

Social Media Policy for Staff – Lutheran Church

“When you talk, do not say harmful things, but say what people need words that will help others become stronger. Then what you say will do good to those who listen to you.”
Ephesians 4:29 (NCV)

Lutheran Church generally views creating or contributing to social media (websites, blogs, message boards, social networks, etc.) by staff in a positive light. In fact, these tools can be a blessing for ministry when used properly. They can increase communication about life and ministry, as well as build or maintain relational connections. We further recognize the desire by many on staff to be a part of the exchange of ideas and social connection that these resources bring not only for those that are a part of but also with the broader church and community.

As a part of the ministry team at _ you will be seen as a representative of and its ministry. While you may view your blog or Facebook page as an extension of your personal life, others will associate you and the views you express with the ministry of . Because of this we require all staff and ministry leaders, both paid and non-paid, to follow the social media polices listed below.

In general, social media tools are neutral by nature: they can be used in both a positive and a negative way.

However, in keeping with our commitment to children’s safety and well-being, along with their rights to confidentiality and privacy, centers should consider policy clarification and implementation in the following three specific areas regarding the use of social media policy.

1. The first area addresses the need to protect the children and preserve their privacy. This area involves the potential risk in posting recognizable pictures of children online.

The Parent Handbook should include a specific policy regarding the posting of children’s pictures that is applicable to both staff and families. This policy includes ‘explicit permission’ for the use of any child’s picture, including those that may be used in promotional materials.

2. The second area addresses social media. Each school must establish a policy for staff regarding ‘friending or following’ school families. The purpose of this policy is to emphasize the “professional nature” of the teacher-child-family relationship.

Some schools take advantage of the popularity of social media sites by creating school or classroom pages. This approach can provide easy access for staff and families to share information and to build community. However, there must be clear expectations regarding who can post, what can be shared, and the manner in which controversial issues will be handled, if they arise.

3. The final area addresses the use of smartphone cameras. While there is considerable value in having the ability to document children’s activities and development by using smartphone cameras, there are also considerable risks in having that information on the personal devices of the staff.

One specific area of potential liability is the use of personal smartphones for taking pictures of the children in your center. A suggested policy would include the following parameters:

- Personal smartphones may be used to take pictures of the children in your program for the specific purposes of documenting developmental growth to be used in the child's portfolio;
- Personal smartphones may be used to share classroom and/or school activities with parents on a closed-access social media format (Class or School Facebook pages, Instagram, etc.).
- Personal phones may be used to take pictures for the center's promotional purposes **with the express written consent of the parents.**
- **In all the above cases, photos should be deleted from the smartphones once the pictures have been printed or posted for their specific purpose. Children's photos should not remain on any school or staff personal smartphones.**

NOTE - The PSD School Ministries and EC Cabinet recommendation is for the center/school to provide tablets, cameras and/or other devices for classroom use.

NOTE – An additional related issue is the use of personal cell phones from a Licensing perspective. Licensing has determined that cell phone use by a teacher, for both calls and taking photos, can be considered 'lack of proper supervision'. The basis for this interpretation is that if the teacher is involved in a call or taking pictures of one or more children, her attention to the group in her care is therefore compromised. Therefore, PSD School Ministries and EC Cabinet are recommending the following policy be put into place regarding personal cell phone use.

Cell phones must not be visible at any time in the presence of students. They should not be used during lunch and recess supervision. Cell phone usage should only occur during designated teacher/teacher assistant breaks and lunches. Examples: Teacher Assistants: Lunch Hour and/or 10 Minute Break(s). Teachers: Prep Periods and/or Lunch Hour. The only time they should be on the employee is for crisis response and or on field trips. Violation of this policy will lead to write up and or termination.

Additionally, the following issues may need to be addressed if your staff members are involved with personal blogs and/or websites.

- **Notify your team leader if you are presently or plan in the future to write a blog or host a personal website.** They can help you think through the implications of that for and for your ministry here.
- **If you are ever concerned about any interaction you have with others online, especially those connected to , let your team leader know immediately.** If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in social media please speak with your team or ministry leader. If you have concerns about the conduct of other staff or ministry leaders on social media, please speak first with them, and then, if necessary with your team or ministry leader.

- **• Include a disclaimer.** You should include on your blog, website, or social media site the following disclaimer (or some reasonable version thereof): *The posts and other content on this site are my own personal opinions. They are not approved by Lutheran Church nor do they necessarily reflect the values or teachings of .* (If you have questions or concerns about this please talk to your ministry leader.)
- **• Maintain confidentiality.** Ask permission from others at _ before including things they have said or the results of meetings, especially those that are meant to be for private or internal use only.
- Do not post videos, pictures, or other content that is a part of 's ministry without permission. This includes content that WILL BE public but has not yet been released.
- **• When you post your personal opinions or repost the opinions of others, remember that those on church staff are to be "above reproach" (1 Timothy 3:2).** In general, social or political opinions may be shared, but only in a manner that exhibits the utmost respect for all opinions, including those that are not your own. Language should reflect the fact that you represent , and, more importantly, Jesus!
- **• Refer press inquiries.** Should something you post generate interest from the press regarding anything that has a connection to 's ministry, refer all those inquiries to your Team Leader or the Senior Pastor.
- **• Use good judgment.** Remember that what you write is both permanent and public. You should always assume that what you write will be read by those you serve in ministry, by your boss, by your family, by other church members and leaders, and by the attorney of the person that doesn't like you. Always ask yourself if you are comfortable with ANYONE reading what you have written. Be careful that what you write will not hinder the work God has called you to do... now and in the future.
- **• Never post when you are angry, upset, tired, or compromised in any way.** Think twice before you "hit send" and then, think a third time. Remember, once it is out there it cannot reliably be taken back.
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- Finally, please remember that any action you take, even if that action is during your personal time and in the "virtual world", can be grounds for a temporary or permanent change in your ministry responsibilities at Lutheran Church.
- Please also keep in mind that technology changes rapidly and, as a result, these policies will need to be changed from time to time.
- In all things we ask staff to use good judgment when using social media, even if specific actions are not covered by these policies and the principles they express.
- Signature of Staff Person Date
- Signature of Supervisor Date
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