

Social Media Policy and Guidelines for the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

Introduction

This policy is offered to provide helpful best practices and guidelines as the CME Church embraces social media. The use of social media should be well integrated into the overall communication strategy for the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. Social media can be powerful tools for strengthening community and can support the CME Church in a myriad of ways: connecting people with similar interests, sharing information about in-person events, providing ways for people to engage in dialogue, etc.

Social media encompasses a broad array of online activity, all of which is trackable and traceable. It includes social networks like Facebook and MySpace; professional networks such as LinkedIn; the live blogging tool, Twitter; video and photo sites like YouTube and Flickr; social bookmarking such as Digg and Delicious, information sites like wikis; as well as virtual worlds or other media yet to be identified or created that are used to connect you with the rest of the world.

Online social media communities are vast and are growing at a rapid pace. Given the size and scope of these communities, they offer excellent forums for the CME Church's visibility and evangelization. Social media provide tools for building community. Membership in communities also requires accountability and responsibility.

The key question that faces each CME ministry that decides to engage social media is, **How** will we engage? Careful consideration should be made to determine the particular strengths of each form of social media (blogs, social networks, etc.) and the needs of a CME department, ministry or local church.

Policy Statement

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church views the Internet as an important communication, educational and evangelizing tool to promote the general church and its ministries and encourages leaders and their staff to have the appropriate tools to interact safely and responsibly online. Our leaders and members using the Internet should bear in mind that certain comments and information may have a harmful effect on the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, its reputation and its leaders, members and employees.

In light of this possibility, this Social Media Policy should be adhered to by the membership of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

Objectives

1. Establish practical, reasonable and enforceable guidelines by which Christian Methodist Episcopal Church leaders and members can conduct responsible, constructive social media engagement in both official and unofficial capacities.
2. Promote a safe environment for the CME Church leaders and members to share information in a social media outlet.
3. Prepare the Christian Methodist Episcopal church leaders and members to utilize social media channels to help each other and the communities serves, particularly in the event of a crisis, disaster or emergency.
4. Protect the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church from violating Municipal, State or Federal rules, regulations or laws through social media channels.

Guiding Principles

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church supports the use of social media. Social media tools enable the denomination to share information. This "conversation" is what makes social media different from traditional forms of one-way institutional communication.

Before creating a social media site for your Episcopal District, General or Connectional Department or local church, please take time to identify your goals and audience. If you don't have the time or resources to engage regularly, we do not recommend that you create one.

These principles provide guidance on how to run a social media site effectively and safely.

Own your content

What you write is ultimately your responsibility. Exercise common sense and don't forget that what you publish will be public for a long time – treat it with care and respect. Anything you post in your role as a leader reflects on the institution.

Be accurate

Before posting, make sure you have all the facts by first verifying with a credible source. Cite and link to your sources whenever possible – doing this will build credibility. Seek advice from those authorized for messages that might be perceived as the "voice" of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

Be human

Build trust with your audience by communicating to them in an authentic voice. Your audience will more likely connect and relate to you if you engage with them genuinely. When promoting an event or a program, state the real intent and goals.

Know your audience

- Who is following your department or ministry?
- What do they tweet about?
- What are their interests?

Use this knowledge when you are building an online persona Engage your audience by asking questions and inviting them to participate. Extend a warm welcome even to those who may not be affiliated with the CME Church

Think twice

Refrain from comments that can be interpreted as offensive, demeaning, inflammatory, etc. Keep an open mind and remember that your audience is comprised of varied opinions. Always pause and think before posting. Do not engage in arguments or debates with naysayers on your site. That said, reply to comments in a timely manner when a response is appropriate.

Be active

Success in social media requires diligent time and energy. **Reconsider jumping into social media if you do not make time to check in on social media sites at least a few minutes each day and post fresh content several times a week.**

Help build a community

The essence of community is the idea that it exists so you can support others and they, in turn, can support you. Balance talking at your audience with listening and responding.

Respect copyrights

Respect proprietary information and content (including graphic images, music and literary work) and confidentiality.

Monitor

While it is important to welcome comments on your social media site, remember to always keep a vigilant eye open to filter spam posts, commercial products or services, and offensive comments in a timely manner. Remember to maintain a warm, open, and safe online community.

Bring value

Social media will pay dividends for you if you add value to your followers, readers, fans and users' experiences.

What is it about your site that distinguishes it from others?

What makes your site uniquely yours?

Definitions

Definitions provide clarity and a common language. They are even more important in guidelines for social media, since the usage of terms is rapidly evolving.

1. Social Media Channels - Blogs, micro-blogs, wikis, social networks, social bookmarking services, user rating services and any other online collaboration, sharing or publishing platform, whether accessed through the web, a mobile device, text messaging, email or any other existing or emerging communications platform.

Web 2.0: The term “Web 2.0” is commonly associated with Web applications that facilitate interactive information sharing. A Web 2.0 site allows its users to interact with other users, to change website content, to provide reaction to content, to share the site’s content with others, or to filter content being provided by the site creator. This is in contrast with non-interactive websites, where users are limited to the passive viewing of information that is provided to them. * Example: Amazon.com’s inclusion of users’ reviews and offering of recommendations based on the consumer’s past use of the site make it a Web 2.0 site.

