

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR BELIN MEMORIAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

10.16.12

Introduction

Social media encompasses a broad array of online activity, all of which is trackable and traceable. It includes social networks like Facebook and MySpace; professional networks such as LinkedIn; the live blogging tool, Twitter; video and photo sites like YouTube and Flickr; social bookmarking such as Digg and Delicious, information sites like wikis; as well as virtual worlds or other media yet to be identified or created that are used to connect you with the rest of the world.

Today, many churches are turning to social media and social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace and Twitter to connect with people and promote outreaches and other church programs. And that's what these tools were designed for: easy mass communication and media sharing. Easy, and a creative way to do business and connect with people inside and outside the church, but appropriate policies and monitoring procedures need to be put in place and adhered to avoid any libel issues.

Anything posted online is available worldwide and never dies, even after a user deletes it. Even if you restrict the privacy settings or the page is password-protected, there are ways to get into that document. Facebook, for example, retains copies of these according to its "Terms of Use Agreement." Social networking sites are public and permanent, making it easy to collect information on people these days. If the staff is going to talk about anything work-related on any webpage, that posting may create problems for the church, and, in some cases, a liability for the church. Hence, the best way to avoid liability for staff members' postings to social media is to require them to agree that all postings will comply with these terms and conditions for social networking agreed upon by the church staff members.

Purpose: Facebook has significant benefits. It's an easy way to connect with those your church is hoping to reach. Since more than 750 million Americans are already on Facebook, it's a great place for a church to reach out and get exposure. Facebook also affords plenty of opportunities for church members to quickly connect with one another in this high-speed society, organize events, provide feedback on church functions, and even—build community.

Social Media and Social Networking Policies and Guidelines

Here is the official policy and guidelines for using social media at **Belin Memorial United Methodist Church**. As you know, social media continues to evolve each and every day – and this policy and these guidelines may evolve right along with it – so please make sure to check back periodically for updates. Policy will be posted on the church website.

The Policy and Guidelines cover any use of social media if you are an employee, agent,

volunteer, member or independent contractor of **Belin Memorial United Methodist Church** and engage on social media sites for professional purposes. To be clear, if a use of social media constitutes a use for professional purposes, that use must adhere to both the Policy and the Guidelines. **Belin Memorial United Methodist Church** strongly recommends following these guidelines when using any social media site.

The goal of these guidelines is to assist everyone with the proper and positive usage of social media and to help protect **Belin Memorial United Methodist Church** and our employees, agents or independent contractors from the risks of using social media.

If you have any questions or comments on these guidelines or would like any additional information on these topics, please contact: **Belin Memorial United Methodist Church** administrative staff at 843.651.5099.

Facebook

As we noted above, Belin Memorial United Methodist Church recognizes the important opportunities afforded by social media sites and we encourage our employees, agents and independent contractors to participate in this Conversation Age. That said, there are some unique challenges to the emerging social media sites and Belin Memorial United Methodist Church hopes to protect both you and the Church by implementing this policy.

We view our employees, agents or independent contractors as representatives of Belin Memorial United Methodist Church. As such, and just as in your daily lives, we ask that you continue to hold yourselves out in the context of social media sites in a professional manner that is reflective of our church and our reputation.

It is important to understand that any mention or connection to Belin Memorial United Methodist Church on social media sites, including identifying Belin Memorial United Methodist Church as your employer, are reflective of both you as an individual and Belin Memorial United Methodist Church as a religious organization.

In fact, any mention or connection to Belin Memorial United Methodist Church on social media sites may create risk to Belin Memorial United Methodist Church and, therefore, those uses of social media are subject to both this policy and the guidelines below:

All church groups wishing to have a social media page, such as on Facebook, must have approval prior to starting the page and must adhere to all church social media policy for Facebook pages. Must submit request for a Facebook page to the church office. Note that for most purposes the general church Facebook page may be the preferred option. Information that is sent to Facebook is not confidential. It can be shared or reposted to others and, therefore, only information appropriate to all should be posted. All Facebook pages should have at least two administrators and all posts should be reviewed by at least two administrators before being posted.

