful suggestions and guidelines can be found in the *Shepherding* textbook, chapter 4, paragraphs 21-28. The elders should carefully review this material when helping victims of child sexual abuse. In the case of any discussion with a child abuse victim who is still a minor, an elder should never meet alone with the minor but should always involve another elder and another adult member of the congregation, preferably the minor’s parent(s). If it is not possible to include the parent (for example, if the parent is the accused), then another adult member of the congregation who is a confidant of the victim should be included. In addition to the spiritual shepherding provided by the elders, the victim or her family may desire other assistance. For example, the victim or her family may decide to consult a mental-health professional. This would be a personal decision for them to make.

12. When an elder is approached by an adult who is concerned or distraught about past abuse, he should “speak consolingly” to the person. (1 Thess. 5:14) Elders should manifest an empathetic, compassionate, patient, and supportive response to those approaching them about such matters. An elder must never meet alone with or become the sole confidant of a sister to whom he is not closely related.

13. **Investigating Allegations:** The elders may learn of an allegation of child sexual abuse directly from the victim, through her parents, or through a trusted confidant of the victim. After receiving assistance from the branch office, the body of elders will appoint two elders to conduct a Scriptural investigation of every allegation of child sexual abuse. These elders should carefully follow Scriptural procedures and the Bible-based direction outlined in this letter and in the *Shepherding* textbook, particularly chapter 5. Elders should remember that during the investigation process and during the judicial committee process, a victim of child sexual abuse is not required to make her allegation in the presence of the alleged abuser. In the exceptional event that the two elders believe it is necessary to interview a minor who is a victim of child sexual abuse, the elders should first contact the Service Department.

14. **Judicial Committee:** If the body of elders concludes that there is sufficient Scriptural evidence to warrant the formation of a congregation judicial committee on the grounds of child sexual abuse, the coordinator of the body of elders should first contact the circuit overseer. (*ks10* chap. 5 par. 37; chap. 6 pars. 1-2) The circuit overseer will designate an experienced elder to serve as chairman of the judicial committee and, if needed, the appeal committee. If wrongdo-
ing is established and the wrongdoer is not repentant, he should be disfellowshipped. \((ks10\ 
\text{chap. 7 par. 26})\) On the other hand, if the wrongdoer is repentant and is reproved, the reproof should be announced to the congregation. \((ks10\ \text{chap. 7 pars. 20-21})\) This announcement will serve as a protection for the congregation.

15. **Reinstatement Committee:** If a person who has been disfellowshipped for child sexual abuse applies for reinstatement, the coordinator of the body of elders should contact his circuit overseer and provide the names of those who served on the original committee. The circuit overseer will designate an experienced elder to serve as chairman of the reinstatement committee. If the decision is to reinstate, two elders should immediately call the Service Department. This call must be made before the reinstatement is announced to the congregation.—\(ks10\ \text{chap. 11 pars. 1-6, 11-15.}\)

16. If a person who has been disfellowshipped for child sexual abuse has moved and applies for reinstatement in a different congregation, the coordinator of the body of elders of the new congregation should contact his circuit overseer. The circuit overseer will designate an experienced elder to serve as chairman of the reinstatement committee in the new congregation. If that committee recommends that the person be reinstated, the committee should contact the coordinator of the body of elders of the original congregation, who should then contact his circuit overseer and provide the names of those who served on the original judicial committee. That circuit overseer will designate an experienced elder to serve as chairman of the reinstatement committee in the original congregation. If that committee agrees to reinstate, two elders from each congregation should immediately call the Service Department. These calls must be made before the reinstatement is announced in both congregations.—\(ks10\ \text{chap. 11 pars. 7-10, 13.}\)

17. **Restrictions:** The elders should carefully adhere to all direction provided by the Service Department regarding reasonable steps that should be taken to protect minors from one who has engaged in child sexual abuse. For example, the Service Department will provide direction when (1) a congregation judicial committee determines that one guilty of child sexual abuse is repentant and will remain in the congregation, (2) one disfellowshipped for child sexual abuse is reinstated, (3) when an unbaptized publisher or a baptized member of the congregation who denies an accusation of child sexual abuse is convicted by the secular authorities, or (4) one viewed as a child molester by the community or the congregation becomes a publisher or becomes a baptized member of the congregation.

