

Employee Social Media Policy
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Introduction

[Our church] recognizes the desire of many of our employees to participate in—and contribute to—online communities, and generally holds a positive view of personal websites and social media as an avenue of self-expression and outreach.

At the same time, as an employee of [our church] you are seen by our members and outside parties as a representative of the church. Therefore—as in all areas of daily life—a church staff member’s personal website or blog is a reflection on the church, whether or not the church is specifically discussed or referenced. If you choose to identify yourself as a church employee or to discuss matters related to the church on your website or blog, please bear in mind that, although you may view your site as a personal project, many readers will assume you are speaking on behalf of the church.

In light of this, all employees should observe the following social media guidelines in order to preserve the Christian witness and effectiveness of both you and the church. For the purposes of this policy, social media includes all means of communicating or posting content of any sort on the internet, including to your own or someone else’s blog, journal, diary, personal website, social networking or affinity website, web bulletin board or chat room—whether or not associated or affiliated with [our church]—as well as any other form of electronic communication. Examples include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, Pinterest, Tumblr, Wikipedia, YouTube, Vimeo, etc.

1. Notify your supervisor (Romans 13:3)

If you currently have a personal website or blog, or are considering starting one, please discuss it with your supervisor. If you have any questions, please contact the [Senior Pastor or other appropriate church administrator]. Social media identities, logon IDs and user names may not use [our church]’s name without prior approval from the [Senior Pastor or other appropriate church administrator].

2. Include a disclaimer (Philippians 2:3)

It must be clear to your readers that the views you express are yours alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of [our church]. Include the following notice, or something similar, on your blog homepage or social media site:

The posts on this site are my own personal thoughts. Though I work at [our church], nothing here is read or approved by [our church] before it is posted. Opinions, conclusions and other information expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of [our church].

3. Maintain confidentiality (Acts 20:28)

Online conversations and postings are not private. Further, Google has a very good and very permanent memory, so your online words will probably live on long after you've forgotten about them.

It's perfectly acceptable to talk about your work and have a dialog with the community, but it is extremely important to not disclose—whether intentional or not—information that is confidential or proprietary to [our church]. This includes, but is not limited to, pastoral details such as hospitalizations, deaths, health concerns or counseling engagements.

For guidance about what constitutes “confidential” or “proprietary” information, contact the [Senior Pastor or other appropriate church administrator].

Be sure that what you are posting has been announced in the bulletin, on the website, in official [our church] social media channels, or from the sanctuary platform. Check with your supervisor or the [Senior Pastor or other appropriate church administrator] before reporting information, conversations, or meetings that are meant for private or internal use only. This includes information that will become public, but has not yet been announced or posted. As a general rule: spread news, don't break it.

Any employee who violates [our church] confidentiality policies may be subject to discipline, up to and including immediate termination of employment.

4. Respect the church (1 Corinthians 14:12)

Since your site is a public space, [our church] expects its employees to be respectful of the church and its leaders, employees, volunteers and members. Any employee who uses a personal website to disparage the name or reputation of the church, its practices, or its pastors, officers, employees, volunteers or members may be subject to discipline, up to and including immediate termination of employment.

5. Respect copyright (Leviticus 19:11)

All [our church] names, copyrights, trademarks, videos, logos and other identifying materials are the property of [our church] and must be used by [our church] employees according to [our church] guidelines. You may embed or link [our church]-owned videos, graphics or other materials provided they have been published on church-owned websites, blogs or social media channels. For personal websites and blogs, [our church] should be credited for the materials with the following notice:

©<year created> [our church], used by permission.

For social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), copyright notice is not required.

Do not post any content that is the property of another individual or organization unless you have written permission, or are sure the content lies in the public domain or is otherwise legally permitted. It is good general practice to link to others' work rather than reproduce it.

6. Use good judgment (Proverbs 29:11; Ephesians 4:29)

Remember that what you write on a website or blog, or transmit through social media, is public. What you write is your responsibility and you are legally responsible for your comments. Always assume that your supervisors, colleagues, servant leaders and church members will read your words; if you would not be comfortable with them reading your words, do not write them.

Respect your audience, use common sense and choose your topics wisely. Some ideas, such as political views, controversial topics or personal and/or professional frustrations may be best expressed in personal conversation rather than in a public forum. Do not let your posts hinder someone else's spiritual growth, and be careful that what you write does not impair your ability to work with your staff colleagues, lead your servant leaders or represent [our church] in the community.

Make sure you are always honest and accurate when posting information or news. If you make a mistake, correct it as quickly as possible, and be open about any previous posts you have altered.

7. Use care with professional media channels (Acts 6:1-4)

Should you choose to offer advertisements on your website or blog, ensure that ads are consistent with [our church's] values (to the extent that you have control).

If a member of the media contacts you about a post that includes [our church-]-related material or content, or asks you for [our church] information of any kind (other than service times or other basic public information), you are encouraged to refer their request to the [Senior Pastor or other appropriate church administrator].

8. Respect your time (John 17:4)

All time and effort spent on your personal site should be done on your personal time and should not interfere with your job duties or work commitments.

Do not use [our church] email addresses to register on social networks, blogs or other online tools utilized for personal use. Instead, register an email address at any of the many free online email services, such as Google, Hotmail, Yahoo, etc.

9. Retaliation is Prohibited (Romans 12:17)

[Our church] prohibits taking negative action against another employee for reporting a possible violation of this policy, or for cooperating with an investigation into a possible violation. Any employee who retaliates against another employee for reporting a possible violation of this policy, or for cooperating with an investigation into a possible violation, may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

10. Follow the Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual (Hebrews 13:17)

The [our church] Employee Handbook provides more detail about standards of conduct, which extend to your online presence. As with other forms of communication, do not engage in personal, racial or sexual harassment, unfounded accusations or remarks that would contribute to a hostile workplace.

If you have any questions, please contact the [Senior Pastor or other appropriate church administrator].