No communications on social media sites should be made as though the communications are “official” statements of Belin Memorial United Methodist Church without the prior

written authorization of Belin Memorial United Methodist Church.

Any mention of Belin Memorial United Methodist Church must adhere to the brand guidelines, including usages of trademarks and logos.

All policies and procedures set forth in the Belin Memorial United Methodist Church's IT Policy on Internet or MOBILE? device remain in effect. Please review those procedures.

All policies and procedures set forth in the Belin Memorial United Methodist Church's Employee, Agent or Independent Contractor Handbook [and any Code of Conduct] remain in effect. Please review those procedures.

In order to assist in our management of the use of social media by our agents, employees or independent contractors and some of the risks associated with that use, please submit a list of social media sites that you are currently using for professional purposes to the following: Belin Memorial United Methodist Church Administration.

Failure to follow the Policy and Guidelines when engaged in social media for professional purposes may result in disciplinary action or in termination of a social media outlet.

Online Etiquette Rules of Conduct:

Be Truthful. Always communicate facts that are true. If you are not sure if something is true or not, do not write it as though it is true! It is OK to write opinions, but make sure that your opinion is NOT communicated as a fact.

Be Positive. If you do not have something nice to say, think twice before you say it.

Be "Short and Sweet." If you want someone to read your message, get to the point and quickly.

Be Up to Date. Many readers are interested in learning something. Be a source of information, but make it new and fresh.

Be Yourself. Do not falsely impersonate anyone.

Know Your Audience. Consider the appropriateness of your messages and photos – especially if there are minors that can access your information. (See details in the section pertaining to photo use.)

Using Proper Spelling and Grammar. Even though use of abbreviations in texting and various forms of social media is widespread, we recommend using proper spelling and grammar in all professional messages.

Correct Your Mistakes. If you make a mistake, make sure to print a retraction or correction to your message. If you try to correct someone else's mistake, Belin Memorial United Methodist Church recommends sending him/her a direct message rather than a public note. It is both polite and avoids any embarrassment in case your correction is inaccurate.

No Illicit Statements. It should go without saying, but no messages should contain statements that are unlawful, threatening, abusive, libelous, defamatory, obscene, vulgar, pornographic, gambling-related, drug-related, alcohol-related, profane, racist, sexually explicit or indecent.

Quality, Not Quantity. It is hard for a reader to absorb multiple messages in a row. Consider spreading out your messages to give readers sufficient time to reflect on your message.

ALWAYS TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS: If something tells you that you should not write it, don't – or consult someone before you do!

Everything Can be Used Against You in a Court of Law. Assume that everything lasts forever on the Internet and it can come back to haunt you.

Know your Code of Ethics – DO NOT DISCLOSE CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION!

Consider that information passed through third party email systems such as Gmail, Yahoo or Hotmail accounts may not be considered confidential.

Know Your Federal and Local Laws. There are federal and state laws that govern Privacy Laws.

Don't Provide Too Much Information. When posting comments, writing a status update, or deciding what information to include on the church Facebook pages, remember that anyone could be reading it. Facebook might seem like a place to interact with friends (and it is), but Facebook also attracts deviants, predators, and those hoping to steal the identities of others. Some information is necessary, but revealing too much is dangerous.

Delete Anything Inappropriate. If the church's Facebook pages are accessible to all, then anyone can post a comment on the "wall." The information page of the Facebook page should state that the Church will remove any comments, photos, links or videos that are objectionable at the church's discretion. At least one person/administrator should be checking this daily (email notifications can be set up to alert users about any new posts), and anything inappropriate should be deleted immediately. Whether it's an inappropriate comment, a link to a questionable site, or a harmless comment posted by someone with a racy profile picture—these things, if not removed, might reflect negatively on the church, especially for those who could be visiting your church's Facebook pages without any

prior knowledge about whom you are and what Belin Memorial United Methodist Church values as a congregation. As far as that visitor knows, the person posting inappropriate content could be a church member—and the fact that it hasn't been deleted will suggest that the church leaders didn't have a problem with it.

