Ethical Ministry: Resource book for Facilitators and Participants

Half-day Refresher Program

A continuing education program for:

Ministers, Candidates, Pastors, Chaplains, Pastoral Practitioners, Church Engagement Leaders and Lay People engaged in ministry.

Case Studies for:

Online Communication: Social Media and Email

Acknowledgement

'Ctrl+Click' on the links provided below for both, the:

Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice

and also, the:

Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders

Or search this page: ***https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/regulations***

and click on the 'Regulations' and 'Policies' tabs
to find the abovementioned documents.

Themes

- 2017A: Bullying Behaviour

- 2017B: Online Communication: Social Media and Email

Table of Contents

Process Tools

Ground Rules for Group Discussion[1]

1. Arrive on time, remain for the entire session, and do not wander in and out of the session.

2. Unless you're expecting an emergency call, please turn mobile phones off. If you must take a call please leave the room before doing so in order to minimise the interruption. Devices should only be used for reading the relevant materials for the session, not for Facebooking the conversation.

3. Listen. Hear what the other person is saying. Let them finish talking. Think before you respond. The same word or phrase may mean different things to different people, so it may be helpful to ask a question for clarification rather than making an assumption.

4. Talk about yourself and your own experience. You may ask questions of others, but do not challenge the validity of another's personal experience or point of view. Code of Ethics case studies are meant to be used as tools for learning more about how the Code applies to our own ministry practice. Sometimes discussions may need to hold a wide range of views, and guidance may be needed from the Facilitators to ensure that the spirit and intention of the Code of Ethics is being upheld in the discourse.

5. Keep your comments brief and to the point, so everyone has a chance to speak.

6. Do not generalise from your experience and feelings to the experience and feelings of others. Let people speak for themselves.

7. Do not attack, or try to hurt, or pass judgment on anyone, whether or not they are present.

8. Treat this group session as a confidential conversation; do not repeat elsewhere what is said here.

9. Stay on topic.

10. Please be responsibility in discerning what material is appropriate for you to share in the wider group, what would be better suited to the 'paired sharing' and what should be shared only with your supervisor.

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[1] Adapted from http://lbgtrc.msu.edu/resources/groundrules-for-discussion-and-support-groups (accessed 17 May 2013).

Safe Paired Sharing

This is an invitation to engage with the topic on a more personal level, and to integrate your learning with your ministry practice. Participants are requested to keep discussions confidential, but at the same time to remember that paired sharing is in no way intended to take the place of a conversation with your supervisor. We are all vulnerable people. Collegial respect and care for one another are essential elements of Code of Ethics training, and of course they are also essential for ministry.

Sharing an example from your ministry could include:

- An actual (de-identified) situation that you feel comfortable to discuss in this setting
- A 'hypothetical' situation that could possibly happen to you or someone else – what steps would you take to resolve it, or how might you prevent a breach of the Code of Ethics? What choices might you make in this situation?
- You might start out with a situation when your own boundaries were violated by another person (de-identified) – but the fruit of the discussion would more likely be found in changing places. Instead of staying with what happened to you, what might the other person in the situation have done differently so they would not have acted unethically towards you? Or fruitful discussion might be found in thinking about how in your own ministry practice you seek to avoid such violations.

You may find it helpful to take some time at the beginning of this session to silently reflect and gather your thoughts. This could be a good way to work through which issues you feel safe about sharing in this context, and which ones you would rather save to discuss privately with your supervisor.

The suggested format for the paired sharing time is as follows:

Paired Sharing: (1 hour)

- Share for 20 minutes each: In pairs think of an example from your ministry that relates to the topic. How did you resolve it? What did you learn from it? How are you practising ministry differently as a result?
- Dialogue with each other 10-15 minutes – What insights have we gained about prevention of ethical breaches in ministry practice?
- End with (5-10 minutes): – What would you like to bring to the group about your own experience, or about this discussion? (Don't discuss the other person's experience with the wider group.)

