

Stealing the Collection Plate

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES TAKE TACOMA TO THE CLEANERS BY Bryan Winchell

7-12-2000 - Tacoma Reporter

Many

Ex-communications, end-of-the-world prophecies, strict orders that mandate members shall not make friends outside of the organization; this is what the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society—commonly known as Jehovah's Witnesses—is all about. When they flock to the Tacoma Dome this weekend for the fourth in a series of conventions, the Watchtower Society will run away with hundreds of thousands of dollars in parking fees that—if they abide by their contract with the Dome—should stay here in Tacoma.

The situation has caused a crisis of conscience for 51-year-old Bruce Baker, a lifelong Jehovah's Witness. For the past several years, Baker served on the Watchtower Convention Committee (WCC), which oversees the functions of the Watchtower Convention at the Tacoma Dome.

In early June, Baker was ex-communicated for raising concerns about the organization's financial practices and several of

its beliefs, particularly the one that defines the Watchtower Society as the only conduit to God's true message. As a result of the ex-communication, Baker's oldest daughter and son-in-law can no longer speak to him and he has lost touch with his 19-month-old granddaughter.

of his friends are likewise no longer speaking with him, for fear of being ex-communicated themselves.

"This is a big boat to rock,"

Baker says. "I've discovered a lot of things about the organization on the internet and from being one of the higher-ups in the area."

Just what did Baker find out that resulted in his ex-communication? Last January, at a pre-convention meeting, he was told by Mark Lahfdary, another leader of the WCC, that the contract with the Dome specifically states that the Watchtower Society cannot charge for parking.

Yet at assembly halls, Baker says, Jehovah's Witnesses are frequently told that to not pay the parking "contribution" would be a sin. A February letter from the Watchtower Society in New York to the Tacoma chapter refers to a "per-day suggested parking contribution" yet goes on to refer to a ticket that can be acquired in advance for all three days. Does a contribution require a ticket?

Perhaps most telling about what the Society really expects from its members is this line from the letter: "Parking Department attendants should be on hand in

Reprint
by permission
Bruce
Baker

full force when the lots open each morning. Otherwise delegates park and do not contribute, which is unfair to those who come later and make a contribution." If the parking "contribution" is not a requirement--as the contract with the Dome states it must not be--then why do attendants need to be out in "full force" to ensure that everyone contributes?

With over 10,000 attendees at the three-day convention, the Watchtower Society collects >>

>> over \$120,000 from the parking "donations" of one convention, money that usually goes into the pockets of the Tacoma Dome. Last Friday, Baker sent information to Mayor Brian Ebersole, City Manager Ray Corpuz and City Councilmember Kevin Phelps urging them to take action against the organization. None could be reached for comment.

What may stop them from raising the issue, however, is the fact that the Watchtower Society fills the Dome for a month straight during the down season, thereby contributing money to the local economy. And, as Baker points out in his letter to the three politicians, the New York headquarters for the organization has "strongly intimated that if the Dome tries to flex with pricing at all they will pull out and go somewhere else."

Which leads to the question: Would we really miss them? (12)

City of Tacoma
City Manager
747 Market St. Suit 1200
Tacoma WA 98402

July 12, 2000

Mr. Corpuz:

What I have to say is very important to the City of Tacoma, please hear me out. I have been one of Jehovah's Witnesses all my life (51 years now.) For several years I've been part of the 3 man Watchtower Convention Committee (volunteers overseeing all functions at one of the Watchtower Tacoma Dome Conventions. Mr. Combs is probably most familiar with Dave Heckman and Mark Lahfdany (both very fine and dedicated men.) They have been assigned by Jerry Grisles convention office at the Watchtower Societies Headquarters in Brooklyn NY, to be what they call negotiators or liaison people. But, within the Convention Org. there are three man committees who oversee everything else.

On June 6th 2000 after being a faithful JW all my life, volunteering 1,000's of hour and tens of 1,000's of dollars over time. I was abruptly excommunicated; the Watchtower Society is currently seeking out my wife and younger daughter to excommunicate them as well. The reason is not due to any moral or legal indiscretions, as we have always tried to live by Christian standards.

It was a crisis of conscience regarding scriptural and ethical matters involving the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. One of these came to light Jan of this year when myself and 30 others, including Mark Lahfdany, and Dave Heckman as chairman and the four 3 man committees met at a pre-convention seminar. (all volunteer, no one gets paid all donations go to the Watchtower Society).

