UFMCC SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
Approved by the Council of Elders 8 December 2014

Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.
1 Corinthians 10:31

Policy Statement:
An ever-increasing number of people use and prefer digital communication over other forms. It is essential that the church be present in this medium because the responsible use of social media can enhance communication and deepen relationship. The following policy and guidelines apply commonly accepted principles of healthy boundaries and safe church to the virtual world of digital networking and communication.

This policy concerns the publication of and commentary on social media by employees, clergy, and lay leaders of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC). For the purpose of this policy, social media means any facility for online publication and commentary, including but not limited to: blogs and SMS (short message service) messages, collaboration applications such as wikis; social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn; and photo and video sites such as Flickr and YouTube.

This policy is in addition to and complements any existing policies regarding the use of technology, computers, e-mail and the internet.

Protocol for UFMCC Social Media Policy
1. MCC employees, clergy, and lay leaders are free to publish or comment via social media in accordance with this policy.

2. MCC employees, clergy, and lay leaders are subject to this policy when they identify themselves as an MCC employee, clergy, or lay leader in any social media.
   a. The only exception is the incidental mention of place of employment or religious affiliation in a personal blog on topics unrelated to MCC.
   b. Unless representing MCC, an MCC employee, clergy, or lay leader must make it clear that the views and opinions expressed are theirs alone and do not represent the official views of MCC.

3. All uses of social media must follow the same ethical standards that MCC employees, clergy, and lay leaders must otherwise follow.

4. MCC social media policy violations will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including the MCC Judiciary Process.

5. The following information should never be published on social media.
   a. Personal information acquired in the course of pastoral duties, whether or not the information is related to a member of MCC
   b. Dishonest, untrue or misleading information

      c. Ethnic slurs, defamatory comments, personal insults, obscenity

6. A member, constituent, business partner or supplier should never be identified by name without permission.

7. Misrepresentations made by others in social media about MCC should be corrected with respect and with the facts.

8. Other than when used by local churches and MCC-authorized ministries, social media identities, logon ID's and user names may not use the MCC name without prior approval from the MCC Director of Operations or an official designee.

9. MCC employees, clergy, and lay leaders should not violate any laws governing copyright and fair use or fair dealing of copyrighted material owned by others, including MCC's own copyrights and brands.

UFMCC SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

These guidelines are provided for all MCC employees, clergy, and lay leaders. The intent of these guidelines is to provide a framework of best practices for the use of social media for both MCC related activity and personal use.

Privacy
Privacy settings on social media platforms associated with MCC should be set to allow anyone to see profile information.

Privacy settings on social media platforms not associated with MCC and particularly those for personal use should be set to limit access. Be very mindful of posting information that you would not want the public to see.

Content
What you publish will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully and be particularly cautious with personal information. A good guideline to consider for MCC related social media is that nothing should be posted that you would not want projected on the front wall of your church on Sunday morning.

The speed of being able to publish your thoughts is both a great feature and a great downfall of social media. The time to edit or reflect must be self-imposed. If in doubt over a post or an e-mail, or if something does not feel right, either let it sit and look at it again before publishing it, or ask someone else to look at it first.

Do not quote more than short excerpts of someone else's work, and always attribute such work to the original author/source. It is good general practice to link to others' work rather than reproduce it.
If you make an error, admit it and correct it quickly.

If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so.

If someone accuses you of posting something improper (such as their copyrighted material or a defamatory comment about them), deal with it quickly. It is better to remove it immediately to lessen the possibility of a legal action.

Many social media users include a prominent disclaimer saying who they work for, but that they're not speaking officially. This is good practice and is encouraged, but don't count on it to avoid trouble - it may not have much legal effect.

The best way to be interesting, stay out of trouble, and have fun is to write about what you know. There is a good chance of being embarrassed by a real expert, or of being boring if you write about topics you are not knowledgeable about.

Use a spell-checker.

If you're not design-oriented, ask someone who is whether your blog looks decent, and take their advice on how to improve it.

Time Management
Social media can take up enormous amounts of time and energy. Make sure that using social media does not interfere with your job or life commitments.

DEFINITIONS
1. **Social networking** is the practice of expanding the number of one's business and/or social contacts by making connections through individuals. While social networking has gone on almost as long as societies themselves have existed, the unparalleled potential of the Internet to promote such connections is only now being fully recognized and exploited, through Web-based groups established for that purpose.