Case Studies:

Introduction to the Case Studies

The following case studies form the basis of the program. This is a deliberate choice based on the recognition that ethical issues in ministry often require dealing with complex and difficult situations and people. The way we respond shapes our ministry and integrity. Hence, although the case studies are somewhat artificial, they draw on real life situations and therefore offer shades of grey. In each case considered, participants are invited to consider how they would respond in a similar situation.

The case studies reflect varying ministry situations, such as chaplaincy, youth ministry, cultural heritage and congregational ministry. While these topics do not occupy a large proportion of the *Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice*, it is widely recognised that problems involving online communication happens in varying degrees in churches, causing frustration and distress.

Discussion questions are included at the end of each case study. The questions are generic so as not to lead the conversation, but to provide a framework for a lively and thoughtful conversation.

<u>Participants</u> need to choose 1 case-study to reflect on

<u>Facilitators</u> need to choose 2-3 case studies for the group to discuss

<u>Relevant Sections of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice and Lay and Leaders Code of Conduct:</u>

Case Studies involving Online Communication

Participants: Choose one case study to reflect on.

Facilitators: Choose 2-3 case studies for discussion within the session.

Case Study 1:

Themes: Facebook, Social Media

A Uniting Church minister was invited to an old college friend's 50th birthday party. It was fancy dress based on unimagined futures. In other words, come as someone you *did not* become. The minister went as a homeless person, with a scraggly beard (fake), wild hair (hair-sprayed in different directions), a trench coat and a bottle in a paper bag. It was a great night and everyone caught up with old friends they hadn't seen since high school or university. The next day, the minister got an email from a parishioner saying that she thought his behaviour was inappropriate and that she had brought it to the attention of several other members of the congregation. He was bewildered – so he asked what she meant and she told him that she saw him on Facebook and had reposted the pictures. He does not use technology much, so he went and asked his son what Facebook was and what was on it. There, to his horror, he saw more than 6 pictures of himself, bottle in hand, dishevelled and roaring like a drunk having a great time. Now the photos were making the rounds of the community.

Read this story in the light of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice:

Paragraphs 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 1.7; 3.5

Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 2:

Themes: Language, Social Media

There had been a 'conversation' developing on a social media website which started off in the English language – and then separate threads emerged as some participants began to 'converse' with one another in their own first languages. The common discussion had been based on how the church had made a declaration that it was "A Multicultural Church" in 1985 – and then subsequent ones on "A Church For All God's People" (2006) and "One Body, Many Members" (2012). It was started off by Louisa who was wondering what these statements might mean in practice. There was some discussion about how so often when events were set up that were described as multicultural, cross cultural or intercultural, only a handful of "Anglos" would turn up. Tevita and Ofa are both bilingual. But, after a while they began making their replies in Tongan; 'David' and 'Ruth' are both Korean – but, after a while, they began making their replies in their own first language. For them English is not the "language of their heart" but the "language they get by in". The thread grew longer - and then Alex

commented. He had become very impatient and posted the comment: "Stop using your own languages; use English; that's our language; we might come from different places, but we are all the same in Christ". He added an angry looking emoticon.

Read this story in the light of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice:

Paragraphs 1:8; 2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 2.4; 3.2(a).

Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 3:

Themes: Facebook, Cross Cultural, Social Media Postings

Adam is of Middle Eastern descent and a minister of a culturally diverse congregation. He was attending a church conference on cross cultural relationships and practice. During the conference people were posting on Facebook about their experiences and responding to others' questions and comments. Fred, from an Anglo background, mentioned in a post that he was disappointed that the number of people from different cultures was low in comparison to previous conferences. In that conversation, one of the Pacific Island women, Kelisi commented that people are not attending, especially from her culture, and they would be more open to attend if they were asked to perform a dance or a song. Fred replied saying that if one particular group was invited, then all other cultural groups would need to be invited to perform also. He also mentioned that with the number of culturally diverse groups at a conference, it would be time-consuming and boring to have each group perform. Kelisi took offence to the comment and posted that Fred was not an expert on Pacific culture or any other culture for that matter and he had no right saying such things about any of them. Adam knew Fred and Kelisi very well as they were members of his congregation. He understood that Fred's intent in making the comment was to open up conversation and provoke honest reflection about cross cultural relationships.