When the subject of RV Parking came up Mark Lahfdany gave all of us a very serious and elongated word of caution. He said in effect that our contract specifics that we cannot charge for parking. And last year we got into trouble since one of the JW's not knowing any better called the Dome and wanted to know how much the RV parking cost (RV Parking was new in '99). Mark came across with the idea we had to be sure no one got the Dome phone number so his would not happen again. We were instructed to give out only our phone numbers, since we did not want to get in trouble with the Dome and impact our very good rental rate or jeopardize future contracts. No mention that we should abide by our contract and change our ways of doing business, even if we think we can get by on a technicality. As Christians we should go the extra mile and follow the spirit or intent of the contract. By the way this contract is top secret, I've never been shown it. I'm going by Mark's words and Dave Heckman heard the whole thing and never corrected Mark, all thirty of us assumed we were in some sort of violation of the contract. Mark, Dave, myself and a good majority of the thirty were raised as JW's and taught to view the Watchtower Leadership as God ordained. This creates a non questioning Rank and File. If you read and understand the contract like Mark, the city is losing approximately 1/2 million dollars in a 4-5 year period not to mention lack of concession proceeds, I will explain.

A Watchtower Rep. will tell you the \$4.00 is a donation since no one is towed away. I just heard announced a few weeks ago in my previous congregation that we needed to buy our parking tickets right now since the order was going the next day. Even though it is technically referred to as a donation each witness would consider it a serious indiscretion not to buy and pay for each day of his or her parking. Mark, who sends out the tickets to each congregation, (an extra volunteer assignment for him which seems to me a conflict) told me a few weeks ago they will only be sent 1 ticket per \$4. He said if the Cong. sends in \$400, they would receive 100 tickets, even if their request is more. (I don't believe this is a true donation arrangement, if it was they wouldn't need the tickets at all. I bet the Dome management, City of Tacoma or other groups who rent the Dome won't accept such a ludicrous explanation. Instead of the facility costing them, they not only break even, but even could make money. I bet everyone else who rents the Dome would not be too happy knowing this is hypocritically being done on the QT. Especially by an organization who lambastes others for the slightest impropriety.

The City of Tacoma taxpayers are being royally defrauded if this is a true violation. Even if maybe not technically, ethically no doubt it is. This is what would concern the community, since witnesses regularly visit the homes of all as uninvited guests; the community needs to know what goes on behind the scenes.

I have a copy of the designated donation charges for parking as sent out by the Watchtower society on their own letterhead, which I will enclose or send by separate mail.

After each convention a confidential net proceeds check goes back to Jerry Grisles dept at Watchtower Headquarters in NY. The checks I have personally seen range from \$130,000-\$150,000—clear profit per convention minus the Dome rent. A nice chunk of change, multiplied by 4 conventions. If they are taking in so much you probably wonder why so much quibbling over nickel and dime matters, at times dragging out contract negotiations for months. I know the volunteers (won't mention names) are often embarrassed with the Grisles office in NY. (By the way I was informed they have kept a separate record of parking ticket receipt monies over the years, maybe this would make it helpful in the City retrieving any funds due them.)

Included in a news release sent to one newspaper and also being sent to others as well is how you could check this out for yourself. Of course if anyone has or will tip them off they will doubt quickly change their program if this truly is a violation.

Go to the Watchtower convention on Fri. or Sat. about 9 am and at 10, discretely count the cars and RV's before or at noon break, ask and get directions from parking attendants or attendants inside where you can buy your parking ticket inside. (Try to dress like a witness in a business suit, or sport coat and dress pants and tie.) Go inside with someone who can take a photo of you buying a parking ticket, \$4.00 a day, buy a couple extra for Dome or City. (Be as discreet as possible so you don't create suspicion) if you carry a briefcase or Bible it will help you blend in. If you visit the men's room you will no doubt

see they are very careful with finances restricting each one to a single paper towel for drying hands.

If all of this fails you will have the printed parking charges per type of vehicle. You might though actually enjoy having one of their parking tickets; the dash of each car might display their tickets as well.

If you calculate the number of cars x's 3 days x's 4 conventions you will see how much the Tacoma taxpayers are subsidizing the Watchtower on their convention each year. Then find out how many years this has been going on. I would guess it's close to 1/2 million dollars in the last 4 years, just in parking monies.

After seeing this and experiencing what I believe are unethical manipulations of finance, ethics, and scripture, I started researching the Internet among other things. The Watchtower Society is very unhappy and appears to be almost paranoid about the Internet since it's info they can't control, which any witness can tap into in the privacy of his home. Any witness perusing the websites exposing organizational improprieties and indiscretions are viewed as almost committing the unforgivable sin.

The Public Speaking Assignment I was originally given to speak about at the Dome at the fourth convention was on Gossip, mentioning the Internet repeatedly as something to watch out for. Basically damage control as was their June Awake magazine on Propaganda, things coming against them from Europe.

They are facing some very difficult challenges in Europe, (check internet) as countries are trying to classify them as a sect or cult, they recently beat France out of a \$50,000,000 religious sect or cult tax by going public, using every means possible, even selling their souls if the rank and file in the US knew what they did to beat the wrap. I understand they used congressmen, full page add against France in the NY Times. You see, they fit France's ck list for cults.

