



Recommended Guidelines for the Use of Social Media & Electronic Communications

Local Churches & Their Leaders, Staff and Volunteers

DEFINITIONS

“Child” or “children” or “youth” means any person who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday.

“Vulnerable Adult” means a person eighteen (18) years of age or older who is unable to protect him or herself from abuse, neglect, or exploitation by others because of a physical, mental, or emotional disability.

“Social Media and Electronic Communication” refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to advance interactive communication – both public and private. Social media and electronic communication includes, but is not limited to, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, texting, e-mailing, video, and new electronic mediums as they become available.

GUIDELINES

1. Church staff, leaders, and volunteers should receive training in the proper use of social media and electronic communication.
2. Safe use and appropriate behavior of social media and electronic communication should be taught to children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
3. Personal social media and electronic communication should be used appropriately. Anything you post via the internet is permanent. It remains accessible forever – even if you delete it.
4. Apply discretion when using social media and electronic communication. Do not post any information that is a breach of confidentiality. For example, requests for prayer or communications about health issues may only be posted with permission.
5. Using social media or electronic media to give personal opinions may be misconstrued as making a statement on behalf of the church.
6. The following are steps for protecting the privacy, identity and Christian dignity of children, youth, and vulnerable adults:
 - a. The respect and dignity of every person depicted in an electronic image should be strongly considered.
 - b. Electronic images of children, youth, or vulnerable adults should not be posted on any form of social media and electronic communications without written consent of parents or legal guardians.
 - c. Personal information such as names, addresses, or phone numbers of children, youth, or vulnerable adults should not be posted on social media and electronic communications without written consent of parents or legal guardians.
 - d. Only designated representatives should post photos on official church social media and electronic communications.
 - e. Social media groups associated with children, youth, or vulnerable adults should be private groups. These groups should be reviewed annually to remove access to those no longer active in the group.
 - f. When communicating with children, youth or vulnerable adults on social media and electronic communication copy another adult (ideally a parent or legal guardian). Rarely, if ever, should a “direct message” be sent to children or other vulnerable persons.
 - g. Social media and electronic communication is not an appropriate forum for counseling.
 - h. Creation, viewing, or distribution of sexually suggestive or pornographic images is prohibited and may be illegal. Unlawful or inappropriate postings should be reported to the appropriate persons or authorities.
 - i. Cyberbullying should not be tolerated on church social media sites or condoned in any forum. Church leaders should be prepared to identify cyberbullying and intervene.