

Statutes of the Religious Association *Jehovas Zeugen in Deutschland*, K. d. ö. R. (StRG-E)

In the new wording of Januar 22, 2020 (*Amtsblatt von Jehovas Zeugen in Deutschland*,¹ No. 2, 2020, pp. 1 ff.)

Preamble. (1) According to the Bible, the governing body of Christians in the first century was a body made up of Jesus' disciples who were closely united by his teachings. It provided the congregation with Biblical directives on religious matters, and these directives helped to preserve doctrinal unity. It also provided the necessary spiritual assistance for Christians in the first century.—Acts, chapters 15 and 16.

(2) In a similar way today, the ecclesiastical Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses (Governing Body) gives Bible-based guidance, encouragement, counsel, and directives (Acts 20:27; Romans 1:11, 12; Hebrews 13:22; Acts 16:4) in order to help Jehovah's Witnesses preserve doctrinal unity (Philippians 1:27) and to provide the necessary spiritual assistance.—1 Thessalonians 2:7, 8.

(3) Jehovah's Witnesses practice their religion under the spiritual direction of the Governing Body. (Matthew 24:45-47) In this manner, Jehovah's Witnesses, with their structural divisions and agencies, form a worldwide religious community, a 'brotherhood' united by the bonds of love (John 13:34, 35; 1 Peter 2:17; Colossians 3:14) according to the Biblical pattern. (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13) Within the scope of these Statutes, Jehovah's Witnesses and their structural divisions and agencies form the Religious Association known as *Jehovas Zeugen in Deutschland*² (Religious Association) under the supervision of the Branch Committee.—§ 3. The Religious Association is part of the worldwide religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses.

(4) All structural divisions and agencies of the Religious Association operate on the common basis of the law of the Religious Association (religious law). (Psalm 19:7; Psalm 1:2; Galatians 6:2) This includes the understanding of Bible teachings as established by the Governing Body as well as the structure and work procedures of the Religious Association. (Matthew 24:45-47) It also includes the guidelines issued in letters and publications or communicated orally by the Governing Body, its representatives or the Branch Committee within its sphere of responsibility.

(5) By virtue of their water baptism, all of Jehovah's Witnesses recognize the arrangements outlined in paragraphs 1 to 4.—Isaiah 2:2, 3.

(6) The Religious Association has been active in Germany since 1897. Jehovah's Witnesses have been repeatedly deprived of rights, falling victim to bans and persecution. In the days of National Socialism, thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses were incarcerated in prisons or concentration camps for exercising their religious

¹ Translator's note: Official Gazette of Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany.

² Translator's note: Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany.

StRG-E 1.1-E

and conscientious convictions—such as preaching, refusing to hail Hitler and declining military service. Over one thousand of Jehovah’s Witnesses lost their lives. In the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), Jehovah’s Witnesses were also persecuted. Thousands were again sentenced to long terms of imprisonment because of their faith, some even losing their lives. Remembering these men and women of faith, Jehovah’s Witnesses in Germany are determined to continue with the same religious zeal in obeying Jesus’ command to his followers that they proclaim the good news.

(7) Jehovah’s Witnesses live in expectation that the realization of a righteous new world under Christ’s rule in God’s Kingdom is near at hand. Painful conditions that cause distress today will then be eliminated. Even sickness and death will be things of the past. (Revelation 21:4) Through Christ Jesus, Jehovah God is presently inviting people of all nations, regardless of their ethnicity, gender or educational background, to come and be taught by Him. (Isaiah 2:3, 4) According to God’s will, the invitation to be reconciled with Jehovah God (2 Corinthians 5:20) and to gain his friendship (James 2:23) must be proclaimed to all of mankind.—Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20.

§ 1 Name, Seat and Sphere of Activity. (1) The Religious Association bears the name Jehovas Zeugen in Deutschland. The Religious Association was granted the rights of a corporation under public law by a certificate of bestowal from the State of Berlin dated June 13, 2006.

(2) The Religious Association has its seat in Berlin.

(3) The Religious Association operates in Germany (sphere of activity). It can also operate in other territories assigned to it by the Governing Body. It also supports the worldwide work of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

§ 2 Purpose. (1) The goal of the Religious Association is to bear witness to the name, word and sovereignty of the Almighty God JEHOVAH and to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God under the rule of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20; Psalm 83:18; Isaiah 43:10-12) To this end, it provides Bible education “for disciplining in righteousness” by conducting free schools and public meetings for worship (Leviticus 23; Hebrews 10:23-25) “so that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) The ways in which the Religious Association proclaims the word of God include producing, procuring, importing, exporting, and distributing Bibles and all types of Bible-based media as well as supporting its members in their personal practice of faith. In order to glorify God by making known his love and comfort (2 Corinthians 9:13; 1 Peter 2:12), it grants material and spiritual assistance to victims of disasters, needy persons or those suffering want, thus fulfilling the Christian command to love one’s neighbor and the admonition: “Let us work what is good toward all, but especially toward those related to us in the faith.”—Matthew 12:33; Galatians 6:10; Romans 15:26.