Understand the Privacy Settings. The information page of the Facebook page should state that the site is not private or confidential. Facebook's default privacy settings are not private. As a church, there is some information that should be made available to all (who you are, what you believe in, where you are located, etc.), and other information that will need to be kept private. Customize the privacy settings to get the right balance. To access and update privacy settings, the user needs to log in and click on "Account" in the upper right-hand corner. When the drop-down menu appears, click on "Privacy Settings." Facebook can change its privacy settings at any time. Users may be notified (depending on the changes), but they may not. It's the user's responsibility to check the settings and to continue checking them.

Protect Photos. Sharing photo albums is one of the features that attract many users to Facebook. But as a church, we must be extremely careful regarding what pictures to post—and who will be allowed to view them. Participants must be informed when being photographed or videotaped, as the buildings and grounds of the church are not public space. When minors are pictured, you must have parental permission and must not include the minors' names in the captions. And do not make these photo albums available to everyone. Doing so could open up the church family to potential predators. In addition, tagging adults in pictures must have the person pictured permission for the tag to appear. The best policy is to not tag photos of adults or minors.

Making First Impressions. Facebook is fun, but the church should remember that any affiliated Facebook page could be offering a first impression for those in the community (or anywhere in the world) who have never been to the church. Facebook provides a venue for friends to stay in touch, for new acquaintances to become friends, and for friends and family members to interact in amusing ways. Having fun is not a bad thing—but if the church is taking the time to operate Facebook pages, then they should be doing it with a clear purpose in mind.

Use Discretion

Once users have configured their privacy settings, and once they know how to control who can view their information (including who has access to their photo albums), the key to safe Facebook use is simply being smart about what's posted.

One flippant or reckless comment could seriously damage the church's reputation. It could also deter people from visiting on Sunday morning or anytime. Those responsible for maintaining a church's Facebook pages should always be cautious about how their comments might be perceived by those who aren't familiar with the church community. For example, an inside joke posted on the church's Facebook page might seem completely harmless ... to those involved. But if there's any chance that a joke will be misinterpreted by those who happen to be checking out the church's pages (perhaps

because they're thinking of visiting), then it's probably not worth posting. Save the inside jokes for emails or in-person interactions—not for publicly accessible social media sites.

Users do have the ability to delete comments from their page. If someone posts something inappropriate on the church's page—whether it's a member making a joke or perhaps someone being intentionally malicious—it can and should be deleted. If a church is going to have its own Facebook page, then they should have at least two persons who check it daily and sent email alerts of new posts. Then, if someone posts something inappropriate, it can be removed in a timely fashion.

Posting- Photos & Videos of Children Online

The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 ("COPPA") protects certain personal information that a website collects from children under the age of 13. Personal information is defined as: (A) a first and last name; (B) a home or other physical address, including street name and name of a city or town; (C) an email address; (D) a telephone number; (E) a Social Security number; (F) any other identifier that the Federal Trade Commission determines/permits the physical or online contacting of a specific individual; or (G) information concerning the child or the parents of that child that the website collects online from the child and combines with an identifier described in this paragraph.

Each individual owns his or her likeness or other identifiable characteristic. Stated another way, each person owns his or her face. No one may use his or her face (or other individual identifiable characteristic) in any commercial manner. If the church uses the videos or images to promote the church or makes them available on the Web, then the courts will likely find that the church used the images in a commercial manner. This use may create an invasion of the privacy lawsuit for the individuals whose image appears in the video or photo.

The church is responsible for all activities occurring at church events. As a result, the church is responsible if anyone (employee or volunteer) takes photos or videos for the church at church events. This will include Sunday School teachers and nursery workers, youth volunteers, BCLC staff and parents, Blessing of the Inlet staff and volunteers. Several exemptions may apply. The first question is whether the church shot the video or photograph in a public place at a public event. If so, then the church does not need permission to take the photographs or videos. However, churches are private venues.