Adam wondered about whether Facebook was the right medium for the conversation. Should Fred have initiated a face to face conversation with Kelisi instead – and if so would he have received the same response from Kelisi? Adam wondered about Kelisi and whether she was right in putting Fred in his place? Since the Facebook exchanges Fred and Kelisi no longer talk to each other. Prior to these exchanges Kelisi and Fred were reasonably good friends. Adam was left wondering about the inherent complications of cross cultural communication and relationships that are further exacerbated and made even more complex by social media postings.

Read this story in the light of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice: Paragraphs 1:8; 2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 2.4.

Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 4:

Themes: Email, work email address

Robert is a minister in placement. He found a cartoon depicting a female wearing clerical gear while washing the dishes in the kitchen. The caption read 'Rev Sara finally finds her place'. Robert is supportive of women in ministry, but found this amusing. Using his work email, he emailed it to a friend - who promptly emailed it to other friends. It wasn't long till it was uploaded to social media – naming the original sender. The outrage was overwhelming.

Read this story in the light of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice:

Paragraphs 1:3; 1.4; 1.7; 2.1; 2.2; 2.4; 3.1abef.

Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 5:

Themes: Social media, online theological discussion

Mary and Susan are both active ministers, serving in different locations. They have a good friendship and love talking theology. This leads to some very robust conversations via Facebook. Mary and Susan often use strong language – such as 'Clearly you are wrong'; 'you are ignorant of Scripture'; 'you make an appalling interpretation of Church Doctrine'. The back and forth might be stimulating to them but it drives other people crazy. Some comments from other Face-book-ers have indicated that the endless messaging clogs their feed and is irritating. Other members of the church feel that it portrays the church in a really judgemental and exclusive way.

Read this story in the light of the Code of Ethics for Ministry Practice:

Paragraphs 1:3; 1.4; 1.7; 2.2; 2.4; 3.1;3.6b

Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 6:

Themes: Copyright, downloading and using images

Gary has just received a legal notice relating to a poem hosted on the church website. The sternly worded notice carefully explains that the reproduction of the poem, without permission from the author, is in breach of copyright. Of concern is the attached invoice, laying out a significant claim for lost revenue and royalties. Talking to the church's lawyer, Gary points out that the church hasn't made any money out of publishing the poem, and that this poem is less than ten percent of the published book from which it came. The lawyer reminds Gary that this author relies on book sales, and that permission should have been sought before publishing, regardless of the number of words. Now Gary is wondering about all the photographs and images he's downloaded from the internet to use on the church's web site.

Read this story in the light of Gary being a lay person or an ordained minister:

Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders: Paragraphs 2.2; 2.3;2.4

Code of Ethics for Ministry Practice: Paragraphs 3.4; 3.6e; 6

Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 7:

Themes: Confidentiality, online groups conversations.

Karina has just opened an email from a member of the church council alerting her to an online conversation that's been happening over the last week. Brian, the church's secretary, confided in one of his friends that he had been visiting a counsellor to talk about addiction to pornography. It wasn't long before an email went out to the prayer circle getting people to pray for Brian's porn addiction. The communication chain has now gone another step and members of church council are emailing each other about finding a new church secretary. Karina wonders how this personal information spread so quickly and what can be done to address the issue.

Read this story in the light of Karina being a lay person or an ordained minister:

Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders: Paragraphs 1.3; 2.2; 2.3;

Code of Ethics for Ministry Practice: Paragraphs 2.1; 2.2; 2.4; 3.5; 3.7cdef.

Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 8:

Themes: Confidentiality, ethical and responsible posting

Larissa is a virtual attender at the Synod meeting this year. She's been able to catch up with the details of robust debates by following the Twitter and Facebook feeds of her friends. Most of the posts are inspiring. She's seen photographs of key presenters and events, and she has been able to read reports as they've been published online. Today, however, things have become more interesting. The most contentious debate experienced in years is unfolding online, as observers on the floor upload details on points raised by each controversial speaker at the microphone. The online chatter doesn't even stop when the Synod votes to meet in private to discuss delicate legal matters.

Read this story in the light of Larissa being a lay person or an ordained minister:

Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders: Paragraphs 1.3; 2.2, 2.3, 2.5

Code of Ethics for Ministry Practice: Paragraphs 1:3; 2.1; 2.2; 2.4;3.6f

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Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 9:

Themes: Online blog, defamation, slander and boundaries

Carmel has been writing a blog on faith and justice for the last four years. At times she invites colleagues to write guest posts on their favourite causes. Today she ha's received an article about how staff have been unfairly treated by an inter-church agency during a recent restructure. The author, who prefers to stay anonymous, points to an increasing level of corporate thinking in the church and names several key leaders who have been seduced by the power they hold. Carmel believes that her blog is be a place where workplace matters could and should be aired. But is this article crossing the line into defamation and slander? What if she just removes the names and allows people to read between the lines?

Read this story in the light of Carmel being a lay person or an ordained minister:

Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders: Paragraphs 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5

 Code of Ethics for Ministry Practice: Paragraphs 1:3; 1.4; 1.7; 2.1; 2.2; 2.4; 3.1;3.6abc

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Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 10:

Themes: School Chaplain, texting, confidentiality, appropriate sharing of information online

Abed is a school chaplain with responsibilities for teaching, pastoral care and worship. Just over a month ago one of the students at the school reached out to him using an instant messenger program. Abed was able to support the student through a difficult time at home. He knew that the school had a policy of not associating with students through social media. This, he thought, would be a one-off intervention. However, this last week the student is reaching out again, looking for advice on romance. In a moment of weakness Abed has chatted about his own love life, and how he copes with being single after a drawn-out breakup. The conversation is starting to make Abed uneasy.

Read this story in the light of the:

Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice: Paragraphs 1.4; 1.7; 2.1; 2.2; 2.4; 3.4e;3.5a.vi

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Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 11:

Themes: Facebook, using photos of minors online,

Jared has just published a story on his Facebook page about the recent Christmas party for the local Early Learning Centre. Photographs of children and their parents present the younger face of the church and its work in the community. The story is very popular with members of the church's Facebook page, but not with everyone. Three families have complained to the Early Learning Centre Director about their children appearing in the story. They are concerned about third parties exploiting the images of their children, and are particularly concerned that their children's identities are exposed in a public sphere.

Read this story in the light of Jared being a lay person or an ordained minister:

Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders: Paragraphs 2.2; 2.3; 2.4

Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice: Paragraphs 1:3; 1.4; 1.7; 3.5iv,vi

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Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 12:

Themes: Retired Ministers, Acronyms,

Minister Andrew and his wife Eliza have recently retired. Their grandson recently set them up with a Facebook page. On hearing of a death in the family of a former congregant, Andrew decides to send a Facebook message. However, instead of sending a private message, Andrew unwittingly posts the following 'Thinking of you in this time of deep sadness – lol '

Andrew soon learns that not only had some family members not heard of the death yet, but that 'lol' means 'laugh out loud', and not, as he thought 'lots of love.'

Andrew is now unsure if Facebook has any value in ministry.

Read this story in the light of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice: Paragraphs 2.1; 3.7a,di

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Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 13:

Themes: Face Book, Administrator of Church social media page

You're the administrator of your Church's Facebook page. You have been approved by the Church Council to manage the page and post updates on it on behalf of the Church. The Facebook page has about 150 people who 'like' the page, both members of the congregation and people from outside who are interested in what the Church does. You regularly post updates on the page about what happened in Sunday services, and events and activities that are coming up in the life of the Church. Occasionally you post articles on the page from various news sources that you think might be of interest to people.