(2) Through its board of directors (§ 4), the Religious Association, both in and out of court, protects its rights as well as the rights of its structural divisions and agencies, and the rights of its members in relation to third parties insofar as these rights result from membership in the Religious Association and the state legal system permits it. The Religious Association shall be liable only for such claims and expenditures as shall have been approved and authorized in accord with the statutes and the internal religious law.

(3) All assets are subject to the purposes of the Religious Association. The principles of asset management are regulated by a set of laws.

(4) The Religious Association can engage in cooperation with other legal entities that support the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in other parts of the world, with the aim of proclaiming the good news (including establishing and maintaining places of worship) of God's Kingdom, including by means of receiving and providing financial assistance, services and supplies.

§ 3 Branch Committee. (1) The supervisory organ of the Religious Association is the Branch Committee, which is composed of at least three elders. The Branch Committee operates and makes decisions on the basis of spiritual directions received from the Governing Body under its spiritual supervision and is accountable to the Governing Body and its representatives.

(2) The Branch Committee is responsible for the supervision of the Religious Association, its structural divisions, agencies and assets.

(3) The Branch Committee makes decisions on the formation and dissolution of the structural divisions (§ 5(1), §§ 6-8) and agencies (§ 5(2), §§ 9-12a) of the Religious Association. The Branch Committee is responsible for the appointment and withdrawal of spiritual offices within the Religious Association (§ 14), unless this is done by the Governing Body or one of its representatives. It makes final decisions on questions relating to membership and religious law. It passes laws, including amendments to these Statutes, gives binding individual instructions, issues directives, regulations and administrative acts, and deals with the interpretation of religious law, except where this is reserved for the Governing Body.

(4) Regulations, if legally required, will be published in the Religious Association's own official gazette.¹

(5) The members of the Branch Committee are appointed to office by the Governing Body. The Governing Body may withdraw this office at any time and without providing reasons. Membership in the Branch Committee is verified by a notarized copy of a certificate from the Governing Body.

§ 4 Board of Directors and Legal Representation. (1) The board of directors is responsible for the legal representation of the Religious Association.

¹ Translator's note: *Amtsblatt von Jehovas Zeugen in Deutschland*.

StRG-E 1.1-E

(2) The board of directors is composed of at least three elders. Members of the board of directors are appointed to their office by the Branch Committee. The Branch Committee may revoke their office at any time and without receiving any reason, or board members may resign from office.

(3) Two members of the board of directors must jointly represent the Religious Association unless the board of directors arranges that a board member individually represent the Religious Association in specific areas. This is indicated by the seal imprinted next to the signature (§ 7(1), sentence 2 SiegelO) and the qualified electronic signature of the board member.

(4) Members of the board of directors conduct dealings with joint authorization and responsibility in accordance with the current guidelines or individual instructions from the Governing Body and the Branch Committee. The board of directors sets out rules of procedure for this purpose.

§ 5 Structural Divisions and Agencies of the Religious Association.

(1) The following are structural divisions of the Religious Association:

- the branch office,
- circuits,
- congregations.

(2) The following are agencies with specialized spheres of responsibility within the Religious Association:

- Worldwide Order of Special Full-Time Servants of Jehovah's Witnesses—Germany,
- Wachturm Bibel- und Traktat-Gesellschaft der Zeugen Jehovas, e.V.,¹
- Stiftung Königreichswerk Jehovas Zeugen, and,²
- administrative offices.

(3) Additionally, elders serve to fulfill special duties under the direction of the branch office in accord with issued directives.

(4) According to the religious law of Jehovah's Witnesses, structural divisions or agencies exist as independent or non-independent components of the Religious Association. Independent structural divisions and agencies under religious law may act as asset holders, managing their assets independently within the scope of their jurisdiction. (§ 2(1) VVGJZ) In legal dealings, they may act under their own name.

¹ Translator's note: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Jehovah's Witnesses, registered association.

² Translator's note: Kingdom Service Foundation of Jehovah's Witnesses.

(5) Independent structural divisions and agencies under religious law do not possess their own legal personality under state law and, in particular, do not have their own corporation rights. Even when they act under their own name, they obligate the Religious Association as a corporation under public law as long as and insofar as they do not have their own legal personality as defined by state law. (§ 4 VVGZD)

(6) Insofar as the regulations of religious law allows for a structural division or agency to have its own legal personality under state law, this shall be acquired in accordance with the general provisions of state law in a legal form provided for by the legal system.

