

Northern Great Lakes Synod: Adopted 3/21/2020

## Social Media Policy

Social media has transformed the way we receive, create, and even engage in information. Such media can be a helpful tool for ministry. But it can also hinder ministry efforts and undermine the fabric of a community of faith. As social media continues to evolve, expand and further integrate into our personal and professional lives, please consider the following guidelines for using social media in a way that is mindful of the impact it can have.



### **Definition:**

Social media is a public forum. There is no true privacy in social media, even with the use of security settings- words, photos, and videos can be duplicated and spread very easily and quickly. When using social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube etc., it is important to understand how they work, put safeguards in place, and be mindful that the information you share does not undermine efforts in ministry. Because of the widespread use and the ease of copying and forwarding electronic materials, it is very important to make sure that you are not exposing the synod or your congregation to liability or bad publicity due to improper or unwise social media content. Nor should social media use contribute to divisiveness in your congregation or to a climate of distrust because of what you have posted. Both Rostered Leaders and Staff should keep in mind that they are offering a public witness and they should be careful on social networking communications whether it be for private or public use.

### **Helpful hints:**

- Posts should be appropriate to our ministry.
- We should not post confidential and sensitive information on social media, for example, alerting congregation members to a death, praying for someone who is ill or in crisis. Any public disclosure should come from the family first, or with the family's or the individual's express permission.
- Remember the difference between being political and being partisan. Our current political climate is divisive and reactive. Pastors undermine their own ability to have productive and meaningful conversation around difficult issues if the congregation thinks they already think they know how their pastor feels about a given topic, or if they feel threatened by the force of your convictions, leaving little room for debate or discussion.
- When discussing one's own opinion on either a ministry related issue or non-issue, qualify that it is your opinion and not the opinion of your congregation, the synod, or the ELCA.
- Keep in mind there can be individuals of varying age groups, including children and youth, who could see your postings. While it is common to see postings of food artfully accompanied by a glass of wine or beer, this may be misconstrued in unhelpful ways.
- If you are connecting to younger groups on social media for the purposes of Youth Group or Sunday School please keep content age appropriate and maintain appropriate boundaries.

- Before you put something out on social media consider the following:
  - Does this post explicitly or tacitly condemn or denigrate those who might disagree with it?
  - How might my Posting be perceived?
  - Have I considered issues of sensitivity or confidentiality?
  - Is this a post that might not be appropriate for younger individuals?
  - Will people be able to tell who I will vote for in the next election?
  - Do you really have to share that post? Do people really need to know your opinion on any given issue? What kind of impact will your share, tweet, snapchat make? Will it be positive, humorous, life-giving? Or not?
  - Is it about an issue that is better discussed over coffee or at Bible Study than argued about in brief zingers in the comment section?
  - Finally, if you are unsure about your posting please consult your church leadership or the synod offices.

**Internet and computer security:**

Make sure all devices have updated anti-malware software and watch for spam.

**Boundaries:**

In regard to social media it is important to keep in mind the maintaining of healthy boundaries particularly when interacting or “Friending” with congregation members or peers of the past, present, and future. If there are any questions or concerns about boundary issues please consult with your congregation leadership or the synod office.