

Guidelines for the Responsible Use of Social Media for Texas Annual Conference Clergy and Employees

Preface:

The following are guidelines – not rules or regulations – created in response to inquiries about the appropriate use of social media from local churches and pastors. These guidelines are not about limiting what one can do through social media. Rather, raise the question, “as a member of the Body of Christ, what is the best use of social media for the Christian community and outreach?”

Guidelines:

- Know and follow Biblical understandings and the Book of Discipline.
- Post only what you want the world to see. Once a post is on a social media site, it may be available online even after the post is removed.
- Remember the Internet is instant communication; anything (even initial posts which have been edited or deleted) can be forwarded and saved.
- Avoid commentary that could possibly be deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary or libelous.
- Be aware of copyright laws when using material and photos that are not original.
- Refrain from posting pictures of minors without prior written parental permission.
- Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colorful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions and derogatory remarks or characterizations. Be aware of special uses for all caps, abbreviations, or lexicons.
- Avoid discussing pastoral concerns or coworkers. Also refrain from using church outlets to publicly criticize The United Methodist Church, colleagues or conference personnel.
- Remember that people classified as ‘friends’ have the ability to download and share your information with others so be discerning on whom you ‘friend’. If you are an online ‘friend’ with a minor, consider limiting and moderating the information you make available.
- Engaging in online arguments is seldom a good idea.
- Be cautious about reposting without permission to avoid copyright issues or to protect the privacy of the original author.
- Remember that church media accounts reflect the church’s mission and ministry within the community.
- When posting prayer requests, be careful to avoid divulging personal information. Consider asking for general prayer rather than relaying specific, individual information.

When considering social media for yourself or a social media strategy for the congregation, you might ask:

- “Would you want the information that is posted on social media to be on the sign in front of the church?”
- “Who is allowed to post information on behalf of the church?”
- “Who is assigned to monitor social media on behalf of the church?”

Security:

- Due to security risk, be cautious when installing external applications that work with social networking sites, e.g., calendar programs, games, etc.
- Consider running updated malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your computer.
- Visit your profile security and privacy settings. For Facebook, at a minimum, consider making the privacy settings to ‘only friends’. ‘Friends of friends’ and ‘networks and friends’ open your content to a large group of unknown persons. Your privacy and that of your family may be at risk.

Adopted on April 10, 2014 by Communications Committee of the Texas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.