§ 6 Branch Office. (1) As an independent structural division under religious law, the branch office is the administrative instrument through which the Branch Committee and the board of directors perform their duties on the basis of directions issued by the Governing Body. It administers assets allocated to it as property as well as any donations it receives.

(2) The branch office performs its duties particularly through members of the Worldwide Order of Special Full-Time Servants of Jehovah's Witnesses—Germany.

(3) On behalf of the Governing Body, the administrative office known as Revisionsamt Jehovas Zeugen¹ annually reviews the management and use of funds by the branch office and other asset holders.

§ 7 Circuits. Several congregations are usually grouped into a circuit, which is a dependent structural division under religious law whose spiritual care is the responsibility of a circuit overseer.

§ 8 Congregations. (1) The congregations are independent structural divisions under religious law. They administer the assets allocated to them as property as well as other legally acquired assets.

(2) Each congregation is directed and represented by a body of elders composed of the appointed elders in the respective congregation.

(3) Congregations are formed, named, dissolved or merged by the Branch Committee and are subject to the supervision of the branch office. They bear the name: Jehovas Zeugen, Versammlung ...²

(4) Congregations carry out their responsibilities within the framework of the *Congregation Charter* (VersO), which is binding on all congregations.

§ 9 Worldwide Order of Special Full-Time Servants of Jehovah's Witnesses—Germany. (1) The Worldwide Order of Special Full-Time Servants of Jehovah's Witnesses—Germany (Order) is part of the Worldwide Order of Special Full-Time

¹ Translator's note: Auditing Authority of Jehovah's Witnesses.

² Translator's note: Jehovah's Witnesses, ... Congregation.

StRG-E 1.1-E

Servants of Jehovah's Witnesses used by the Governing Body to supervise and direct its religious work. The Order is a non-independent agency under religious law. The Order is under the supervision of the Branch Committee.

(2) The care for the Order's legal and financial interests is guaranteed by the structural divisions or agencies designated for this purpose as legal entities of the Order. The basis for the Order's activity is laid down in its regulations (OrdensO).

§ 10 Wachturm Bibel- und Traktat-Gesellschaft der Zeugen Jehovas, e.V. (1) The Wachturm Bibel- und Traktat-Gesellschaft der Zeugen Jehovas, e.V., is an independent agency of the Religious Association under the religious law that performs assigned duties within the boundaries of the purpose of the Religious Association according to § 2(1).

(2) It exists in the form of a registered association in order to conduct legal transactions. The principles for its activities are determined in its statutes.

§ 11 Stiftung Königreichswerk Jehovas Zeugen. (1) The Stiftung Königreichswerk Jehovas Zeugen is an independent agency of the Religious Association under religious law that performs its assigned duties within the boundaries of the purpose of the Religious Association according to § 2(1).

(2) It exists in the form of an ecclesiastical foundation with legal capacity under civil law in order to conduct legal transactions. The principles for its activities are determined in its statutes.

§ 12 Administrative Offices. (1) Administrative offices are independent agencies of the Religious Association under the religious law that perform their assigned duties within the boundaries of the purpose of the Religious Association according to § 2(1).

(2) The Branch Committee establishes administrative offices as required. The provisions governing their activities are enacted upon their establishment.

§ 12a Christliches Humanitäres Hilfswerk der Zeugen Jehovas in Deutschland.¹ The administrative office of Christliches Humanitäres Hilfswerk der Zeugen Jehovas in Deutschland is an independent agency of the Religious Association under religious law that performs assigned duties within the boundaries of the purpose of the Religious Association according to § 2(1).

§ 13 Independent Activities, Preaching Activity. (1) The religious law of the Religious Association and its self-concept determine which actions may be attributed to the Religious Association.

¹ Translator's note: Christian Humanitarian Relief Work of Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany.

(2) The Religious Association is not responsible for the autonomous, personal religious practice of members of the Religious Association, even when the objectives of their actions coincide with those of the Religious Association.

(3) One particular activity that is autonomous and not attributable to the Religious Association is the preaching activity that its members perform as a personal commitment and religious practice, which they assumed through their solemn vow of dedication to Jehovah God (1 Corinthians 9:16; 2 Corinthians 4:13; Galatians 6:5), even if the Religious Association makes the infrastructure, equipment and other aids available.

§ 14 Principles of Operation, Spiritual Offices. (1) The volunteer spirit and the personal responsibility of each one of Jehovah's Witnesses are basic principles of the Religious Association. All services are performed on a religiously motivated and voluntary basis, in the awareness that these are sacred services to the honor and glory of God. Jehovah's Witnesses consider it an honor and privilege to be used in any of avenue of service.