Church events are private, though the public is invited. As a result, the videos and photos shot at VBS and Sunday School, or any event on church grounds do not qualify for this exemption. An example of a public event at a public place would be the church hosting a food drive at a local park.

The next question is whether the individuals are "public" individuals involved in activities where the public is invited. If the person is famous, and the event is an event where the public was invited, then the courts may find that the church has not invaded the

public individual's privacy.

The final question is whether the individuals gave written consent for the church to photograph or video them. If so, they cannot later sue for an invasion of privacy. Since children cannot give consent, the parent or guardian must have given written consent.

In some circumstances, the courts have found that proper notice of filming may constitute notice and consent. If properly worded signs are conspicuous and located outside every entrance, a court may find that the church provides adequate notice to the subjects and that no invasion of privacy occurs when the church publishes videos or photos of them. If the church chooses to post the signs, the church suggests the posting of additional signs outside and inside the children's area so that parents will receive notice of the church's photography and video activities.

The sign might read as follows:

ALL CHURCH ACTIVITIES MAY BE TAPED AND PHOTOGRAPHED FOR CHURCH MEDIA/PUBLICATION USES. ENTRY INTO ANY CHURCH BUILDING CONSTITUTES CONSENT TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED OR TAPED FOR CHURCH PURPOSES.

For events that are for children, such as Youth Group, Vacation Bible School and Summer Camps, the registration forms should already include a notice of photography and or taping and require a signature from the parent for written consent. Signs should also be in place; however, the signs do not completely replace the need for a written consent.

To protect the church from liability, the church should consider placing the photos and videos in a secure area on its website. By requiring a secure login to that area of the website, the church is not making the materials available to the public. The church could issue login and passwords to members who request them. Via software, the church should also prevent the images and videos from being downloaded, printed, or copied. Finally, the church should monitor website activity to identify potential abuse of the images and videos, such as software that circumvents the restrictions on downloading, printing or copying.

Twitter

Of all types of social media, Twitter is the simplest. With Twitter, users communicate (or "tweet"), using 140 characters or less. Many churches tweet, encouraging messages or Bible verses, highlight upcoming events or missions' opportunities, or reflect on current events (within the church or the world).

Twitter is easier to monitor than Facebook because only the user can post on their own Twitter feed. Other Twitter users can send direct messages to the church account (using the @TwitterName feature), but it is obvious that these messages did not originate from

the church account—which makes it clear that the church did not sanction these comments in any way (whereas, when something inappropriate is posted on a church’s Facebook page, it could be perceived as tacit approval if the comment is not deleted by those operating the church’s Facebook page).

Because of the 140-character limit for tweets, Twitter sparked the popularity of URL-shortening services like bit.ly and Tiny URL which reduce the number of characters in lengthy Web addresses—making it possible to include these links in tweets. The problem with these shortened URLs, however, is that they’re ambiguous, and you can’t be certain where the link will take you when you click on it. Never click one of these links unless you know and trust the person providing it. And do not “retweet” someone else’s link unless you have verified that it indeed directs users to the destination the tweeter claims. The last thing you want to do is accidentally link to scandalous content from your or the church’s Twitter feed.

Those tweeting from a church Twitter account need to remember that they are representing the church, not themselves. The best piece of advice for safe use of Twitter is this: think before you tweet. A little common sense can go a long way. For example, don’t tweet the location where the youth group is going for a campout. If you want to tweet something about the event after the youth group has returned, then do that, but never broadcast the location of your students in advance of an event.

Blogs and Websites

Websites provide a place to communicate the church’s identity, values and mission. Websites also provide information about church functions and outreach events. Websites have the fewest risks because the church leaders are solely tasked with this responsibility to control the content visible on the site. Unless the church website has a message board, then the only users who can post any content on the site are those who have been granted access.

