

# Church Social Media Policy

At Our Church (the "Church"), we know that online social platforms, including blogs, wikis, message boards, video and photo sharing websites, and social networking services, are constantly transforming the way we interact. We also recognize the importance of the Internet in shaping the public view of our Church. The Church is committed to supporting your right to interact responsibly and knowledgeably on the Internet through blogging and interaction in social media. We want our staff, volunteers, and church attenders to share and learn from others in order to build a valuable online community.

The purpose of these guidelines is two-fold: First, the Church has an aim to protect our interests, including, but not limited to, the privacy of our employees and confidentiality regarding our plans, partners, users, and operations. Second, these guidelines will help you make respectful and appropriate decisions about your work-related interactions with people on the Internet.

Your personal online activity is your business. However, any activity in or outside of work that affects your performance, the performance of others at the Church, or the Church's interests are a proper focus for this Social Media Policy. You must always assume that your work-related social media activity is visible to the Church as well as current and potential employees, clients, partners, and prospects. The Church reserves the right to direct its staff to avoid certain subjects and remove inappropriate comments and posts. Our internal policies remain in effect in our workplace.

## **Guidelines for Discussing Our Church on the Internet**

- You are not authorized to speak on behalf of the Church without express permission from your manager.
- If you have permission to discuss the Church and / or our current and potential activities, employees, or partners, please follow these guidelines:
  - Identification: Identify yourself. Include your name, and when appropriate, state your role or title within the Church.
  - Disclaimer: Use a disclaimer that "the views you express on the particular website are yours alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the Church."
  - Proof: Support any statements made online with factual evidence. Use links where appropriate.
- Also, let your manager know about the content you plan to publish. Your manager may want to visit the website to understand your point of view.

## **Guidelines for Confidential and Proprietary Information**

You may not share information that is confidential and proprietary about the Church. This includes, but is not limited to, Church strategy, information about trademarks, upcoming product releases, sales, finances, donation information, discipline or counseling information, and any other information that has not been publicly released by the Church.

The list above is given as example only and does not cover the range of what the Church considers confidential and proprietary. If you have any questions about whether information has been released publicly or any other concerns, please speak with your manager before releasing information that could potentially harm the Church, or our current and potential business interests, employees, partners, or clients.

The Church's logo and trademarks may not be used without explicit permission in writing from the Church. This is to prevent the appearance that you speak for or officially represent the Church. If given permission to use the Church logo, you must use it in accordance to the current Style Guide.

It is fine to quote or retweet others, but you should not attempt to pass off someone else's words, photography, or other information as your own. All copyright, privacy, and other laws that apply offline apply online as well. Always give proper credit to credit your sources when posting a link or information gathered from another source.

## **Ownership of Social Media Contacts**

Any social media contacts, including "followers" or "friends," that are acquired through accounts (including, but not limited to email addresses, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, or other social media networks) created on behalf of the Church are the property of the Church.

## **Transparency and Disclosures**

If you have permission to publicly share what a client, partner, or other Church is doing, such as launching a new website or coming out with a new product, you must disclose your relationship to the other party.

Do not discuss a Church or product in social media in exchange for money. If you receive a product or service to review for free, you must disclose it in your post or review.

## **Respect and Privacy Rights**

- Use common sense.
- Follow the rules of the social media sites you use.

- Speak respectfully about the Church and our current or former staff and members.
- Write knowledgeably, accurately, and with appropriate professionalism. Despite disclaimers, your Web interaction can result in members of the public forming opinions about the Church and its employees, partners and interests.
- Refrain from publishing anything that could reflect negatively on the Church's reputation or otherwise embarrass the Church, including posts about drug or alcohol abuse, profanity, off-color or sexual humor, and other inappropriate conduct. Do not use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any conduct that would not otherwise be acceptable in the Church's workplace. Please also show respect for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory.
- Honor the privacy rights of our current staff, members, and partners by seeking their permission before writing about or displaying internal Church information that could be considered a breach of their privacy and confidentiality.
- Ensure that your social networking conduct is consistent with the all policies contained in the Church's Employee Handbook.
- Respect the law, including those laws governing defamation, discrimination, harassment, and copyright and fair use.

