Social Media Policy – 2021

Social media has become a normal, integral part of society, and covers an ever-evolving collection of programs and devices like Twitter, Instagram, email, texting and Facebook. It might be tempting to dismiss these technologies as tangential to the Presbytery and to our congregations and churches. While they can be ignored, banned, or acknowledged, what we can't do is to expect that social media is not a normal part of life for most of our members, and for those outside social media "friends" of our Presbytery and congregational members. Social media is not a fad – it is a fundamental shift in the way we communicate.

Location or familiarity no longer defines the number or immediacy of those with whom we are in communication. Social media gives people a chance to share ideas and think aloud with multiple communities. People engaging in social media are potentially listening to, talking, and reflecting with many people at the same time, many of whom may come from different experiences, cultures, practices, and beliefs, on any number of topics. Being present with someone engaging in social media does not necessarily mean that you are the person getting their primary attention. And in some ways, in contrast with this shift in the way we communicate are the principles of Presbyterian polity and governance.

A major affirmation of our faithfulness together is a trust in the power of discernment when people gather to speak and listen to each other and to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Our Presbytery, Presbytery office staff, churches, congregations, and committees are clearly defined in membership and Reformed theology. The guiding principle for using social media within this context is to be attentive and present to the community gathered immediately around us, the breadth of acceptable practice and position, and to the mysterious and wondrous movement of the Spirit of Christ in our ministries. Whatever our thumbs may be doing, our work calls us to respectfully engage our hearts with each other in every moment.

Policy of the Presbytery

- Sharing positive messages, as in an invitation to an event or worship service, or a celebration, are encouraged!
- Staff and members of Presbytery may not speak on behalf of the Presbytery, or list affiliation with the Presbytery in a public opinion statement, without prior permission from the Executive Presbyter.
- Staff and members of congregations may not speak on behalf of the congregation, or list affiliation with the congregation in a public opinion statement, without prior permission from the Session.
- Staff and members of both Presbytery and individual congregations should be clear when they are authorized to speak on behalf of their respective institutions and when they are sharing personal opinions. In situations where there may be confusion between speaking in a personal and professional voice, a clear disclaimer is strongly encouraged.
- Please remember that in many cases you are already publicly identified with your church or the Presbytery, and be mindful that even with a disclaimer you may be seen as representing that entity.
- Staff and members shall pursue any necessary conflict resolution by bringing negative feedback directly to the Presbytery or church rather than drawing attention to it indirectly on social media.
- The social media sites of the Presbytery are administered from the office of the Presbytery or with permission of the Presbytery.

Please also refer to the Presbytery of Cincinnati Social Media Guidelines for best practices and guidance on implementation of this policy.

Adopted by Presbytery February 2021