18. Direction from the Service Department to the elders will include restrictions imposed on an individual’s activities within the congregation, on his participation in the field ministry, and on his interaction with minors. The elders will be directed to caution the individual never to be alone with a minor, not to cultivate friendships with minors, not to display affection for minors, and so forth. In some cases, the Service Department may specifically direct elders to inform parents of minors within the congregation of the need to monitor their children’s interaction with an individual. If the body of elders has questions about a past case, two elders should be assigned to call the Service Department for direction. The coordinator of the body of elders should ensure that newly appointed elders and elders who move into the congregation are made aware of the Service Department’s direction regarding such individuals.
19. One who has engaged in child sexual abuse does not qualify to receive any privileges in the congregation for many years, if ever. This includes seemingly minor privileges. Elders should keep in mind what is stated in the January 1, 1997, *Watchtower* article “Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked,” page 29, paragraph 2: “Child sexual abuse reveals an unnatural fleshly weakness. Experience has shown that such an adult may well molest other children. True, not every child molester repeats the sin, but many do. And the congregation cannot read hearts to tell who is and who is not liable to molest children again. (Jeremiah 17:9) Hence, Paul’s counsel to Timothy applies with special force in the case of baptized adults who have molested children: ‘Never lay your hands hastily upon any man; neither be a sharer in the sins of others.’ (1 Timothy 5:22.)” Therefore, if the body of elders believes that one who has engaged in child sexual abuse decades ago may now qualify for minor privileges, such as carrying or adjusting microphones, operating audio/video equipment, or assisting with accounts, literature, magazines, or territories, they should assign two elders to call the Service Department. The assigned elders should call the Service Department before any congregation privileges are extended.

20. **Filing:** Information concerning individuals associated with the congregation and accused of child sexual abuse (established or not), including letters of introduction, should be placed in an envelope labeled with the individual’s name and marked “Do Not Destroy.” This envelope should be kept indefinitely in the congregation’s confidential file. This would include *Notification of Disfellowshipping or Disassociation* (S-77) forms on individuals who have committed child sexual abuse, even if later reinstated.

21. **Moving to Another Congregation:** When an individual who has been accused of child sexual abuse (established or not) moves to another congregation, two elders from the congregation the individual moves from should immediately call the Legal Department. The elders should be prepared to provide the name of the new congregation, if known. This should be done even if the individual is disfellowshipped or is in prison and is transferred to another facility or is released. The Congregation Service Committee should not send any information to the new congregation until after receiving legal advice from the Legal Department and direction from the Service Department.

22. When the elders are informed that an individual who has been accused of child sexual abuse (established or not) has moved into the congregation, two elders should immediately call the Legal Department. This should be done even if the individual is disfellowshipped or is in prison and has transferred from another facility or is released. If the individual is disfellowshipped and living within the congregation’s territory, the elders should list that address on the appropriate congregation territory card as a “Do Not Call.”

23. **Notification by Secular Authorities:** From time to time, secular authorities may inform the elders that a sex offender is living in the area. The notice may provide the address of the individual and may state the nature of his criminal activity. In such a case, the elders should list that address on the appropriate congregation territory card as a “Do Not Call.”

24. **Sexual Misconduct Involving Only Minors:** What steps should elders take when minors engage in sexual misconduct with one another? As stated in paragraph 6, two elders should immediately call the Legal Department even when both persons are minors. Minors who
engage in sexual misconduct with one another are not generally considered by the congregation as having engaged in child sexual abuse. However, regardless of the ages of those involved, such misconduct is serious and may even warrant congregation judicial action. The body of elders should work with the parents to ensure that the minors receive spiritual assistance. If elders have questions regarding a specific case, they should call the Service Department.—ks10 chap. 5 par. 61; chap. 6 par. 14.

25. The potential serious consequences associated with “sexting” highlight the importance of Christian parents supervising their children’s use of electronic devices. When baptized minors become involved in “sexting,” the elders must use good judgment in determining whether the wrongdoing has escalated to a point warranting congregation judicial action. Helpful information can be found in “Questions From Readers” in the July 15, 2006, issue of The Watchtower. Please review this material carefully before concluding that a baptized minor is guilty of gross uncleanness or brazen conduct. (ks10 chap. 5 par. 9) If the baptized minor has been previously counseled and persists in the wrong course, in most cases, congregation judicial action is taken. Each case must be evaluated on its own merit. In all cases, the body of elders should work with the parents to ensure that the minors receive spiritual assistance. (ks10 chap. 6 par. 14) If elders have questions regarding a specific case, they should call the Service Department.