A few days ago, you posted a news article about abuse in detention centres. One member of the congregation posted a heated comment on the page strongly disagreeing with the article. Your minister has also received a complaint from this member about the article being on the Church's page and it seeming to 'portray the view of the Church'.

Read this story in the light of the administrator being a lay person or an ordained minister:

Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders: Paragraphs 2.2; 2.3; 2.4

Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice: Paragraphs1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.6; 2.1; 2.4; 3.3; 3.5

Reflection and Interpretation

1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?

2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 14:

Themes: Face Book, Administrator of Church social media page

You manage your church's Facebook page and have created a post about an upcoming event your church is hosting. The event is centred on a guest speaker who causes some controversy within certain Christian communities/traditions. A person, not connected to your church, makes a negative and inflammatory comment on the post. They attach a photo about heretics and write about the speaker being someone that Christians shouldn't listen to. Some of their friends, again not connected to your church community, also comment and make negative criticisms about the speaker and those who like their work. No-one from your community has commented yet, and you wonder whether to respond to the comments on the page, as yourself, or whether to simply "hide" the comments so that others won't see them…

Read this story in the light of the administrator being a lay person or an ordained minister:

Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders: Paragraphs 2.2; 2.3; 2.4

Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice: Paragraphs1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.6; 2.1; 2.4; 3.3; 3.5

Reflection and Interpretation
1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?
2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

Case Study 15:

Themes: Face Book, multiple pages, past posts

The JNC for a congregational placement is holding their final meeting to review the preferred candidate & their references.

One member mentions that they found the candidate maintains two Facebook pages – a 'work' page and a 'personal' page. They then suggest the content on the 'personal' account was concerning, as it featured photos from a schoolies trip and several Contiki tours (albeit 14-16 years earlier) – a mutual friend had shared the 'memories'. Another member of the council suggested having two accounts seemed a greater concern than the content one either account. The JNC chair asked members to consider the impact of social networks & the permanency of social media, and whether the JNC should reconsider the candidates character in light of the posts.

Read this story in the light of the administrator being a lay leader or an ordained minister:

Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders: Paragraphs 2.2; 2.3; 2.4

Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice: Paragraphs 1.4; 1.7. Note: *This is a contempory and ethical issue despite not being fully addressed in COEMP*

Reflection and Interpretation
1. What ethical issues around online communication does this case study present?
2. What are some appropriate ways of responding?

2017B: Readings on Online Communication

For more information on social media – see the website:

The Beginner's Guide to Social Media

http://mashable.com/2012/06/12/social-media-beginners-guide/#Gbf4z8.TT8q3

Asking Critical Questions

by M.L. Daniel and Marie M. Fortune

There is a sacred trust between spiritual leaders and those who have entrusted their spiritual well-being to them. It is a trust that is governed by an appreciation for maintaining appropriate and healthy boundaries that clearly define each party's role. In traditional brick and mortar spiritual arenas, the challenges and benefits of boundaries, at best, can be described as complex. However, these same considerations have taken that complexity and multiplied it exponentially in our 21st century world where technology allows for connection virtually 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week. No matter where you are or turn, people are posting, texting, tweeting, face-booking, you-tubing, checking email, voicemail or their calendar on the constantly evolving smart phones. In today's society, vast resources of information and social networks are virtually at our fingertips every moment of the day. What it means to be community, in communication or connected is being redefined daily in the fast paced world of virtual reality, as more and more people are embracing the technology both in and out of faith communities. Faith communities of all sizes and spiritual leaders of every background are increasingly establishing identities or presence in the virtual world. As such, the challenges and benefits of establishing and maintaining healthy and appropriate boundaries in this new frontier pose some critical questions for spiritual leaders and communities venturing into this arena.

Social networking is not new. Not so long ago, social networking implied face to face encounters that created and sustained community. People of faith gathered in public settings, in homes, mosques, churches and synagogues to worship and study together. However, the internet has taken social networking to a whole new level. There are social networks that cater exclusively to faith communities such as Tangle.com, Mychurch.org, and tuggle.it, and those that target a wider mainstream audience such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace. What all of them have in common are memberships that increase every day. On Facebook alone, there are 500 million users, half of which log in on any given day. Additionally, they seem to have the attention of

the very demographic that is disappearing in most mainstream denominations, those 35 and younger.