Anyway our family and fiends of a lifetime have been separated from us overnight, including our oldest daughter and 19 month old granddaughter, she is adhering to the Organization's view on shunning, and won't even talk to us. It is all a misapplication of 2 John verses 10 & 11, in the New Testament. "*If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.*" The New American Standard Bible, Zondervan Study Bible vs 7 tells what this false teaching is, "*For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.*" (Bold ours) This does not apply to us since we will always believe Christ came in the flesh.

The introduction and footnote on vs 10 gives the setting and application in the above Bible translation.

Introduction—Occasion and Purpose

During the first two centuries the gospel was taken from place to place by traveling evangelists and teachers. Believers customarily took these missionaries into their homes and gave them provisions for their journey when they left. Since Gnostic teachers also relied in this practice (See note on 3 John 5), 2 John was written to urge discernment in supporting traveling teachers; otherwise, someone might unintentionally contribute to the propagation of heresy rather than truth.

Footnote—2 John 10--

Receive him into your house. A reference to the housing and feeding of traveling teachers (see introduction: occasion and purpose) the instruction does not prohibit greeting or even inviting a person into one's home for conversation. John was warning against providing food and shelter, since this would be an investment in the "evil deeds" of false teachers and would give public approval (see vs 11).

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, please act on it immediately if you are so moved. Principles are involved. Once again all local volunteers are very dedicated Christians, doing what they think is required by God via "His" organization.

Sincerely

Bruce Baker

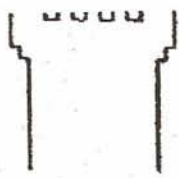
P.S. It has been strongly intimated by the New York office that if the Dome tries to flex with pricing at all they will pull out and go somewhere else. The psychology in the past is *we will teach them a lesson*. That's one of the major reasons as I understand Corvallis OR was dropped even though it was financially profitable. It went up over a three year period around a thousand dollars a day. The Gill Coliseum was about \$1000.00 a day and gradually went up to around \$2,500.00 a day over a 2-3 year period. If I remember correctly all vehicle and RV parking more then paid for the rent.

Anyway don't feel by calling them to task on this contract you will be necessarily losing a future renter anyway. They could leave in a flash as they did in Corvallis OR, that's why many Oregonians have been coming up here for the last 4 years.

Another threat to keeping conventions in Tacoma is money again. If room rates go up too much they will pull out. In recent years I've been told by other committee members that special Hotel room negotiators were brought in to show the local volunteers how to squeeze every last cent out of hotel mangers. I guess it didn't work as the locals were doing their best anyway.

cc. Kevin Phelps
City Councilman

cc. Brian Ebersole
Mayor of Tacoma



WATCHTOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.

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CONVENTIONOFFICE@WTBTS.ORG

COB:COH February 7, 2000

TO 2000 TACOMA, WA ROOMING OVERSEER(S)

Dear Brothers:

Subject: Parking Contributions for the 2000 Doers of God's Word District Convention(s).

Parking arrangements for the convention facility shown below have been included as part of the contract and are to be operated by the Parking Department under the direction of the rooming overseer. Please note the following per-day suggested parking contributions that have been approved by the Society. Do not deviate from these suggested contribution amounts without contacting the Society's Convention Office.

Convention	Tacoma, WA
Facility	Tacoma Dome
Car/Truck/Van	<u>\$4.00</u>
Bus	<u>\$12.00</u>
Recreational vehicle (12 hours) if two spaces used	<u>\$7.00</u>
Recreational vehicle (24 hours) without utilities	<u>\$17.00</u>
Recreational vehicle (24 hours) with utilities	<u>\$25.00</u>

A ticket acquired in advance will allow in and out privileges for all three days. On the next day, the same ticket can be used as a two day ticket, based on the daily parking contribution. A ticket should not be used for those who park for only one day. Instead, the parking attendant should collect the daily contribution as the vehicle enters the lot, or it may be collected inside the facility if parking contributions cannot be collected at the gate. If parking contributions cannot be collected at the gate the driver should be given a 3" X 5" card with direction to the location inside the facility where they can either contribute for a ticket or for parking that day. In addition, a vehicle towing a trailer or another vehicle should make a contribution based on the number of spaces each vehicle will occupy each day.

Parking Department attendants should be on hand in full force when the lots open each morning. Otherwise delegates park and do not contribute, which is unfair to those who come later and make a contribution. Those who enter unattended parking areas often cause the loss of many spaces due to incorrect parking of their vehicle. Therefore, please have adequate attendants on hand when the lots open to make sure delegates have a ticket, or can obtain one, or contribute for parking for that day, as well as directing them where to park.

