

Note: this is a compilation of several social and print media guidelines and templates... to be used for church assistance in developing their own guidelines, best practices, policies, and procedures.

Social and Electronic Media Guidelines: Church Policy/Guideline Template

Purpose

This document provides parameters in order to guide church staff, team members, employees, volunteers, and church leaders when social media tools are used on behalf of **Example Church** or when **Example Church** becomes part of a social media dialogue.

Where Do These Guidelines Apply?

This policy applies to all online and mobile platforms for sharing content and information, whether hosted by **Example Church** or hosted by others. "Social media" refers to social networking services, short-message services, message boards, wikis, podcasts, image/video sharing sites and other methods for sharing real time information among users. Due to the ever-changing speed of social media, this policy applies to all new social media platforms, whether or not they are mentioned. All social media platforms are relevant and included.

Introduction

Example Church views email, texting/messaging, social media, and many other forms of electronic communication as a positive way to provide and receive information, network, and exchange ideas. This communications policy is established to impart boundaries protecting the integrity of information delivered, and safeguard the unique Wesleyan charism of the **Example Church** and The United Methodist Church. Our overall goal is to share the love of Christ in a way that is open, transparent, and safe for all users. Therefore, policies and guidelines for functioning in the electronic world are the same as the values, ethics, and confidentiality policies we are expected to live every day.

Guidelines Regarding What You Share

- Be selective. There are a variety of digital platforms available. Use the right medium for the message. For example, don't use a Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram to communicate sensitive or private information.

- Remember that you represent the church. You may even represent God to others. As staff, volunteers, and clergy, you have a higher profile in the community. Your responsibility does not end when you leave the premises or off

the clock. While you may view your online presence as a personal project, many readers will assume your views represent the church.

- Be extremely wise with all content posted. A blog, community post, or social media post is often visible to the entire public (boss, coworkers, volunteers, parents, children, spouse, the attorney for the person who does not like you) and can/will be shared by others in various ways that cannot be controlled at any level. *Google has a very good and very permanent memory.* You are personally and legally responsible for what you share, including content to media outside the church and your own personal social media outlets.
- Always choose grace when utilizing social media. For example, if someone has offended you, consider speaking with them privately on the matter. Do not post offense responses publicly, air personal grievances, or try to solve conflicts online. When in doubt, be positive! Whether someone has posted something mean, rude or distasteful, take the high road at all times.
- Honor our differences. We love others because God loves others. All people bear God's image and are worthy of the dignity inherent in that identity.
- Do not ignore internal hesitations. If you are unsure, do not share or post; your gut is likely telling you someone might misunderstand, be hurt, or be offended.
- Be safe! Protect your personal information such as location, surroundings, and contact information.
- Topics such as partisan politics and highly controversial subject material is better discussed in person. Do not hinder someone else's spiritual growth. Be careful not to impair your ability to work with staff, volunteers, other leaders, other churches, and the community in general.
- Be authentic and transparent. Use your real name and be clear about your role. Do not post anonymously or use a name that hides your identity. Be accurate with the material you post, and if you make a mistake, admit it and remove or correct it.

Policies Regarding What You Share

- All of **Example Church's** policies including harassment, bullying, confidentiality, unfounded accusations, illegal activities, profanity, sexual misconduct, defamatory language, personal insults, misrepresentation or disparaging the name or reputation of the church or another person, remarks that contribute to a hostile workplace, unethical behavior, unprofessional behavior, and software use apply in the use of all electronic/social media.

- **Example Church** social media should never be used to establish private communications between parties.
- **Example Church** communication may not be used for partisan political messages. Association, representation, or endorsement of, or by any political candidate, party, or campaign whether actual, inferred, or implied is prohibited.
- When you share your views, include a disclaimer. It must be absolutely clear that all views/posts do not reflect **Example Church**, but are reflective of themselves.
- Ask us! In areas where this policy does not provide a direct answer for how members of our community should answer social media questions, please check with **Example Church's** leadership team before speaking as a representative of the church.

Regarding What You Share About Others

- Ask permission before reporting on conversations or meetings that are meant to be private or for internal use only. This includes information that will be made public but has not yet been announced or posted.
- Do not refer to other people by name or provide information about others that could reasonably identify them without their permission. Do not provide personal information about members, guests, or staff such as phone numbers, addresses, email, etc...
- Social media postings should never disclose sensitive or confidential information, unless written consent to share said information is obtained from the individual it concerns. This includes but is not limited to personal and/or medical information.
- Please refrain from posting photos of individuals or identifying those individuals on **Example Church's** social media pages without their written consent prior to posting. Written consent can be submitted via email or text. The members of the social media team are responsible for disabling the "tagging" feature of photos posted on the ministry's page. If the photos reference a location, that information must be deleted as well.
- Do not purposefully or inadvertently disclose any information that is confidential or proprietary, including sensitive financial or operational information. If it is not already public information, it is not your job to make it so.