26. Notations in the Shepherding Textbook: In view of the foregoing, each elder should make the following notation next to chapter 3, paragraph 20; chapter 5, paragraph 10, second bullet; chapter 7, paragraph 20, second bullet; chapter 10, paragraph 2; and chapter 12, paragraph 18, of the Shepherding textbook: “See letter dated August 1, 2016, to all bodies of elders.” In addition, each elder should cross out chapter 12, paragraphs 20-21.

27. It is imperative to adhere to the direction in this letter each time a matter involving child abuse comes to your attention. This will serve to uphold the sanctity of Jehovah’s name and to protect minors. (1 Pet. 2:12) Your full cooperation with this direction is appreciated. May Jehovah grant you knowledge, wisdom, and discernment as you care for this and other weighty matters in connection with the flock of God entrusted to your care.—Prov. 2:6; 1 Pet. 5:2, 3.

Your brothers,

Christian Congregation
of Jehovah’s Witnesses

c: Circuit overseers
TO ALL BODIES OF ELDERS

Re: Protecting Minors From Abuse

Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal Considerations</th>
<th>Paragraphs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congregation Considerations</td>
<td>5-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing Spiritual Assistance to Victims</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigating Allegations</td>
<td>11-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicial Committee</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinstatement Committee</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictions</td>
<td>15-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filing</td>
<td>17-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving to Another Congregation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notification by Secular Authorities</td>
<td>21-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Misconduct Involving Only Minors</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notations in the Shepherding Textbook</td>
<td>24-25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dear Brothers:

1. This letter replaces the letter dated August 1, 2016, to all bodies of elders regarding protecting minors from abuse and has been added to the list of policy letters cited in Index to Letters for Bodies of Elders (S-22). Please read the entire letter and take careful note of the updated direction outlined in paragraphs 3, 7, 13, and 14. Be sure to update your copy of the Shepherding textbook as outlined in paragraph 26. While the following information refers to an accused in the masculine gender and to the victim in the feminine gender, it applies equally regardless of the gender of the accused or the gender of the victim. References to parents and family heads apply equally to legal guardians.

2. Child abuse includes the sexual or physical abuse of a minor. It would also include the extreme neglect of a minor by her parent. Child sexual abuse is a perversion and generally includes sexual intercourse with a minor; oral or anal sex with a minor; fondling the genitals, breasts, or buttocks of a minor; voyeurism of a minor; indecent exposure to a minor; or soliciting a minor for sexual conduct. Depending on the circumstances of the case, it may include involvement with child pornography or “sexting” with a minor. “Sexting” describes the sending of sexually explicit messages or images electronically.

3. From the Bible’s standpoint, child sexual abuse is a gross sin. (Deut. 23:17, 18; Gal. 5:19-21; ks10 chap. 5 par. 10; w97 2/1 p. 29; g93 10/8 p. 10, ftn.) Jehovah’s Witnesses abhor child sexual abuse. (Rom. 12:9) Thus, the congregation will not shield any perpetrator of such repugnant acts from the consequences of his sin. The congregation’s handling of an accusation of child sexual abuse is not intended to replace the secular authority’s handling of the matter. (Rom. 13:1-4)
Therefore, the victim, her parents, or anyone else who reports such an allegation to the elders should be clearly informed that they have the right to report the matter to the secular authorities. Elders do not criticize anyone who chooses to make such a report.—Gal. 6:5.

4. The Scriptures place the responsibility on parents for teaching and protecting their children. (Eph. 6:4) As spiritual shepherds, elders can help parents to shoulder their Scriptural responsibility. Our publications and website contain much helpful information to assist parents.—w10 11/1 p. 13; w08 10/1 p. 21; g 10/07 pp. 3-11; lr pp. 170-171; g99 4/8 pp. 8-11; g97 4/8 p. 14; w96 12/1 pp. 13-14 pars. 18-19; fy pp. 61-62 pars. 24-26; g93 10/8 pp. 5-13; g85 1/22 pp. 3-10.

5. Legal Considerations: Child abuse is a crime. In some jurisdictions, individuals who learn of an allegation of child abuse may be obligated by law to report the allegation to the secular authorities.—Rom. 13:1-4.