Blogs are used to share church ideas, stories, devotionals and insights. Like websites, those to whom the blog moderator or facilitator has granted access can only update the blog’s content. Most blogs do allow comments—and these sections can attract volatile or inappropriate messages, or spammers who link to content the church wouldn’t want to promote—but these problems can be easily remedied by requiring that all comments be moderated and approved before they’re visible on the site.

On both church blogs and church websites, the church will want to be careful about violating copyright law.

Many churches have their own website, and for good reason. A website is a great tool for promoting the mission and ministries of a church, and for sharing information with members. But few church leaders are aware that there are several legal and tax issues associated with the use of church websites, and unfamiliarity with these issues can result in unexpected liability.

Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act

The federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) requires certain commercial websites to obtain parental consent before collecting, using or disclosing personal information from children less than 13 years of age. The purpose of COPPA is to protect the privacy of children using the Internet. It was enacted in response to the widespread use of the Internet by pedophiles to obtain personal information from children. COPPA achieves its goal by requiring commercial websites and online services directed to (or that knowingly collect information from) children under 13 to provide notice about their policies with respect to the collection, use and disclosure of children’s personal information.

With certain exceptions, websites also must obtain “verifiable parental consent” before collecting, using or disclosing personal information from children. COPPA only applies to commercial websites, and so it is not applicable to websites maintained by nonprofit churches, even if they collect or use personal information obtained from children under age 13.

However, many nonprofit organizations, including many churches, are voluntarily complying with the law to “set a good example” and demonstrate their commitment to protecting children. For example, the entire federal government is exempt from COPPA, but every federal agency that maintains a website is voluntarily complying. The same is true of many state agencies.

If we as a church operate a website, we may be “collecting” personal information obtained from children under 13. The word “collecting” is defined broadly by COPPA to include “the direct or passive gathering of any personal information from a child by any means,” including any online request for personal information, or the use of a chat room, message board, or other public posting of such information. “Personal information” includes a child’s name, address, phone number, and/or email address.

Church websites ordinarily will not be covered by COPPA since they are not “commercial.” Still, voluntary compliance has a couple of important advantages. First, it demonstrates a church’s commitment to safeguarding children. And, second, it will reduce a church’s risk of liability in the event a child is seduced or molested as a result of information obtained by a pedophile from the church’s website.

Invasion of Privacy

The use of someone’s likeness without permission has been deemed to be an invasion of privacy by some courts. This risk goes way up if (1) the image is used for commercial purposes (in a money-making venture, even if by a nonprofit entity), or (2) you use the image in connection with demeaning text (for example, an image of an adolescent in an article on victims of child abuse). If neither of these two factors is present, then the risk of invasion of privacy is reduced, but not eliminated.

Here are a couple of options that can reduce this risk:

First, do not insert a photo of anyone on the church website without obtaining prior, written permission from that person. This option may be inconvenient, but it's legally safe. A second option is to print notices periodically in church bulletins or newsletters, informing members that the church occasionally uses photos of people and groups on the church website and that members objecting to the use of their photos (or photos of their children) should so inform the church office. A list can be maintained of persons who have requested that their photos not be used. This option provides "implied consent" to the use of members' photos. It is not as foolproof as having each person whose image is depicted on the church website sign a release, but it does provide some protection and is certainly more convenient. This option should only be used for photos of church members and their children.

The risk of liability based on invasion of privacy associated with the publication of a person's photo on a website without permission will increase in any of the following circumstances: (1) the photo was used for advertising purposes; (2) the photo was used to make a profit; or (3) the photo is associated with potentially negative text (for example, a photo of children on a church's website accompanying an article or caption about victims of child molestation may constitute an invasion of privacy, as might a photo of adults accompanying an article or caption about the need to protect children from child molesters).

- **Prayer Lists.**

Some churches post "prayer lists" on their website that describe the prayer needs of identified members. These needs may include medical diagnoses, relational problems, or financial needs. Does the posting of this information on a church website constitute an invasion of privacy? Possibly. A church can reduce, if not eliminate, this risk by obtaining consent from people before putting their names on the list. This can be done either by contacting persons directly and obtaining their written consent to having their name (and need) posted on the website prayer list.