(2) The attitude described in § 14(1) forms the basis for exercising all of the spiritual offices conferred by the Religious Association according to its religious law. Qualified members are appointed to the spiritual offices, which are permanent in nature. The exercising of a spiritual office is a solely personal right that cannot be exercised by proxy.

(3) With the exception of members of the Order, only persons willing and able to accept an office without receiving financial support or material compensation from the Religious Association are appointed to serve in these spiritual offices. Employer-employee relationships are foreign to the Religious Association and ruled out for all services and spiritual offices. Neither the rendering of a service nor the exercise of a spiritual office can give rise to claims against the Religious Association for reimbursement, support, and care, except in the case of Order members who are guaranteed the provisions outlined in the rules of the Order.—§ 9(2).

(4) Dismissal from office terminates the office holder's authority and obligates him to return all physical documents entrusted to him for the office, to permanently delete digital documents, to return other items belonging to the Religious Association and to provide information about his official duties upon request. The same applies in the case of a resignation from office.

(5) Elders are pastors of the Religious Association by virtue of their appointment to the office of elder. Institutional pastors with a particular sphere of activity may be appointed for the care of persons in special facilities, such as prisons, hospitals, residential facilities, etc. Institutional pastors must fulfill their duties conscientiously in compliance with religious law and the laws of the state.

(6) The assumption of special assignments may be transferred to elders. These assignments should not be understood as independent spiritual offices.

StRG-E 1.1-E

§ 15 Membership, Pre-Membership Status. (1) Membership in the Religious Association is established through:

1. baptism as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and
2. a link to structural division or agency with the sphere of activity of the Religious Association.

(2) When a structural division recognizes a person as belonging to it, this person is linked to a structural division within the sphere of activity of the Religious Association. The recognition of affiliation is determined by the place of residence within the sphere of activity of a structural division.

(3) The following are regarded as belonging to the Religious Association, having pre-membership status:

1. unbaptized publishers,
2. minor children of Jehovah's Witnesses, provided that they personally feel a sense of belonging in the Religious Association.

The pre-membership status of an unbaptized publisher enables a person to test himself by fully participating in congregation life and to examine whether he wishes to be baptized as a Jehovah's Witness. It entitles him to participate in the preaching activity of Jehovah's Witnesses.

(4) The status of unbaptized publisher is usually the prerequisite for baptism. Anyone who, at his own request, has been approved for baptism by the elders authorized under religious law can be duly baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

§ 16 Termination of Membership. (1) Death terminates membership in the Religious Association.

(2) Membership in the Religious Association is terminated when a person departs from the sphere of activity of the Religious Association because of links to a structure outside of the sphere of activity, unless there is still a link with a structural division or agency within the sphere of activity of the Religious Association.— § 1(3).

(3) Membership is terminated when an appointed judicial committee passes an exclusion resolution. The following procedural principles apply:

1. The judicial committee makes a decision after judicial committee proceedings are conducted on the basis of the religious tenets of Jehovah's Witnesses and include an oral hearing to which the person concerned is invited.
2. If the person concerned fails to attend the hearing a second time, the judicial committee may proceed in his absence.
3. The accused can present evidence and call witnesses.
4. Due to the pastoral nature of these proceedings, assistance from other persons, particularly lawyers, is not permitted. Persons may attend as observers in cases where this is allowed under religious law.

5. After being notified of the decision of the judicial committee, the person concerned may file a written appeal against the decision of the judicial committee within seven days.

(4) Membership is terminated when an appointed committee upholds a person's decision to disassociate himself from the Religious Association. Such a decision is admissible on the basis of:

1. a personal, written declaration to leave the Religious Association,
2. a declaration of resignation from the designated authority under the law of the respective federal state,
3. an oral statement before two witnesses, expressing the desire to leave the Religious Association,
4. obvious conduct that contradicts religious law.

(5) The pre-membership status may be revoked if the person concerned declares that he no longer wishes to be an unbaptized publisher, or if his attitude or lifestyle no longer conforms to the beliefs and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses. The person is given the opportunity to make a statement.

§ 17 Filing Resignation with State Authorities. Filing resignation from the Religious Association with the authorities in accordance with the law of the federal state only terminates membership with regard to the legal system of the state.

§ 18 Reinstatement. In the cases listed under § 16(3)(4), reinstatement in the Religious Association is possible at the request of the person concerned. The appointed committee decides on the reinstatement.

§ 19 Data Protection. The protection of personal data is ensured during processing by the Religious Association by means of its own data protection law.

§ 20 Dissolution. In the event of the dissolution of the Religious Association, assets will be transferred to one of the legal corporations of Jehovah's Witnesses as determined by the Governing Body.