

In Jehovah's eyes, he has married someone while still bound to another. Entering into such a marriage would call for judicial action.

16. If the disfellowshipped one was eventually reinstated, the elders would be very cautious in extending any special privileges. He could share in the cleaning and repair of the local Kingdom Hall. He may eventually give student talks in the Theocratic Ministry School if his doing so would not disturb others. However, **he would not be assigned to help with literature, accounts, magazines, attendants, or similar privileges in the congregation as long as the innocent former mate is alive, unmarried, and has not been guilty of por-nei'a.**—w83 3/15 p. 29.

17. If a Christian did not enter into an adulterous marriage but **deliberately committed adultery in a scheming way so as to end his marriage or he pressured the innocent mate to reject him** and eventually agree to a divorce, he has dealt treacherously with her. (Mal. 2:14-16) His conduct is similar to entering into an adulterous marriage, and he would not qualify for special privileges for *many years*.

## Child Abuse

18. You should **immediately call the branch office** for direction if you learn of an accusation of child abuse, regardless of the age of the victim now or at the time of the alleged abuse, even if it occurred before the alleged perpetrator's baptism. The branch office will then give direction based on the circumstances involved in each situation.

19. 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.—Gal. 6:5.

20. When a known child molester moves to another congregation, the Congregation Service Committee should send a letter of introduction with full and complete information about his background and current situation. Any letter from the branch office concerning the child molester should not be photocopied or sent to the new congregation. However, the new congregation should be clearly informed of any restrictions imposed by the branch office. A copy of the letter of introduction should be sent to the branch office.

21. 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? (w95 11/1 pp. 25-26) (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.

### **Taking Brothers to Court**

22. 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.—w97 3/15 pp. 21-22; w86 11/15 p. 20; g83 2/8 pp. 13-15; w73 11/15 pp. 703-704.

- If an individual ignores God's Word on this matter, it *may* affect his congregation privileges.
- There is no difference between taking an individual brother or sister to court and taking to court a corporation whose owners are all Jehovah's Witnesses. The spirit of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 would be violated by relying on the secular courts to settle business disputes among corporations that are made up entirely of brothers.

23. However, there are legal matters over which the congregation does not have authority and which may therefore be taken to a secular court for judgment without violating the principle or the spirit of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. These include:

- Getting a divorce decree, child custody and support, alimony.

- Obtaining insurance compensation. If a person suffers loss or is injured in or by an automobile owned by a spiritual brother, it might be necessary legally to sue the brother in order to obtain compensation from the brother's insurer.
- Being listed among creditors in bankruptcy procedures.
- Probating wills.
- Certain countersuits. For example, if a *worldly creditor* sues a brother, it might be necessary for the brother, for his own protection, to file a countersuit even though spiritual brothers may be included in the action.
- If a brother takes legal action against another baptized Witness, it would not be a violation of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 for the one being sued to defend himself or to countersue. This is true whether the matter was first taken before the elders or not.

### When Disasters Occur

24. When the local congregation is affected by a disaster, elders should assist the publishers in the following ways:

- **Quickly make assessment of the immediate needs of the brothers and sisters.** Group overseers can take the lead to locate each family in their field service group and inquire of their well-being. They will next want to communicate their findings to the coordinator or another elder, if he is not available, even if all is well.
- **Take care of the immediate needs** by arranging for medical treatment and supplies, such as water, food, and shelter. (John 13:35; Gal. 6:10) If advance warning of a disaster is given, as with some major storms, elders should ensure that everyone is in a safe location and if time per-