Some churches seek to avoid the inconvenience of obtaining the consent of every person on a prayer list by creating a "no prayer list" and notifying the congregation periodically (i.e., in church bulletins or newsletters) that persons who do not want the congregation to pray for them should contact the church office and have their names placed on the "no prayer list." This "implied" consent is not as effective as the express consent obtained by contacting each person directly, and it is far from clear whether it would be deemed effective by a court.

Suggested Belin Prayer List Policy: If Belin opts to post the "prayer list" on its website or via social media platforms, it shall only post the name of the member and not the specific needs as members may consider this an invasion of privacy.

Pedophiles

A church may expose minors to risk by displaying images of them with personally identifiable information on the church's website. This information may be globally circulated among the pedophile community, and may allow child molesters to solicit and seduce these children. As a result, the following two precautions should be considered:

First, in no event should any personally identifiable information about a minor be disclosed on a church website or social media site that would enable someone to initiate direct contact with him or her. Such information would include, for example, the minor's first and last name plus any one or more of the following: (1) a telephone number; (2) cell phone number; (3) email address; (4) residential address; (5) school; (6) account or access information for a web-based forum; or (7) home church (if the church has a website that contains a directory of members' names, addresses, and telephone numbers); (8) and birthdate or age.

Second, other personally identifiable information about a minor may be disclosed on a church website with written permission of both parents (even if the parents are divorced or separated).

For example, a church website displays an image of a minor that is accompanied by her name and grade in school.

Some churches have placed their entire pictorial directory on a church website. There are two problems associated with such a practice. First, if a professional photographer was used to compile the directory and the photographer did not authorize the posting of the entire directory on the church's website, then the church probably has violated the copyright law. Second, as noted above, such a practice will provide invaluable information to pedophiles around the world.

Suggested Belin Policy: Pedophiles

Minors may be exposed to risk by displaying images of them with personally identifiable information on Belin's website and social media sites. This information may be globally circulated among the pedophile community, and may allow child molesters to solicit and seduce these children. Therefore, in no event should any personally identifiable information about a minor be disclosed on its website that would enable someone to initiate direct contact with him or her. Such information would include, for example, the minor's first and last name plus any one or more of the following: (1) a telephone number; (2) cell phone number; (3) email address; (4) residential address; (5) school; (6) account or access information for a web-based forum; or (7) home church (if Belin's website contains its directory of members' names, addresses, and telephone numbers).

Defamation

Any statements on a church website that are false, and that injure the reputation of another person, are potentially defamatory. Such statements may be made by persons speaking on behalf of the church, such as an editorial by a pastor. But, they also may include statements made by persons having no association with the church that are simply repeated on the church website.

For example, a church website or networking site posts an article containing defamatory statements, or contains a “discussion board” on which someone posts defamatory statements.

Some courts have ruled that merely hosting a discussion board on a website can result in liability for defamatory statements posted by third parties, especially if the host had reason to know of the defamatory statements and did nothing to remove or block them. The worldwide scope of the Internet may result in increased damages for defamation, since victims can argue that the damage to their reputation was global. It also should be noted that defamation laws vary from country to country, and liability may be easier to prove in other countries.

Here are some common techniques employed by website providers to reduce their risk of liability for defamatory content:

- Require persons to register in order to post messages to your discussion board. Registration allows the website provider to block users who post offensive and potentially defamatory information.
- Have two church employees moderate the discussion board, reviewing all messages before posting them. to check for potentially defamatory information.
- Post a disclaimer on the website prohibiting anyone from posting defamatory material.

Suggested Belin Policy: Defamation

Should Belin decide to host discussion boards on its website and in overseeing discussions on social media platforms, it should employ the following techniques to reduce its risk of liability for defamatory content:

- Require persons to register in order to post messages to the website discussion board. Registration allows the website provider to block users who post offensive and potentially defamatory information.
- Have a church employee or committee chair moderate the discussion board, reviewing all messages before posting them.
- Have a church employee review all materials posted to the website to check for potentially defamatory information.