2. **Social media** is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation, and wikis are among the different types of social media. Examples of social media:

   - Facebook is a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. According to statistics from the Nielsen Group, Internet users within the United States spend more time on Facebook than any other website.
   - Twitter is a free microblogging service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets. Twitter members can broadcast tweets and follow other users' tweets by using multiple platforms and devices.
   - Wikipedia is a free, open content online encyclopedia created through the collaborative effort of a community of users known as Wikipedians. Anyone registered on the site can create an article for publication; registration is not required to edit articles. Wikipedia was founded in January of 2001.
   - LinkedIn is a social networking site designed specifically for the business community. The goal of the site is to allow registered members to establish and document networks of people they know and trust professionally.
   - Reddit is a social news website and forum where stories are socially curated and promoted by site members. The site is composed of hundreds of sub-communities, known as "subreddits." Each subreddit has a specific topic such as technology, politics or music. Reddit site members, also known as, "redditors," submit content which is then voted upon by other members. The goal is to send well-regarded stories to the top of the site's main thread page.
   - Pinterest is a social curation website for sharing and categorizing images found online. Pinterest requires brief descriptions but the main focus of the site is visual. Clicking on an image will take you to the original source, so, for example, if you click on a picture of a pair

     of shoes, you might be taken to a site where you can purchase them. An image of blueberry pancakes might take you to the recipe; a picture of a whimsical birdhouse might take you to the instructions.

COMMONLY ACCEPTED PRINCIPLES OF HEALTHY BOUNDARIES AND SAFE CHURCH
- Adults have more power than children and youth
- Clergy have more power than people with whom they have a pastoral relationship.
- Adults younger than 65 years of age generally have more power than persons who are 65 years of age and older.
- The mutuality of friendship cannot exist when there is a disparity of power.
- Two unrelated adults must be able to maintain visual contact with each other any time they engage in ministry with children or youth.
- Windows in doors allow transparency of interactions with children, youth and adults who may be vulnerable.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS
- All communication sent digitally (email, social networking sites, notes or posts, etc.) is NOT CONFIDENTIAL and may be shared or reposted to others.
- Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent, as a window in the door provides transparency in the physical world.
- In the virtual world healthy boundaries and safe church practices must be adhered to as they are in the physical world.
- In the virtual world, "friend" can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate through that medium. In the physical world, friend can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self-disclosure, mutuality and expectations for relationship.
- Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES AND GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Relationships through Social Networking Sites
1. Those who minister to children, youth, and vulnerable adults are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile. Individual personal profiles are to be used to interact with real friends, family and peers. Those who minister to children, youth, and vulnerable adults should not use their individual personal profile to submit "friend" requests to minors, youth, or vulnerable adults to whom they minister. Children, youth, and vulnerable adults may not be able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between them and those who minister to them. Youth may ask to be "friends", and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests.

2. If an adult chooses to accept friend requests from minors or youth who are associated with their ministry or community of faith, other adult leaders must have full access to all aspects of that adult's profile and correspondence.
3. Adults who want to connect via a social networking website with youth to whom they minister are strongly encouraged to set up a closed group account that youth may join.   Youth requesting to "friend" an adult can then be invited to join this group rather than be accepted as a friend on an adult's personal profile account. The

purpose of these two separate accounts/profiles is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with youth and real family, friends and colleagues.

4. Any material on any site (whether affiliated with MCC or not) that raises suspicion that a child, youth, or vulnerable adult has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to MCC and/or the appropriate local, state, or national legal authority. If the material is on an MCC site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with the appropriate local, state, or national legal authority and/or the local police.

Groups on Social Networking Sites
1. Closed groups, but not "hidden" groups, should be used for children and youth groups.
2. Groups for children and youth should have at least two unrelated adult administrators as well as at least two youth.
3. Invitations to children and youth to join the group should be made by youth administrators, unless a youth previously asked an adult administrator to invite him/her to join the group.
4. Behavioral covenants should be created to govern what content is appropriate and inappropriate for an online youth group.
5. Any material on any site (whether affiliated with MCC or not) that raises suspicion that a child, youth, or vulnerable adult has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to MCC and/or the appropriate local, state, or national legal authority. If the material is on an MCC-affiliated site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with MCC and/or the appropriate local, state, or national legal authority and the police.
6. Any content that details inappropriate behavior (outside of the bounds of the established behavioral covenant) during a church sponsored event or activity should be addressed immediately by adult youth leaders and parents and be reported to MCC.
7. Social networking groups for youth should be open to parents of current members.
8. Parents should be informed that the content of youth pages or groups that are not sponsored by the church are NOT within the purview of adult youth leaders.
9. Adult leaders of youth groups and former youth members who, due to departure, removal from position, or are no longer eligible because they "aged-out" of a program should be immediately removed from digital communication with youth groups via social networking sites, list serves, etc.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES AND GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTIONS WITH ADULTS