6. To ensure that elders comply with child-abuse reporting laws, two elders should immediately call the Legal Department at the branch office for legal advice when the elders learn of an accusation of child abuse. A call should be made even when both persons involved are minors. The elders should not ask an alleged victim, the accused person, or anyone else to call the Legal Department on the elders’ behalf. The elders should call the Legal Department even in the following situations:

- The alleged abuse occurred many years ago.
- The alleged abuse is based on the testimony of only one witness.
- The alleged abuse is believed to be a repressed memory.
- The alleged abuse involved perpetrators or victims who are deceased.
- The alleged abuse is believed to have already been reported to the secular authorities.
- The alleged perpetrator or victim is not a member of your congregation.
- The alleged perpetrator is a non-Witness associating with the congregation.
- The alleged abuse occurred before the alleged perpetrator or victim was baptized.
- The alleged victim is now an adult.
- The alleged abuse occurred in the past, and it is unclear whether your congregation elders ever called the Legal Department for direction.

7. The Legal Department will provide legal advice based on the facts and the applicable law. If the individual who is accused of the child abuse is associated with your congregation, the two elders calling should provide the Legal Department with the individual’s date of birth and, if applicable, his date of baptism. After speaking with the Legal Department, the call will be transferred to the Service Department at the branch office.

8. Two elders should immediately call the Legal Department regarding any prison inmate, baptized or unbaptized, who has been accused of child abuse and who is now associating with a congregation. This would include his attending congregation meetings held in the prison. In some cases, elders may not be permitted to inquire about the offense that an inmate may have committed. However, if the elders learn that the alleged offense has to do with child abuse, they should immediately call the Legal Department.
9. If the elders become aware of an adult associated with a congregation who has been involved with child pornography, two elders should immediately call the Legal Department. Likewise, if the elders become aware of an adult or a minor associated with a congregation who is “sexting” with a minor, the Legal Department should be called immediately. The Legal Department does not need to be called when the elders receive reports of adults “sexting” one another.

10. **Congregation Considerations:** When discussing child sexual abuse from a congregation standpoint, we are not discussing a situation in which a minor who is a willing participant and who is approaching adulthood is involved in sexual activity with an adult who is a few years older than the minor. Nor, generally speaking, are we discussing situations in which only minors are involved. (See paragraphs 24-25.) Rather, we are referring to an adult guilty of sexually abusing a minor who is a young child, or an adult guilty of sexual involvement with a minor who is approaching adulthood but was not a willing participant.

11. **Providing Spiritual Assistance to Victims:** As elders provide ongoing spiritual shepherding, it is especially important that they demonstrate empathy and compassion to victims of child sexual abuse and their families. (Isa. 32:1, 2) Helpful suggestions and guidelines can be found in the *Shepherding* textbook, chapter 4, paragraphs 21-28. The elders should carefully review this material when helping victims of child sexual abuse. When shepherding a child abuse victim who is still a minor, an elder should never meet alone with the minor but should always involve another elder and another adult member of the congregation, preferably the minor’s parent(s). (Deut. 6:6, 7; Eph. 6:4) If it is not possible to include the parent (for example, if the parent is the accused), then another adult member of the congregation who is a confidant of the victim should be included. In addition to the spiritual shepherding provided by the elders, the victim or her family may desire other assistance. For example, the victim or her family may decide to consult a mental-health professional. This would be a personal decision for them to make.

12. When an elder is approached by an adult who is concerned or distraught about past abuse, he should “speak consolingly” to the person. (1 Thess. 5:14) Elders should manifest an empathetic, compassionate, patient, and supportive response to those approaching them about such matters. An elder must never meet alone with or become the sole confidant of a sister to whom he is not closely related.