The extensive reach of these social networks is attractive and has enticed many faith communities and spiritual leaders to establish a virtual presence as a ministerial resource. For many, the social networks and the World Wide Web are exciting new tools for ministry. While these tools offer access to fertile grounds and present exciting opportunities for ministry, they are equally fertile grounds for ethical and boundary violations, both intentional and unintentional, by spiritual leaders and by those with whom they share the space. Like most tools, they are in and of themselves neutral and as such, have the potential for good or harm. As Social Networking and Healthy Boundaries in Ministry Asking Critical Questions www.faithtrustinstitute.org © 2011 FaithTrust Institute Page 2 of 4 Permission Granted to Duplicate such, spiritual leaders ought to enter this new arena having asked critical questions in order to uses these tools wisely and preserve their sacred trust.

Certainly, the greatest benefit represented by the internet and social networking is quick and easy communications. The mundane organizing and networking within faith communities can be much more easily accomplished through a congregation's website and email.

The second greatest benefit is the potential for "marketing", i.e. letting people know who we are, what we are doing, and how it might interest them. But there are also landmines at every turn that we need to consider. In the policies and procedures of some faith communities active in the virtual world, it is evident that they have given this issue some consideration, for which they are to be commended. Yet there still remains work to be done, and questions worth asking if ministry in cyberspace is to be done responsibly.

There are some basic questions and considerations for all faith communities and their leadership who are either considering establishing a virtual identity or presence or those who already have.

Looking first to organizational considerations:

• Does the faith community have an internet use policy or procedure that addresses employee and leadership engagement in social networks?

• If so, does it speak to professional and private/individual communications, disclaimers and the organization's expectations?

• Are the organization's rules on public speech and private speech clear?

• Have employment issues been considered in relationship to supervisor or leadership "friending," "unfriending" or seeking access to subordinates within social networks?

• Can the information gained by an organization or supervisor via a social network be used to make employment decisions such as hiring, firing, promotions and demotions?

• Are there employment factors to consider and what is the liability exposure for the organization for the actions, statements, or oversight of its leadership that is engaged in social networks on the internet?

• Does it set up a checks and balances for how oversight will be conducted?

• How does the policy deal with supervision of the leadership that is responsible for vulnerable populations?

• Are there safeguards in place to identify predatory leaders who may have unfettered access to not only your population, but to their social networks by virtue of their position and the organization virtual presence? Considering just the issues surrounding leadership and vulnerable populations, the bottom line should be transparency. This operating principle rests in the reality that there is no privacy or confidentiality on the internet and that whatever is posted on social networking sites is there forever. With these things in mind, here are some practical applications that faith communities can consider that would be helpful.

1. Social networking pages should be regularly monitored by senior leadership. Senior leadership charged with supervising the site, should be looking not only at how the site is being utilized and the posting, but at how the leadership assigned to minister to this population is responding to the post, interacting with the community, managing the site, and utilizing the internet, and where appropriate, offer training or corrective action. The objective of such is the fostering of accountable and responsible leadership and healthy communities.

2. Every friend request accepted should be accompanied by an electronic copy of the sites, code of conduct that expressly states the expectations for post, a covenant of understanding, and a clear explanation of how violations, offensive and objectionable

material will be addressed. With respect to site participants, the site moderator should have sole discretion to determine what material is objectionable or offensive and when a violation has taken place. Also, it should be explicitly stated that any and all posts are public information and that there are no expectations of privacy or confidentiality of any party utilizing this method of communication. Further, that no information posted on the site maybe used without the written permission of the author.