Regarding Minors (under age of 18)

the previous policies regarding "others" apply as well as these

- When communicating with youth via social media, team members must adhere to **Example Church's** youth communication policy. Additionally, employees and volunteers serving in the children and youth ministries must keep their professional image in mind at all times. Online conduct, comments, behavior, etc. affects this image. **Example Church** discourages staff members and volunteers from accepting invitations to "friend" youth group members within personal networking sites. Social contact outside the **Example Church's** youth page may create serious risks for the ministry workers and negatively alter the dynamic between a youth leader and a student. If it is necessary to communicate outside the youth page, written parental or guardian consent must be given.
- Any site operated by **Example Church** directed toward the children and youth should be designed to limit access to authorized members. Leaders of such sites should take steps to ensure that unauthorized users will not have access to the site. Registration for such a site must require the use of a legal name and valid contact information. Again, photos may not be posted without the prior consent of the parent or legal guardian of the minor.
- Regarding youth to youth communication: Every effort should be made to discourage abusive language, cyberbullying, and sharing of explicit sexual content whether by written or picture formats. Should abusive language, cyberbullying, or sexually inappropriate content be discovered by staff or youth volunteers, parents and staff should be notified, and the youth and youth parents involved should be addressed- including sharing **Example Church** social media policies and procedures and the possible consequences of abusive online behavior.

Administrative Requirements

- Any **Example Church** website content or social media content should be **regularly monitored by the leaders of each ministry area** for improper content or policy violations.
- Employees/volunteers who are interested in representing **Example Church** must attend a social media training class and sign this policy document affirming they have read and understand its contents.

- If you currently have a personal website or blog, or are considering starting one, be sure to discuss this with your supervisor. If you have any questions, contact Human Resources.
- If you should choose to advertise on your personal blog/podcast/electronic media site, ensure the ads are consistent with **Example Church** values, policies, and procedures.
- Be sure links to other website materials are not in conflict with **Example Church's** values, mission and goals.
- If any posted material concerning **Example Church** seems to be illegal (e.g. child or elder abuse, etc.) team members should contact church leadership and the appropriate authorities immediately.
- Church emails should be used for church business and activities. Group emails should be sent blind copy and forwarded emails should eliminate originating distribution lists to prevent unauthorized sharing of email addresses (unless permission to share has been granted.)
- Please use your personal time, not work time, for your personal electronic media activity.
- No **Example Church** communication may be used to promote any activity resulting in financial gain of a staff member, parishioner, or business.
- Church communications may not be used for partisan political messages, paid advertising, or any activity resulting in financial gain of a staff member, parishioner, or business.
- Team members and employees are solely personally and legally responsible for the content they publish online, including content from their own social media pages.
- As a team member of **Example Church**, remember that your online presence and posts can have the potential to affect the ministry of **Example Church**. For this reason, it is imperative that you conduct your online interactions in accordance with the Employee/Volunteer Handbook and **Example Church's** Code of Conduct. This includes refraining from posting any disparaging remarks about **Example Church**, its members and visitors, and the United Methodist Church. If you have any questions in this area, inquire with the leadership team for clarity.

Public Relations Guidelines

- **Example Church** may designate one or two main employees to facilitate all external communication channels on behalf of the Church. Only authorized employees such as the Pastor(s), Communications Staff and Departmental Directors may coordinate communications with members of the media on behalf of **Example Church**.
- Any external communication from the **Example Church** office regarding serious/unexpected incidents must be approved by church leadership and follow **Example Church's** guidelines. In the event of a crisis, contact church leadership prior to responding to any posting or comments relating to the crisis.
- Your posts may generate media coverage. If a member of the media contacts you about an **Example Church** related post or **Example Church** information of any kind, contact _____ for direction on how to respond.

Copyright Information and Guidelines

- Always use **Example Church's** official name and logo. These branding items must be approved prior to official use. Any **Example Church** materials should be credited to **Example Church** or otherwise not be posted.
- Use of unauthorized websites, blogs, social network sites, direct mailings, and unauthorized use of **Example Church** name and logo are not permitted.
- Copyright and Fair Use Laws must be respected at all times. Point or link another's information to their site.
- Please do not post any content that is the property of another individual or company unless you have written permission or are sure that the use of the material is legally permitted. This is your responsibility. We cannot provide you with legal advice regarding copyrights.
- You may embed or link any **Example Church** video, graphics, or other materials to your site ONLY with prior written permission.

- Please refer to the *Brand Guide* regarding brand/logo architecture, usage in photography and illustration, stationery and business cards, and use on email signatures, social media, and powerpoint presentations.

Possible Outcomes of Improper Social/Electronic Media Use

- Any use of **Example Church** social media that does not comply with this policy should be reported to your supervisor and the communications director immediately.
- Team members who misuse the **Example Church's** social media resources in ways that violate the law or other ministry policies are subject to immediate disciplinary action and/or dismissal.
- Improper use may cause inability to attract or keep members and visitors.
- Improper use of electronic and social media could get **Example Church**, you, and perhaps others in legal (criminal and/or civil) trouble.

****Note: This is a template. Your organization is responsible for compliance with all applicable laws. Accordingly, this sample should not be used or adopted by your organization without first being reviewed extensively and approved by an attorney. **The North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church** assumes no liability in connection with the use or distribution of this template.*