

WATCHTOWER ANNOUNCES ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

A major restructuring of the Jehovah's Witness organization was announced at the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society's meeting last October. The extent of the change, which included the resignation of President Milton Henschel and six other board members, is unprecedented in the Watchtower's 116-year history.

The Society announced other changes, too, including the appointment of seven new directors and the establishing of three new nonprofit corporations in the United States. According to a news release from the Public Affairs Office of Jehovah's Witnesses, the changes to the legal structure of the group "will allow them to keep pace with their growth."

Before the restructuring, the Jehovah's Witnesses were strictly ruled by the group's Governing Body. In keeping with the changes, administrative responsibilities will be handled by one of the new corporations. Public affairs director James Pellechia said the changes will enable the Governing Body to "concentrate more on the ministry of the Word." "The reason for the changes was both theological and practical," he further said.

According to an Associated Press report, "Don Adams, a 50-year veteran of the organization, has been named president and seven lower-ranking members will make up the new board. Henschel will remain a member of the Governing Body, which will have a rotating chairman rather than a permanent leader."

The newly formed corporations include the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, which will direct the sect's religious and education aspects; the Religious Order of Jehovah's Witnesses, which will supervise full-time ministry workers; and the Kingdom Support Services, which will administer certain organizational assets, including the design and engineering of society buildings.

The changes do not come as a big surprise to many who monitor the organization. A more significant shift in Jehovah's Witness policy is one shrouded within the announced changes. The Watchtower now says its principal offices, including president and vice president, no longer have to be held by "anointed" members of its faith.

According to Watchtower teaching, "anointed" Christians are a select body of 144,000 persons consisting of believers from the first century up until the present day.

Jehovah's Witnesses maintain the total number of this group, which is interpreted from Revelation 7:14, was fulfilled in the 1930s. According to the Society's figures, fewer than 9,000 of the elite are presently alive on the earth. Most members of this remnant are aged and the shrinking number posed challenges in selecting Watchtower officers under its previous criterion.

—MKG

LETTING HER PEOPLE GO

The ministry of best-selling author and weight-loss guru Gwen Shamblin recently reached an impasse with many of the evangelical churches that once actively promoted her highly successful Weigh Down Diet program. Shamblin experienced another setback when her publisher, Thomas Nelson, announced plans to cancel her book contract. The publisher said it was immediately stopping publication of her new book, *Out of Egypt*, which had been scheduled to be shipped to bookstores within days of the September announcement.

Shamblin's woes began late last summer when apologist L.L. "Don" Veinot, of Midwest Christian Outreach, received several calls expressing uncertainty about Shamblin, including some from her employees. Veinot took a closer look at the doctrine and practice of Shamblin. His investigation uncovered her anti-Trinitarian theology, Church of Christ roots, and an exclusive notion in which she claims to be restoring New Testament Christianity.

In January 1999, Shamblin, along with her husband, founded the Remnant Fellowship, a Nashville-based church. The fellowship has about 80 members, mostly employees of Shamblin's organization, and currently meets in a warehouse. It was stated in a *Christianity Today* report that, "At least 40 employees have been either fired or resigned since Jan. 1," apparently because of their refusal to align with Shamblin's elitist fellowship. The article, appearing on the magazine's web site, attributed knowledge of the dismissals to "an anonymous source inside Weigh Down."

A Baptist Press article paralleled the *CT* report saying "that at least 35 employees were pressured into resigning from the ministry because they would not join Shamblin's church and two others were fired." The BP report stated its information came from a "former high-ranking executive at Weigh Down" who also stated that, "On many occasions, Gwen had spoken to the employees during devotionals and strongly suggested that we all come and share in their worship service. The last week of

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