- Post a disclaimer on the Belin website prohibiting anyone from posting defamatory material.
- Should the church employee or committee chair find offensive material or defamatory information posted by someone and feel the need, they have the power to block or report the offensive person making the post on the social media platforms.

The Communications Decency Act

The federal Communications Decency Act immunizes providers of interactive computer services against liability arising from content created by third parties: “No provider . . . of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.” This grant of immunity applies only if the interactive computer service provider is not also an “information content provider,” which is defined as someone who is “responsible, in whole or in part, for the creation or development of” the offending content.

Copyright Infringements Online

Churches can commit copyright infringement when creating and maintaining their own websites or social networking sites. Here are some examples:

Images. The use of someone else’s image on your website without permission is a potential copyright infringement. Some “clip art” providers allow the use of their work on a website for a fee. Before using clip art, be sure to read carefully the terms of the license.

Text. The use of copyrighted text on a website without permission may infringe upon the copyright owner’s exclusive rights of reproduction and public distribution unless a defense such as fair use is available, or the use is authorized by consent of the copyright owner.

Linking. Most Web pages are written in computer languages, chiefly HTML, which allows the programmer to prescribe the appearance of the Web page on the computer screen and to instruct the computer to perform an operation if the cursor is placed over a particular point on the screen and the mouse is clicked. Programming a particular point on a screen to transfer the user to another Web page when the point (referred to as a hyperlink) is clicked is called linking.

Web pages can be designed to link to other Web pages on the same site or to Web pages maintained by different sites. For example, a Web page maintained by a church may provide a hyperlink to its parent denomination’s site, or to other websites of interest to its members. Links bear a relationship to the information superhighway comparable to the relationship that roadway signs bear to roads.

Like roadway signs, they point out the direction. Unlike roadway signs, they take one almost instantaneously to the desired destination with the mere click of a computer mouse.

A few courts have addressed the question of whether the use of links on a website infringes upon the copyright of the linked site. While not entirely free from doubt, the answer appears to be no. To illustrate, one court observed:

Links are what unify the World Wide Web into a single body of knowledge, and what makes the Web unique. They are the mainstay of the Internet and indispensable to its convenient access to the vast world of information. They often are used in ways that do a great deal to promote the free exchange of ideas and information that is a central value of our nation. Anything that would impose strict liability on a website operator for the entire contents of any website to which the operator linked therefore would raise grave constitutional concerns, as website operators would be inhibited from linking for fear of exposure to liability. And it is equally clear that exposing those who use links to liability ... might chill their use, as some website operators ... may be more inclined to remove the allegedly offending link rather than test the issue in court.

However, some courts have cautioned that not all acts of linking are legally permissible. To illustrate, some courts have ruled that linking to sites that contain material constituting a copyright infringement will make the linking site guilty of infringement.

Also, the legal status of the common practice of “deep linking” (linking to an interior page on another website) has not yet been adequately addressed by the courts, so websites should avoid deep linking unless they obtain permission from the other website owner.

Miscellaneous issues. There are other legal concerns associated with the establishment and maintenance of church websites having nothing to do with copyright law. These concerns, which are beyond the scope of these guidelines, include the selection and protection of domain names, defamation, trademark infringement and the propriety of using images of minors and adults.

Suggested Belin Policy: While we need to address these issues above, this committee would anticipate that only professionals would be building the site, linking the site and writing the text, and be aware of these policies.

YouTube videos. Many church websites and social media sites incorporate YouTube videos. If the videos are created by the church and contain no copyrighted material that is being used without authorization from the copyright owner, this generally is permissible.

However, many churches display YouTube videos from other sources. There are

two ways that this is done: linking and embedding. As noted above, linking generally is not copyright infringement, except perhaps if the linking site knows or has reason to believe that the linked site contains infringing material.