TO 2000 TACOMA, WA ROOMING OVERSEER(S)
COB:COH February 7, 2000
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Due to the liability involved, attendants must *not* direct vehicles onto or off of public streets. They should only direct vehicles within the rented premises. In addition, the Parking Department is responsible to monitor the parking area at all times, from the time it is opened until it is closed, to make sure that vehicles are not stolen or vandalized. With the security of the volunteers in mind, it would be advisable for no less than two mature brothers to monitor any one area. These brothers should understand that if they observe a vehicle being vandalized or stolen, they should immediately contact the Parking Overseer, thereafter doing whatever is reasonable to protect the property of the brothers.

Your assistance in caring for these arrangements for the convenience of those using the parking facilities is greatly appreciated.

Your brothers,

Nathan B. S. Society
OF NEW YORK, INC.

- c: Convention overseer
- 1. Program overseer
- 2. Contract representative
- 3. Parking overseer (Rooming overseer should immediately forward the enclosed copy(ies) to the Parking overseer(s).)



SCHEDULE OF USER FEES

Tacoma Dome Arena & Exhibition Hall

ARENA

Free Admission / Public Event
Meetings / Conventions

Tradeshows

Paid Admission / Consumer Show

Non-Tacoma Schools (Paid Admission)

Tacoma Schools (Paid Admission)

Graduations (Non-Tacoma Schools)

Graduations (Tacoma Schools)

EVENT DAY

\$15,000

\$12,500 *10,000*

\$ 9,000

\$ 7,500 vs. 12%

\$ 6,000 vs. 10%

\$ 5,500 vs. 10%

\$ 4,000

\$ 3,500

NON EVENT DAY

\$7,500

\$6,250

\$4,500

\$3,750

\$3,000

\$2,750

\$2,000

\$1,750

EXHIBITION HALL

Free Admission / Public Event

Meetings / Conventions / Tradeshows

Paid Admission / Consumer Show

Graduations (Non-Tacoma Schools)

Graduations (Tacoma Schools)

Banquet

\$ 3,500

\$ 3,250

\$ 3,000 vs. 12%

\$ 2,750

\$ 2,500

\$ 500

\$1,750

\$1,625

\$1,500

\$1,375

\$1,250

PARKING LOT (per lot for outside events)

\$ 2,000

\$1,000

EQUIPMENT RENTAL FEES

Chair	(each)	\$ 0.75
Pipe & Drape	(per foot)	\$ 2.00
Table - 8' or 6'	(each)	\$ 10.00
Staging - 9 Pieces Free	(each)	\$ 20.00
Utilities - Ex Hall Max \$250	(event days)	\$ 50.00
Telephone	(local access)	\$ 75.00
Baby Grand Piano	(per event)	\$ 100.00
Utilities - Arena Max \$500	(event days)	\$ 100.00
Spotlights	(each/per day)	\$ 150.00
Forklift w/out Operator	(each/per day)	\$ 150.00
Stage Backdrop	(per event)	\$ 250.00
Portable Light System	(per event)	\$ 250.00
Portable Sound System	(per event)	\$ 250.00
Stage Barricade	(per event)	\$ 500.00
Rigging Grid	(per event)	\$ 1,000.00

SERVICE FEES

Switchboard	(per hour)	\$15.00
Clean-up Crew	(per hour)	\$20.00
Sound / Lights	(per hour)	\$30.00
Event Labor	(per hour)	\$30.00
Electrician/HVAC	(per hour)	\$35.00
House Rigger	(per hour)	\$35.00

PARKING RATES

Major Event	\$ 5.00
Other Events	\$ 4.00
RV Park & Hook-up (per day)	\$22.00
RV Park/no hook-up (per day)	\$18.00
Bus & Lg. Vehicles (per stall)	

SERVICE & EQUIPMENT TAX 8.4%

Rental Rates:

- Per day rates are for activities between 8:00 a.m. and 11:59 p.m.
- All renters must utilize the Tacoma Dome contracted ticketing, food service and guest service providers.
- The Free Admission/Public Event rate includes telephone solicitation, benefit shows and donation admission events.
- Per car parking fees will not be imposed for banquets, except when a concurrent Arena or Exhibition Hall event is taking place.

Rental Rates Include:

- Use of installed public address system and existing general lighting.
- Recognition on a Tacoma Dome marquee on the days of rental and on prior days as available.
- Event Attendants to service restrooms and hall during event and overnight clean up following event.
- Inclusion in the Tacoma Dome Monthly Event Calendar.
- Loading facilities, available storage spaces and show office.
- Event Service Representative and ten (10) parking passes per show day.

Rental Rates Do Not Include:

Guest Service Staffing, Food & Beverage Services, Ticket Services, Drayage, Stagehands, Technical Services Staffing, Equipment, Insurance Coverage, Parking Charges, Licenses, Permits, Taxes and Fees.