13. **Investigating Allegations:** The elders may learn of an allegation of child sexual abuse directly from the victim, through her parents, or through a trusted confidant of the victim. (See paragraph 3.) After receiving assistance from the branch office and if the accused is a member of the congregation, the body of elders will appoint two elders to conduct a Scriptural investigation. These elders should carefully follow Scriptural procedures and the Bible-based direction outlined in this letter and in the *Shepherding* textbook, particularly chapter 5. During the investigation process and during the judicial committee process, a victim of child sexual abuse is not required to make her allegation in the presence of the alleged abuser. Generally, elders should be able to obtain necessary information from the parents. In addition, sufficient evidence needed to establish wrongdoing on the part of an alleged abuser may already be available to the elders. (*ks10* chap. 5 pars. 37-39) In the exceptional event that the two elders believe it is necessary to speak with a minor who is a victim of child sexual abuse, the elders should first contact the Service Department.
14. **Judicial Committee**: If the body of elders concludes that there is sufficient Scriptural evidence to warrant the formation of a congregation judicial committee on the grounds of child sexual abuse, the coordinator of the body of elders should first contact the circuit overseer. (*ks10* chap. 5 par. 37; chap. 6 pars. 1-2) The circuit overseer will designate an experienced elder to serve as chairman of the judicial committee and, if needed, the appeal committee. If wrongdoing is established and the wrongdoer is not repentant, he should be disfellowshipped. (*ks10* chap. 7 par. 26) On the other hand, if the wrongdoer is repentant and is reproved, the reproof should be announced to the congregation. (*ks10* chap. 7 pars. 20-21) This announcement will serve as a protection for the congregation. Victims of child sexual abuse are not handled judicially. However, if the body of elders believes that congregation action may be warranted in the case of a mature minor who was a willing participant in wrongdoing, two elders should call the Service Department before proceeding.

15. **Reinstatement Committee**: If a person who has been disfellowshipped for child sexual abuse applies for reinstatement, the coordinator of the body of elders should contact his circuit overseer and provide the names of those who served on the original committee. The circuit overseer will designate an experienced elder to serve as chairman of the reinstatement committee. If the decision is to reinstate, two elders should *immediately* call the Service Department. This call must be made before the reinstatement is announced to the congregation.—*ks10* chap. 11 pars. 1-6, 11-15.

16. If a person who has been disfellowshipped for child sexual abuse has moved and applies for reinstatement in a different congregation, the coordinator of the body of elders of the new congregation should contact his circuit overseer. The circuit overseer of the new congregation will designate an experienced elder to serve as chairman of the reinstatement committee in the new congregation. If that committee recommends that the person be reinstated, the committee should contact the coordinator of the body of elders of the original congregation, who should then contact his circuit overseer and provide the names of those who served on the original judicial committee. That circuit overseer will designate an experienced elder to serve as chairman of the reinstatement committee in the original congregation. If that committee agrees to reinstate, two elders from each congregation should *immediately* call the Service Department. These calls must be made before the reinstatement is announced in both congregations.—*ks10* chap. 11 pars. 7-10, 13.

17. **Restrictions**: The elders should carefully adhere to all direction provided by the Service Department regarding steps that should be taken to protect minors from one who has engaged in child sexual abuse. For example, the Service Department will provide direction when (1) a congregation judicial committee determines that one guilty of child sexual abuse is repentant and will remain in the congregation, (2) one disfellowshipped for child sexual abuse is reinstated, (3) an unbaptized publisher or a baptized member of the congregation who denies an accusation of child sexual abuse is convicted by the secular authorities, or (4) one viewed as a child molester by the community or the congregation becomes a publisher or becomes a baptized member of the congregation.

18. In such cases, direction from the Service Department to the elders will include restrictions imposed on the individual’s activities within the congregation, on his participation in the field ministry, and on his interaction with minors. The elders will be directed to caution the individual never to be alone with a minor, not to cultivate friendships with minors, not to display affec-
tion for minors, and so forth. The Service Department will direct the elders to inform family heads of minors within the congregation of the need to monitor their children’s interaction with the individual. The elders would take this step only if directed to do so by the Service Department. If the body of elders has questions about a past case, two elders should be assigned to call the Service Department for direction. The coordinator of the body of elders should ensure that newly appointed elders and elders who move into the congregation are made aware of the Service Department’s direction regarding such individuals.

19. One who has engaged in child sexual abuse does not qualify to receive any privileges in the congregation for many years, if ever; this includes minor privileges. Elders should keep in mind what is stated in the January 1, 1997, Watchtower article “Let Us Abhor What Is Wicked,” page 29, paragraph 2: “Child sexual abuse reveals an unnatural fleshly weakness. Experience has shown that such an adult may well molest other children. True, not every child molester repeats the sin, but many do. And the congregation cannot read hearts to tell who is and who is not liable to molest children again. (Jeremiah 17:9) Hence, Paul’s counsel to Timothy applies with special force in the case of baptized adults who have molested children: ‘Never lay your hands hastily upon any man; neither be a sharer in the sins of others.’ (1 Timothy 5:22).” Therefore, if the body of elders believes that one who has engaged in child sexual abuse decades ago may now qualify for minor privileges, such as carrying or adjusting microphones, operating audio/video equipment, or assisting with accounts, literature, magazines, or territories, they should assign two elders to call the Service Department. The assigned elders should call the Service Department before any congregation privileges are extended.