3. The organization should adopt a policy of screening anyone outside the target demographic that is unknown to the organization before allowing them access to the site. Equally prudent is policy for persons in leadership to only accept friend requests and to prohibit solicitation of them. Additionally, if parents or guardians of the target population are welcomed at actual meetings or gatherings, the same should be true with regards to any virtual meeting place; this assists in creating a transparent atmosphere. When working with vulnerable populations in an arena that is changing daily, accountability, responsibility, and transparency are foundational. These limited questions are in no way exhaustive, but they are the introduction to the more difficult conversation organizations should be having around social networks and establishing healthy boundaries. Just as faith communities should be taking on the challenge of addressing boundary issues, so should each individual spiritual leader engage in her own self-assessment. Here are some points to ponder:

• The very nature and design of social networks tends to contribute to the line being blurred between the personal and the professional. As such, it begs the question of whether the establishment of a public page and a private page solves the dilemmas.

• What challenges arise from mixing public and private time, or public and private space?

• What are the implications of doing so when some members/students/followers are friended or are granted access to your private page while others are excluded? How about when one spouse or partner is friended and not the other?

• Regardless of the character of the virtual identity, how do you manage content on your site, both your own content and the content that others post on your site and its dissemination?

• Do you engage in political speech on your page and if so, are there guidelines?

• How might your awareness of so much about congregants' private lives through social networking be detrimental to your ability to serve effectively as a spiritual leader? Conversely, what happens to your ability to lead when the protective boundary between the leadership and followers has been effectively removed?

• What can you share and what pushes or violates appropriate boundaries, and how will you know when it happens?

• Is there anything about your engagement that could lead another to believe her/his communications to be confidential in nature?

• Are there legal implications for your community that can flow from what you do and say in the virtual world?

• Does your presence in the virtual world alter the realistic expectations of your community about your availability and or responsibility to the community?

• How do you handle former congregants when you are no longer their minister but they are part of your friend community?

• How much of your time is the utilization of technology demanding, and what might be sacrificed because of it?

It is in the exploration of all of these questions and others in which a spiritual leader would benefit from not only ethical training, but training that begins to help identify and clarify ministerial boundaries and the scope of the work to be done with respect to the same. This new technology offers the temptation of virtual community and virtual intimacy. Critical questions remind us of the limitations of both.

Regardless of whether you choose to engage or not engage in social networking, an informed decision requires fully entertaining all of the critical issues. Social networks and the internet may very well be the tools for outreach and organizing today; however, faith communities and spiritual leaders have an obligation to engage this new frontier carefully and responsibly, so as to maintain the integrity of ministerial relationships and protect the sacred trust inherent in ministry.

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Social Media Guidelines

Title	Social Media Guidelines
Creation Date	
Version	
Last Revised	16 January 2014 – reformatted
Approved by	
Approval date	

Table of Contents

1. Policy Statement

This policy provides standards for staff, Ministers and Volunteers within the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of New South Wales and the ACT ('the Synod') engaging in communications using public facing social media channels.

2. Definitions

Social media:
an umbrella term that defines the various activities that use technology, primarily internet, web and mobile based tools, for social interaction and content creation and sharing. In the interests of simplicity, this social media policy is focused on those social media activities that are used for discussions and information sharing such as social networks, blogs, wikis, and forums.

Social media platform:
software or technology that enables users to build, integrate or facilitate community, social interaction and user-generated content. Examples include blogs, wikis, forums/discussion boards, social networks, social bookmarking, and video and photo sharing websites

Social media channel:
a presence on a social media platform. Examples include a Facebook page, a wiki page, a YouTube channel or a Twitter account

3. Scope

All official social media accounts are managed by the Synod Communications and Marketing Team, Uniting Resources.

It applies to the use of social media in the following capacities:

• Creating a social media presence as an official representative of the Synod

• Adding content to official, public facing Synod social media channels

• Making reference to Synod within a private capacity on a social media channel

This policy does not apply to Uniting Church staff in their personal use of social media where the staff member, Minister or Volunteer makes no reference to the Synod, its services and people.

