

September 15, 2011

St. Matthias Online Communications / Social Media Policy

A. General Guidelines for all Participants in St. Matthias Social Media

These guidelines are for anyone who posts to any “social media;” i.e., any channel for online publication and commentary, including but not limited to: blogs, wikis, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, etc. This policy is not intended to regulate interactions on any specific site, but to provide general guidelines.

- 1. Bring your best self to online interactions.** Bring your best self such that your presence in social media is spiritually nourishing and aligned with our religious values.
- 2. All social media is public space. Treat it as such.** Remember that once something is posted, it is difficult to remove.
- 3. Remember the seeker; practice hospitality.** Always remember that a St. Matthias social media site may be a seeker’s first experience of St. Matthias. So please be warm and welcoming, informative and responsive representatives of our shared United Methodist principles, ideals, and values.
- 4. Be ambassadors for St. Matthias.** Adult members and friends of St. Matthias interacting on these sites are effectively representatives of the St. Matthias, whether they are volunteer or paid staff.

B. Setting Up St. Matthias Social Media Sites

- 1. Consult communications staff.** If you are interested in setting up a St. Matthias account—Facebook page, Twitter feed, blog, e-mail group addresses, etc.—first discuss with the communications chairperson.
- 2. Set up Administrators.** There should be at least multiple administrators with access to any account to ensure that sites are kept up to date and to monitor interaction occurring there.
- 3. Publicize and educate about the site.** Anytime a new congregational social media presence is introduced, it is important to publicize it through existing communication channels and to encourage people to learn to use the new tools and participate.

C. Interacting on Social Media

Guiding Principle: All social media are public spaces and should be treated as such.

- 1. Be honest.** Do not blog anonymously, use pseudonyms, or false screen names. Be honest and authentic. Use your real name, be clear about who you are, and identify yourself as a member, friend, volunteer, or staff member of St. Matthias.

2. **Be aware of your own privacy needs.** Be smart about protecting yourself and your privacy. Consider carefully what you post, and be cautious about disclosing personal details. Be mindful of posting information that you would not want the public to see.
3. **Protect St. Matthias members and friends.** Never identify someone by name or obviously reference them in some other way without their permission; and never discuss confidential details about them. If you do speak about another, make sure what you say is factual and does not disparage that party.
4. **Spamming others'.** Do not "Reply to All" when responding to an e-mail sent to the entire congregation.
5. **Use of congregational group address.** Do not use the congregational email address group for personal notifications without prior approval from the Pastor.
6. **Use disclaimers.** Always make it clear that any views and opinions you express are yours alone and do not express any official position or view of St. Matthias.
7. **Observe copyright rules.** Always credit others for their work; and make sure you have permission to use material before you do so. "Fair use" requirements dictate that you should never quote more than short excerpts of someone else's work without explicit permission; always attribute work to its original author or source. Where possible, link to others' content rather than copy it.

D. Dealing with Potential Controversies

1. **If you see something, say something.** If you see misrepresentations made about St. Matthias in the media, you may point them out, but always respectfully and with reference to facts. Inform the Pastor to make sure he/she has seen it.
2. **Don't be inflammatory.** Social media is not the place to conduct arguments. Make sure what you are saying is factually correct. If a discussion becomes too heated, an administrator may decide to remove it from the site, archive it, and arrange for the parties to meet in person to discuss their differences. Sometimes issues need to be discussed face-to-face rather than online.
3. **Think before you post.** Social media's greatest strength is also the source of its potential greatest weakness: speed. You can get the word out fast; but that goes for mistakes as well. Be the first to respond to your own mistakes on social media, own up to and correct them quickly! If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so.
4. **Respond to critique.** If someone accuses you of posting something improper (such as their copyrighted material or a defamatory comment about them), work to resolve the situation and let the Pastor know quickly if a problem or a potential problem has arisen.

E. Content Moderation Policy

The tone of any St. Matthias text, audio, or video should reflect the values of this congregation; whether it is original content being posted or a comment on content created by someone else. The content moderation policy posted on our Facebook page is as follows:

St. Matthias United Methodist Church (Fredericksburg, Virginia District) welcomes contributions to conversations on this page and content directly related to St. Matthias and United Methodism. Wall posts, comments, photos, and other content posted on this page should be relevant to these areas of interest, respectful of the people involved, and mindful of the principles upheld by the United Methodist Church's Purposes and Principles.

St. Matthias has the right to delete any inappropriate content from this page, including but not limited to: irrelevant content, redundant content, hateful content, malicious content, uncivil or disrespectful content, attacks or complaints against an individual, financial solicitations, endorsements of a political candidate or party, and content that violates Facebook's terms of use, code of conduct, or other policies. Content that violates Facebook's policies may also be reported to Facebook.

In short, be respectful, be authentic, be honest; don't be inflammatory.

F. Administration and Monitoring

Those who manage and produce content for the congregation's new media tools should agree to:

- 1. Consistently and fairly enforce stated policies.**
- 2. Prioritize confidentiality.** Do not post photos of children without written consent of their parent or guardian. If an event is being filmed or photographed, tell people in advance of and at the event and provide an opt-out option.
- 3. Back up all content.**

H. Guidelines for Adults in Advisory Roles with Youth

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide adults who are in advisory roles with youth of St. Matthias with procedures for electronic communications. These roles include but are not limited to Director Youth Ministries, United Methodist Youth Fellowship (UMYF) leaders, Worship Leaders, Religious Education Teachers, and Ministerial Staff.

One of the components of a balanced youth program is developing strong youth-adult partnerships within the intentional and safe community of youth group. The vast numbers of communication possibilities and the speed of technology require that adults working with youth be aware of the need to maintain appropriate relational boundaries regardless of communication medium.

Facebook or other social networking communications can help create a group identity, and assist in planning for group activities, through the creation of a St. Matthias UMYF online group. These mediums provide powerful modes of connecting with youth and for youth to connect with each other in their fast-paced world and should be channeled as such. Communications on Facebook are most appropriate when conducted through a group. The spirit of this approach requires the adult to think of all communications as if they were happening in person (face-to-face) and apply the same standards applied to face-to-face meetings to exchanges through electronic media. Group communications through email, Facebook, social media, etc., are further defined as follows:

1. Appropriate interaction between youth and adults on Facebook and social media, whether in a UMYF or in one-on-one discussions, include conducting youth group business, discussions of logistics, event planning, and church-related business.
2. Inappropriate actions include: initiating and engaging youth in personal/private conversations better discussed in person, exploring youths' Facebook pages as peers; i.e., commenting on personal photos or "poking".
3. Adult advisors need to remind youth that the specific covenant youth group members have agreed to abide by during group time at the church also applies to online communications and communities set up specifically for the group.
4. Adults must recognize the public nature of social networking sites and see themselves as representatives of St. Matthias (volunteer and/or paid). Thus, advisors agree not to post any material that could be deemed inappropriate or explicit. So doing is cause for dismissal.
5. If an adult leader is in doubt about the appropriateness of any ongoing or new forms for communication, they should consult with the Pastor and/or Communication Chairperson for guidance.

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