

**[CHURCH NAME] social media accounts must adhere to the following policies and procedures:**

Social networking through the use of Internet-based and electronic social media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other online social media vehicles is part of everyday life. Using social media for yourself is different than using it on behalf of [CHURCH NAME], so it is important to be prudent: everything that is posted online, regardless of privacy settings, etc., is permanent, pervasive, and public. This document is intended to provide [CHURCH NAME] staff with guidelines to eliminate any confusion concerning the use of social media.

[CHURCH NAME] employees are free to publish or comment via social media in accordance with this policy. Social media information dissemination will be the responsibility of [CHURCH NAME] staff as determined by [INSERT TITLE/COMMITTEE NAME]. Current staff with posting capabilities are: [list staff who have posting privileges].

**Best practices to use social media successfully:**

1. **Be responsive.** Set up notifications to be informed when someone posts to your page, and be prepared to respond quickly—within the hour if possible and certainly the same day—even during evenings or weekends. Get someone to cover for you if you expect to be unavailable. If you don't know the answer, it is better to say, "We will find out and get back to you" than to not answer at all.
2. **When controversial actions, events, or decisions are anticipated,** discuss with leadership what strategy and steps will be followed when someone posts or tweets about the issue in a critical way. Have church leadership decide who will respond to comments and when approval may be required.
3. **Dealing with negative comments.** While obvious spam posts can be deleted, comments should be allowed on blogs, Facebook pages, and other places. Do not automatically delete negative posts. Instead, respond kindly with accurate information. If the person wants to engage in a lengthy battle or appears to be promoting an agenda, just stop answering.
4. **Be responsible.** The fast pace and transparency of social media mean we will get things wrong sometimes. That is okay if you handle it gracefully, starting with acknowledging your error. If you make a mistake, admit it—be upfront and quick with your correction. What you write is ultimately your responsibility. Participation in social media on behalf of [CHURCH NAME] is not a right but a ministry, so please treat it seriously and with respect.
5. **Questions.** If the poster has specific questions about programs or policies, direct them to an email address for the person who can answer those questions, or to the private message function on your organization's Facebook page. Also, notify the person who you have identified as a point person for questions that this person will be contacting them and ask them to respond as quickly as they can to avoid any further public postings.

- Criticisms or questions are best answered in private, and every care should be taken to avoid a protracted comment battle.
6. **Page moderation.** On Facebook, in the administration portal, block users from posting comments with obscenities. You will find it under Settings and then Page Moderations.
  7. **Display guidelines for comments on your page.** A good guideline for Facebook, YouTube and other social menu venues is to post something similar to this disclaimer in the bio or “about us” section:
    - a. We welcome your thoughts in this space. We ask that you be respectful in what you post and in your comments about other members of the community here. If you’d like to know more about us, visit our web site at [WEBSITE HERE].
  8. **Use proper hashtags.** Never use a hashtag without first being sure you know the origins and proper use. Search online through [www.hashtagify.me](http://www.hashtagify.me) or other means to see if and how it’s already being used on social media.
  9. **Post context for links.** If you want to share a news story on Twitter, Facebook, etc., add a sentence or two that tells what the story is about, so potential readers will know what they’re going to visit when they click on the link. Avoid lengthy posts. For example, a good length for a Facebook post is two to three sentences.
  10. **Avoid acronyms.** They are difficult for readers to figure out.
  11. **Do not use first-person-singular language on a page you manage.** Use “we” to refer to a group of people or the church by name, but do not use “I.” There is no entity represented by a single person.
  12. **Update your status regularly and strategically.** Social media channels should be updated frequently. You can use a free timing tool like [hootsuite.com](http://hootsuite.com) to schedule posts in advance to various social media channels for days you won’t be working. If you use a scheduling tool, be aware of events in the larger world. If a major national news event has just occurred, posting about something completely unrelated is usually seen as a blunder.
  13. **Use analytics to plan.** Based on your social media goals, track and measure people reached and/or impressions and engagement rate. These numbers will help gauge success and improve what types of content to post in the future.

**Best practices for using social media to promote events:**

1. Do not create separate social media pages or accounts just for the event itself.
2. Pre-event planning:
  - a. Meet with the social media manager and/or church leadership six months prior to the event and again one month before the event starts to discuss goals and messaging.
  - b. Develop a web page early with information about the event. This is the place to refer people from Twitter, Facebook, etc.
  - c. Choose a hashtag for the event that is short and unique and use it on all posts in all social media. Hashtags make social media



searchable. Search online through hashtagify.me to be sure your hashtag is not being used by anyone else. Adding a year to your hashtag is one way to help make it specific. Avoid generic hashtags (#presbyterian, #church) in favor of tags like #BigTent14, #GA221, #PYT13, etc.

- d. Be responsive. As the event gets closer, be ready with answers to questions that people are likely to ask about the event.
  - e. Plan social media posts around early-bird dates, registration deadlines, and start dates and times.
  - f. Tag other churches or organizations that are involved with your event (when possible), so they can share your content and help you spread the word.
3. During the event:
- a. Don't "overpost" on Facebook. Group photos in albums, so you don't flood the Facebook feed for people who may not be interested.
  - b. Post as soon as possible after a session ends. Very current content keeps followers engaged. Be sure to proofread carefully.
  - c. Use the names of people in photos as much as you can. Taking a photo of the badge of a person at a conference separate from their portrait is a good trick that helps you keep track of those involved. You may need their name later.
  - d. Tag photos of your Facebook friends to help spread the photos through social networks.
  - e. Live-tweet events, but not excessively. Pick up a few key points from each session and hashtag them with the event hashtag.
4. After the event:
- a. Continue to post a few items for a short time to wrap up any loose ends.

**Recommendations for personal social media usage. As [CHURCH NAME] staff, you are likely viewed by friends, family, and other followers as a representative of [CHURCH NAME].**

1. Be transparent and honest about your identity, and you may want to say something like, "The views I express are not necessarily those of the [CHURCH NAME]."
2. Be accurate. Before posting, take a moment to Google a news story to be sure you have facts correct. Rely on mainstream, reputable news sources.
3. Be respectful. Long, drawn-out arguments on social media consume energy and cause emotions to flame. It is easy to become angry and post insults. This damages your reputation and the reputation of the [CHURCH NAME] and is best avoided.
4. Maintain confidentiality. Do not post confidential or inside information about the community members of [CHURCH NAME] or staff. In general, don't post anything about your work that you would not present at a conference.

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5. Posting events, photos, videos. You may post about official [CHURCH NAME] events on your personal page, but the best practice for page administrators is to post on the organization's page first. You may share to your own personal page or create an entirely new post, but you should tag your organization's page when doing so. This will encourage more people to like and interact with your page.
6. Be aware of liability. You can be held legally liable for what you post on your personal site and on the sites of others. Individual bloggers have been held liable for commentary deemed to be copyrighted, defamatory, libelous, or obscene (as defined by the courts).
7. Protect your identity. Don't provide personal information (home address, telephone number, or email address). It is a good practice to create a separate, non-work email address that is used only with your social media site.

*[CHURCH NAME] Social Media policy and terms are subject to change at the discretion of [INSERT HERE].*