20. **Filing:** Information concerning individuals associated with the congregation and accused of child sexual abuse (established or not), including letters of introduction, should be placed in an envelope labeled with the individual’s name and marked “Do Not Destroy.” This envelope should be kept in the congregation’s confidential file. This would include Notification of Disfellowshipping or Disassociation (S-77) forms on individuals who have committed child sexual abuse, even if later reinstated.

21. **Moving to Another Congregation:** When an individual who has been accused of child sexual abuse (established or not) moves to another congregation, two elders from the congregation the individual moves from should immediately call the Legal Department. The elders should be prepared to provide the name of the new congregation, if known. This should be done even if the individual is disfellowshipped or is in prison and is transferred to another facility or is released. The Congregation Service Committee should not send any information to the new congregation until after receiving legal advice from the Legal Department and direction from the Service Department.

22. When the elders are informed that an individual who has been accused of child sexual abuse (established or not) has moved into the congregation, two elders should immediately call the Legal Department. This should be done even if the individual is disfellowshipped or is in prison and has transferred from another facility or is released. If the individual is disfellowshipped and living within the congregation’s territory, the elders should list that address on the appropriate congregation territory card as a “Do Not Call.”
23. **Notification by Secular Authorities:** From time to time, secular authorities may inform the elders that a sex offender is living in the area. The notice may provide the address of the individual and may state the nature of his criminal activity. In such a case, the elders should list that address on the appropriate congregation territory card as a “Do Not Call.”

24. **Sexual Misconduct Involving Only Minors:** What steps should elders take when minors engage in sexual misconduct with one another? As stated in paragraph 6, two elders should immediately call the Legal Department even when both persons are minors. Minors who engage in sexual misconduct with one another are not generally considered by the congregation as having engaged in child sexual abuse. However, regardless of the ages of those involved, such misconduct is serious and may even warrant congregation judicial action. The body of elders should work with the parents to ensure that the minors receive spiritual assistance. If elders have questions regarding a specific case, they should call the Service Department.—*ks10* chap. 5 par. 61; chap. 6 par. 14.

25. The potential serious consequences associated with “sexting” highlight the importance of Christian parents supervising their children’s use of electronic devices. When baptized minors become involved in “sexting,” the elders must use good judgment in determining whether the wrongdoing has escalated to a point warranting congregation judicial action. Helpful information can be found in “Questions From Readers” in the July 15, 2006, issue of *The Watchtower*. Please review this material carefully before concluding that a baptized minor is guilty of gross uncleanness or brazen conduct. (*ks10* chap. 5 par. 9) If the baptized minor has been previously counseled and persists in the wrong course, in most cases, congregation judicial action is taken. Each case must be evaluated on its own merit. In all cases, the body of elders should work with the parents to ensure that the minors receive spiritual assistance. (*ks10* chap. 6 par. 14) If elders have questions regarding a specific case, they should call the Service Department.

26. **Notations in the Shepherding Textbook:** In view of the foregoing, each elder should adjust the notation next to chapter 3, paragraph 20; chapter 5, paragraph 10, second bullet; chapter 7, paragraph 20, second bullet; chapter 10, paragraph 2; and chapter 12, paragraph 18, of the *Shepherding* textbook to read: “See letter dated September 1, 2017, to all bodies of elders.” Additionally, each elder should cross out chapter 12, paragraph 19. Paragraphs 20-21 should already be crossed out.

27. It is imperative to adhere to the direction in this letter each time a matter involving child abuse comes to your attention. This will serve to uphold the sanctity of Jehovah’s name and to protect minors. (1 Pet. 2:12) Your full cooperation with this direction is appreciated. May Jehovah grant you knowledge, wisdom, and discernment as you care for this and other weighty matters in connection with the flock of God entrusted to your care.—Prov. 2:6; 1 Pet. 5:2, 3.

Your brothers,

*Christian Congregation*
*of Jehovah’s Witnesses*

c: Circuit overseers