

05.02

Social Media Policy

Theological Foundation

God calls us, the people of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA, or 'the church'), to communicate his love through Jesus Christ and be a place where love comes to life. Social media is a resource that assists the LCA to share God's word with people outside the church (2 Tim 4:2a, 1 Cor 9:22) and to build up Christian community (Eph 4:15,16).

Not all communication is life-giving, however, and so this policy recognises the role and responsibility of the LCA to protect our people from harm (1 Pet 5:2) and to be Christ's witnesses to them (1 Thess 2:10) and also to those outside our church (Col 4:5; 1 Cor 8:9). In response to the command to 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Matt 22:39), God's people are called to treat other people in a sensitive, respectful and loving manner.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to promote a consistent approach in the LCA to the effective, responsible and safe use of social media so that it bears positive witness to Christ, builds up the body of Christ, promotes the mission and ministry of the LCA, and does not harm any person or the church.

Relevant to

The policy and related procedures and guidelines apply to:

- all ministries and activities of the church
- all pastors, lay workers, employees, volunteers and members.

Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

1. require that social media is used in a way that serves the mission and ministry of the church
2. protect people and the church from hurt or harm that might be caused by uninformed, irresponsible or careless use of social media
3. establish a culture and practice that does not tolerate unacceptable use of social media in any circumstances.

Policy Statement

Social media can rightly be considered a gift from God for proclaiming the gospel and building up the body of Christ. If used in an uninformed, irresponsible or careless manner, however, this gift can create risks for the church and even be dangerous. Pastors, lay workers, employees and volunteers as well as all members who can be associated with the church through their use of social media are expected to use social media in a way that avoids harming other people and protects the church against loss, liability, litigation, adverse publicity and reputational damage. This applies equally to social media engagement in work-related or private settings.

Definitions

- **Social media:** any online website or application that allows users to create and share content and participate in social networking. Examples include (but are not limited to) Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Tumblr, Pinterest, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google+, Viber and Snapchat
- **Social media use, or social media engagement, or social media presence:** includes establishing an account, page or group, posting new content, responding to existing content, sharing a post with others, linking to or from other sites or pages, and 'following' an organisation to stay informed of new content they post

Procedural principles

The effective application of this policy will:

1. Require that social media is used in a way that serves the mission and ministry of the church, by:
 - a. demonstrating how social media supports mission and ministry goals
 - b. as far as practicable, promoting a positive and life-giving social media presence in line with the LCA's vision to be a place 'where love comes to life'
 - c. expecting all pastors, lay workers, employees, volunteers and members who use social media in their work or private capacities to set a good example in the way they use it.
2. Protect people and the church from hurt or harm that might be caused by uninformed, irresponsible or careless use of social media, by:
 - a. intentionally appointing people who will administer and be accountable for work-related social media and articulate roles and responsibilities
 - b. applying additional safeguards and monitor rigorously if children or young people are involved in the social media presence
 - c. training social media administrators about risks associated with social media, what constitutes unacceptable use, and how to report breaches
 - d. including the LCA Social Media Policy in induction procedures
 - e. regularly communicating and promoting the LCA Social Media Policy and any agency-specific procedures to all who use social media in their work or private capacities.

3. Establish a culture and practice that does not tolerate unacceptable use of social media under any circumstances, by articulating in policy documents and communicating to all users what constitutes unacceptable behaviour, which includes but is not limited to:
 - a. any type of criminal or illegal activity
 - b. vilification, discrimination, defamation, bullying, stalking, harassment, intimidation or any action that a reasonable person would expect to cause hurt or harm to another person
 - c. publishing material which is pornographic or obscene, violent, racist or hate-related
 - d. denigrating, criticising in an abusive manner or engaging in disrespectful debate about the LCA or any of its agencies or any of its policies, procedures, statements or actions
 - e. denigrating, criticising in an abusive manner or engaging in disrespectful debate about any person associated with the LCA, or any other person or group of people
 - f. exposing the LCA or any of its agencies to loss, liability, litigation, adverse publicity or reputational damage
 - g. publishing sensitive, confidential or inappropriate information
 - h. publishing photos and images of people without their consent or, for minors, the consent of their parents/guardians
 - i. breaching copyright legislation or other intellectual property rights
 - j. impersonating or misrepresenting another person
 - k. establishing or administering a social media presence that uses the LCA name or logo or implicitly or explicitly identifies with the LCA or an LCA agency without permission from an LCA approving officer
 - l. pastors, lay workers, employees, volunteers or members conducting or promoting their own private venture or business on an LCA or LCA agency social media presence
 - m. acting in any way that calls into question the individual's suitability for, or their capacity to serve, in their role in the LCA or an LCA agency.

Responsible person/s

- General Church Board (GCB) is responsible for implementing this policy and associated procedures across the LCA
- District Church Boards or Councils (DCB/DCC) are responsible for implementing this policy and related procedures within their respective districts
- Congregation/parish councils are responsible for implementing this policy and related procedures within their congregations/parishes
- Governing Agencies of all church-related entities are responsible for implementing social media policies and procedures that meet their particular requirements, so long as they are consistent with the LCA Social Media Policy and related procedures and guidelines.
- Implementing bodies have responsibility for acting on reports of unacceptable use of social media by LCA pastors, lay workers, employees and volunteers.
- Individual members have responsibility for setting a good example through the way they use social media in their work and private capacities.

Relevant documents

LCA Policy 03.01 Information and Communication Technology

LCA Policy 06.03 Child Protection

LCA Policy 06.04 Complaints Handling

LCA Policy 06.05 Prevention of Harassment and Abuse

LCA Policy 06.09 Privacy Policy

LCA's Standards of Ethical Behaviour

Behavioural Guidelines for Pastors in the Lutheran Church of Australia

Statutory legislation relating to telecommunications offences, defamation, discrimination, harassment, copyright and all other areas relevant to social media

Document Controls

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