Social media is an umbrella term that describes a range of activities and technologies that promote discussion, conversation and sharing of information, primarily over the internet. This includes, but is not limited to, blogs, wikis, discussion forums, discussion boards, podcasts, video and photo sharing, social networks and micro blogs.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Media Protocols and Telling Our Story Guidelines issued by the Synod Communications and Marketing Team, Uniting Resources.

4. Policy

1. Principles of Conduct

All staff, Ministers and Volunteers using social media must exercise and adopt a risk minimisation approach given that all the content posted on social media immediately becomes:

    a.   Public information and freely available to those who can access it

    b.   Information that can be used as source material by journalists and other interested parties

    c.   Information that can be used in legal matters

    d.   Information that may breach the Privacy Act.

2. Official presence of social media

An official social media presence has:

    a.   To be approved by the Synod Communications and Marketing Team, Uniting Resources.

    b.   To meet a demonstrated need for the Synod

    c.   To be part of a communication strategy

    d.   Comply with the Media Policy and Telling Our story Guidelines, including requirements for branding and content

    e.   To be registered within the Synod Communications and Marketing Team, Uniting Resources

    f.   Comply with our Privacy Policy.

3. Official use of social media

Staff, Ministers and Volunteers using social media platforms must:

    a.   Have a prior approval from the Communications & Marketing Team, Uniting Resources to act as a social media user

    b.   Use an official social media account / profile

    c.   Not mix personal and official comments

    d.   Exercise sound judgment and common sense and behave online in accordance with associated Synod Policies and Procedures

4.   Private use of social media

Staff, Ministers and Volunteers participating in social media in a private capacity must:

a.   Not allow the use of social media to undermine their effectiveness at work

b.   Use a private social media account established with a private email address. Staff must not use a Synod social media account for private use of social media.

c.   Not disclose any confidential information obtained through work. This includes information relating to employment, email addresses, contact lists, work duties or photographs of Synod activities or staff, Ministers and Volunteers.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities for establishing an official social media presence are as follows.

Synod Communications & Marketing Team, Uniting Resources:

- Prepares and maintains social media strategy including procedures, templates and disclaimers

- Maintains a register of official social media accounts and channels

- Provides content and frameworks

- Outlines relevant engaging content

- Maintains internal process to ensure quality and efficiency and currency of content

- Ensures that our social media strategy is maintained and monitored.

Activity or Function	Delegated Officer
Approve Social Media Platform for official use	Communications and Marketing Team, Uniting Resources
Approve the establishment of a public facing social media channel and/or account and/or profile that will speak with the voice of the Synod	Communications and Marketing Team, Uniting Resources
Approval to act as a social media user for official purposes	Communications and Marketing Team, Uniting Resources
Approval of a content framework as a source for social media	Communications and Marketing Team, Uniting Resources

6. Ethical standards and related policies

Staff, Ministers and Volunteers need to follow the same behavioural standards online as they would through print or personal interaction. The same laws, professional expectations, and guidelines for interacting with members, families, donors, media, and other stakeholders also apply online. Staff, Ministers and Volunteers are liable for anything they post to social media sites whether in a professional capacity or through a personal post
and may be held accountable.

To assist you in making the correct choices, this policy should be read in conjunction with the policies below:

- Media Protocols
- Staff Procedures and Policies
- Privacy Policy
- Telling Our Story Guidelines

7. Posting Guidelines

Before posting anything in either a personal or professional capacity, stop and ask yourself the following questions:

Do I really want the world to see this?

There's no such thing as a private social media site. The web is viral – comments can be forwarded worldwide in seconds. Archival systems save information even if you delete a post. If you've posted something you wish you hadn't, it's already too late to change it!

Is this information accurate?

Make sure you have all the facts before you post to avoid posting incorrect information about you or the organisation. If you make an error, be the first to correct it – quickly.

Should I be responding to this post?

Let the subject matter experts respond to negative posts. From time-to-time you may come across negative posts about our organisation or the spheres in which we operate. Avoid the temptation to react yourself – instead please pass the information to the Synod Communications and Marketing Team, Uniting Resources, who will determine the responsible spokesperson to address such comments.