Social Networking Sites-Relationship
1. MCC employees, clergy, and lay leaders are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile to shield both adult and youth members from viewing content that may be inappropriate.
2. Individual personal profiles of MCC employees, clergy, and lay leaders are to be used to interact with real friends, family and peers. MCC employees, clergy, and lay leaders should not submit "friend" requests from their personal profile to those to

whom they minister. The disparity of power may not give the other person the ability to decline such request.

3. MCC employees, clergy, and lay leaders who want to connect via a social networking website with someone to whom they minister are strongly encouraged to set up a group account that others may join.   The purpose of having a personal profile and a separate professional profile, page, and/or constituent group is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with constituents and real family, friends and colleagues.

4. MCC employees, clergy, and lay leaders should consider the impact of declining a "friend" request from constituents. These encounters may create a tension in "real world" relationships. MCC employees, clergy, and lay leaders can direct "friend" requests from constituents to an appropriate professional profile, page, and or constituent group.

5. MCC employees, clergy, and lay leaders who work directly with youth are encouraged to establish church sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with youth members.

6. When an MCC employee, clergy, or lay leader's ministry at a particular ministry setting ends, the MCC employee, clergy, or lay leader should use extreme caution in deciding whether to maintain relationships through social media with "friends" who are former constituents with a bias toward removing former constituents of that particular ministry setting as "friends" or contacts in all forms of digital communications.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS AND CONTENT

Behavioral Covenants

1. Covenants should acknowledge that materials posted on Church Sponsored sites (and/or group pages) are NOT CONFIDENTIAL.

2. Covenants should acknowledge that content deemed inappropriate will be removed from the site or group page.

3. Covenants for communities of faith should address the following issues:
   • Appropriate language
   • Eligibility of membership to join a social networking group. Things to consider include whether you have to be a member of a parish or youth group and whether there are age requirements/restrictions for participation for youth groups.
   • Loss of eligibility of membership and removal from the social networking group. Consider how and when members will be removed from the group due to moving away, leaving the faith community, becoming too old for youth group, clergy leaving to minister to another parish or exclusion from ministry positions for other reasons.

   • Who, how and when may photos be tagged (members identified by name; for example, individuals may tag themselves in photos but should not tag others)
   • Appropriate and inappropriate behavior of members (bullying, pictures that depict abuse, violence, sexual acts, etc.) and the consequence for inappropriate behavior.
   • Compliance with mandated reporting laws regarding suspected abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIDEO CHATS, BLOGS, AND VIDEO BLOGS

1. Adults should refrain from initiating video chats with youth and vulnerable adults.

2. Participants in a video chat or blog should consider what will be shown in the video such as their surroundings, their clothing/state of dress, etc.
3. All transcripts of on-line text chats, video chats, blogs or video blogs should be saved when possible.
4. All clergy and adults engaged in ministry with youth should consider the content and nature of any post that will be read by or visible to youth. Your voice is often considered the voice of the church.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLISHING/POSTING CONTENT ONLINE
1. Congregations MUST inform participants when they are being videoed because church buildings are not considered public space.
2. Any faith community that distributes video of its worship services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media MUST post signs that indicate the service will be broadcast.
3. All communities of faith should take care to secure signed Media Release Forms from adults and guardians of minor children who will or may participate in activities that may be photographed or videoed for distribution.
4. Photos that are published on church sponsored sites should not include name or contact information for minor children or youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USE OF EMAIL OR TEXTING (Includes apps such as Facebook and Twitter)
1. Email can be an appropriate and effective means of communicating basic factual information such as the time of an event, agenda for a meeting, text of a document, etc.
2. Email is not an appropriate communication method for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or require extensive conversation.
3. If an email message is longer than a couple of sentences, then the matter might more properly be addressed via live conversation.
4. Humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted in an email.
5. All email users should take a moment to consider the ramifications of their message before clicking on the "send" or "reply to all" button.

The MCC Social Media Policy and Guidelines are built on much work done by other organizations, including:

PolicyTool.Net
Connecticut Diocese of the Episcopal Church
humanresources.about.com
internettoolboxforchurches.com
The United Methodist Church

Our thanks to each source for discussing and sharing their policies in public.