Blog: A blog (a contraction of the term “web log”) is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. “Blog” can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog. * Examples: There are many types of blogs on sites throughout the Internet. They are common for celebrities, writers, journalists, etc. WordPress is one of the more popular tools used to create blogs.

- **Micro-blog:** This form of multimedia blogging allows users to send brief text updates or to publish micromedia such as photos or audio clips, to be viewed either by anyone or by a restricted group, which can be chosen by the user. These messages can be submitted by a variety of means, including text messaging, instant messaging, e-mail, digital audio, or through a Web interface. The content of a micro-blog differs from a traditional blog in that it is typically smaller in actual size and aggregate file size. A single entry could consist of a single sentence or fragment, an image, or a ten-second video. * Example: Twitter is a form of micro-blogging in which entries are limited to 140 characters.
- **Social network:** A social network is a Web 2.0 site that is entirely driven by content of its members. Individuals are allowed flexibility in privacy settings; in posting text, photos, video, links, and other information; and in level of interaction with other members. * Examples: Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr are often included in lists of social networking sites, although sometimes YouTube and Flickr are designated as multimedia sharing sites, while Twitter is currently more often designated as a micro-blogging application.

2. Social Media Account – A personalized presence inside a social networking channel, initiated at will by an individual. YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and other social networking channels allow users to sign-up for their own social media account, which they can use to collaborate, interact and share content and status updates. When a user communicates through a social media account, their disclosures are attributed to their User Profile.

3. Social Media Disclosures - Blog posts, blog comments, status updates, text messages, posts via email, images, audio recordings, video recordings or any other information made available

through a social media channel. Social media disclosures are the actual communications a user distributes through a social media channel, usually by means of their social media account.

4. External vs. Internal Social Media Channels – External social media channels are social media services that do not reside at a domain. Internal social media channels are located at a company- owned domain, require a password to access and are only visible to employees and other approved individuals.

5. User Profile – Social Media Account holders customize their User Profile within a Social Media Channel with specific information about themselves which can be made available others users.

6. Copyrights – Copyrights protect the right of an author to control the reproduction and use of any creative expression that has been fixed in tangible form, such as literary works, graphical works, photographic works, audiovisual works, electronic works and musical works. It is illegal to reproduce and use copyrighted material through social media channels without the permission of the copyright owner.

7. Hosted Content – Text, pictures, audio, video or other information in digital form that is uploaded and resides in the social media account of the author of a social media disclosure. If you download content off of the Internet, and then upload it to your social media account, you are hosting that content. This distinction is important because it is generally illegal to host copyrighted content publicly on the Internet without first obtaining the permission of the copyright owner.

8. Embed Codes – Unique codes that are provided to entice others to share online content without requiring the sharer to host that content. By means of an embed code, it is possible to display a YouTube user's video in someone else's social media account without requiring that person to host the source video file. This distinction is important because embed codes are often used by copyright owners to encourage others to share their content via social media channels.

9. Controversial Issues – Issues that form the basis of heated debate will have to be monitored.

10. Official Content – Publicly available online content created and made public by our company, verified by virtue of the fact that it is accessible through our corporate website .

11. Inbound Links – An inbound link is a hyperlink that transits from one domain to another. A hyperlink that transits from an external domain to your own domain is referred to as inbound link. Inbound links are important because they play a role in how search engines rank pages and domains in search results.

12. Link Bartering Exchanges – Trading or purchasing inbound links from other domains exclusively for the purposes of lifting your domain in search engine page results.

13. Tweets and Retweets – A tweet is a 140 character social media disclosure distributed on the Twitter micro-blogging service. Retweets are tweets from one Twitter user that are redistributed by another Twitter user. Retweets are how information propagates on Twitter.

Guidelines

When developing guidelines for church personnel to use social media, consider including the following elements:

- **Define appropriate boundaries for communications.** These should be in sync with the Social Creed of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.
- **Include examples of Codes of Conduct** that should be posted on social networking sites. Codes of Conduct are for visitors to the site. These codes should always be brief and immediately apparent to visitors. Visitors should also be made aware of the consequences of violations of the Code of Conduct. Always block anyone who does not abide by the Code of Conduct.
- **Define instructions.** Include instructions on how to report, block, etc., on the more popular social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. This provides guidance for those Church personnel who may be entering into social media for the first time.
- **Provide recommendations on how to deal with difficult “fans.”** Give church personnel permission to trust their instincts on blocking repeat offenders of a site’s Code of Conduct. Argumentative participants can easily change the tone of every post. A good way to determine if they should be blocked is to go to their profiles and browse through the pages that they have “fanned.” Do not allow those unwilling to dialogue to hold your site and its other members hostage. In particular situations, the moderator might determine it is best to ask a member to take a conversation “offline.” These offline conversations can be conducted in person, over the telephone, or through private e-mail. The site moderators should be able to refer to the appropriate persons.
- **Provide trusted sites for reference, and recommend that site administrators have a thorough knowledge of these sites.** Often a link to the CME Church can provide necessary information, thereby helping redirect the tone and substance of an online conversation.
- **Remind site administrators they are posting for a broad audience.** Social media are global platforms. Online content is visible to anyone in the world who comes to their sites.