## **Media**

Media inquiries for information about our Church and our current and potential products, employees, partners, clients, and competitors should be referred to the Communications Manager. This does not specifically include your opinions, writing, and interviews on topics aside from our Church and our current and potential products, employees, partners, or clients.

## **Your Legal Liability**

The Church complies with all federal and state laws that apply to our operations and activities. Since you are involved in the Church's operations and activities, you are responsible for understanding and observing these policies.

Note that the breach of privacy and confidentiality, use of copyrighted materials, unfounded or derogatory statements, or misrepresentation may be considered illegal and is not accepted by the Church.

Each person on staff at the Church is personally responsible, and may be legally liable, for the content he or she publishes online. You can be sued for not disclosing your relationship to the Church, or for purposely spreading false information. You can also be sued by Church employees, competitors, and any individual or Church that views your commentary, content, or

images as defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous or creating a hostile work environment. In addition to any legal action, your activity can result in disciplinary action up to and including employment termination.

If you have any questions, please ask the Communications Department or the Human Resources Department for guidance on compliance with the laws.

### **Social Media Guidelines for the Church Accounts**

The following are tips and guidelines for posting on social media accounts belonging to the Church. If you have permission, please follow these guidelines when posting from our accounts.

#### **THINGS TO DO:**

- Interact with your followers, care for your followers, pray for your followers.
- Ask a pastor how to best answer theological questions.
- Get the legal permission of everyone you take a photo of. This means a signed photo consent form for any close up photos of any individuals.
- It is more important to be clear than clever. Being funny is great for sharing, but it doesn't always translate well when you can't reflect tone with text. It can backfire so just be careful.
- Be discerning and be listening to the Spirit (yes, even on social media).
- Glean what you can from interactions with your followers.
- Go with your gut/conscience.
- Tell people you prayed for them.
- Be discerning when posting photos. Any picture you upload could have GPS data on it; people could figure out where you live (that is the default iPhone setting but you can turn it off for your whole phone or just the camera: on the iPhone: Privacy > Location Services > Off).
- Use discernment when "checking in" on Facebook. Avoid posting pictures that could identify a pastor's home, street, children's school, etc.
- Always point to Jesus. He's the hero, not the pastor, not the church, and not you.

#### **THINGS TO AVOID:**

- Do not argue or debate with followers. Pray for critics and remember Galatians 6:7. Only engage with antagonists out of love and to clarify or correct something that is wrong.
- Consider the Internet a permanent record. Every pastor and church not only influences the reputation of the church but, ultimately, Jesus.
- Don't post anything political. This can be a PR issue as well as a legal issue, but more importantly it can divide the church and turn people away from Jesus.
- Don't cuss. Not even a little bit. Not even WTF. While its use is debatable, don't use OMG either. Better to err on the side of caution.
- Use discretion when speaking of liberties (alcohol, tobacco, gambling, etc.)
- Be careful about who you link to, retweet, or follow. A link or follow is considered a quasi-endorsement.
- Verify all the info you post.
- If you're mentioning someone from your church, be sure of their title/status: pastor, deacon, member, attender, etc.
- Be careful when criticizing someone/something online; they can find it or someone can copy it.
- Don't post personal addresses / phone numbers / email.

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE POSTING**

Before sending every post, ask yourself these questions:

- How does this point to Jesus and the gospel and support the mission of the church?
- What are you trying to accomplish with this status/tweet?
- Do you want your enemies to know this? Are you giving rocks to your critics?
- Do you want this to be public record in thirty years?
- Could this be misrepresented, taken out of context, and used to malign your character or the church's reputation?
- Worst-case scenario: how could this information be used?
- Don't just seek to make a point. Ask, "Am I making a difference?"