Embedding is similar to linking in the sense that a YouTube video is displayed. With linking, the video is displayed directly on YouTube rather than on your website, so it is difficult to say that a “copy” is being made. Embedding is different in the sense that the video is displayed directly on your website. Does this difference expose a church to a greater risk of copyright infringement? That is a question that has yet to be resolved by the courts. In the meantime, there are steps that churches can take to reduce the risk of copyright infringement when embedding YouTube videos on their website. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Do not embed on your website a YouTube video that likely infringes on the copyright of others. For example, do not embed a YouTube video containing lengthy excerpts of a movie or television program.
- Some YouTube video providers allow embedding under certain conditions. Use these videos whenever possible.
- Ask the YouTube video provider for permission to embed the video on your website.
- Go to the original source of the YouTube video you wish to use, and see if any “terms and conditions” are posted that may authorize embedding the video on other websites. A copy of these Terms and Conditions will be kept if posted.
- Link, don’t embed. Linking to a YouTube video is less likely to cause copyright problems.
- Seek the advice of an intellectual property attorney.

Suggested Belin Policy: You Tube Videos. Belin should create its own YouTube channel to post videos or share videos.

Should Belin Memorial United Methodist Church’s website and social media sites incorporate videos, they will then link to its YouTube channel. If the videos are created by Belin and its organizations and contain no copyrighted material that is being used without authorization from the copyright owner, this generally is permissible.

However, since many churches display YouTube videos from other sources, it is recommended that whenever possible Belin links rather than embeds video. Linking generally is not copyright infringement, except perhaps if the

linking site knows or has reason to believe that the linked site contains infringing material. With linking, the video is displayed directly on YouTube rather than on your website, so it is difficult to say that a “copy” is being made.

Embedding is similar to linking in the sense that a YouTube video is displayed. Embedding is different in the sense that the video is displayed directly on your website.

Belin will not embed a YouTube video on its website that likely infringes on the copyright of others. For example, do not embed a YouTube video containing lengthy excerpts of a movie, Bible study or education series.

Some YouTube video providers allow embedding under certain conditions. Use these videos whenever possible.

Ask the YouTube video provider for permission to embed the video on your website. Belin shall keep a copy of this permission on file.

Belin will go the original source of the YouTube video you wish to use, and see if any “Terms and Conditions” are posted that may authorize embedding the video on other websites. A copy of these Terms and Conditions will be kept on file if posted.

Belin will link, not embed. Linking to a YouTube video is less likely to cause copyright problems.

When necessary or in doubt, Belin will seek the advice of an intellectual property attorney.

Social Networking Form

If you have a church social networking Web page (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Plaxo, LinkedIn and similar sites) and you write about any work-related activities, you must agree to the following terms and conditions:

You agree to write under your own name.

You may write about the church, your job, or some aspect of our business on a regular basis.

You agree to include the following disclaimer on your site: “The opinions expressed on this site are the opinions of the participating user. Belin Memorial United Methodist Church acts only as a passive conduit for the online distribution and publication of user-submitted material, content and/or links and expressly DOES

NOT endorse any user-submitted material, content and/or links or assume any liability for any actions of the participating user.”

You agree not to attack fellow employees, agents, members, or vendors. You may disagree with the church and its officers provided your tone is respectful and you do not resort to personal attacks.

You agree not to disclose any sensitive, proprietary, confidential, or financial information about the church, other than what is publicly available. You may comment on other churches, but you agree to do so respectfully without ridiculing, defaming, or libeling them in any way.

You agree not to post any material that is obscene, defamatory, profane, libelous, threatening, harassing, abusive, hateful or embarrassing to another person or any other person or entity.

You agree not to post advertisements, solicitations and/or market and/or promote any business or commercial interest, chain letters or pyramid schemes.

You agree not to post any material that is copyrighted unless (a) you are the copyright owner, (b) have the express, written permission of the copyright owner to post the copyrighted material on your blog, or (c) are reasonably sure that the use of any copyrighted material conforms to the doctrine of “fair use.”

You agree not to post any material that violates the privacy or publicity rights of another.

You agree to conform to the rules of the Church Employee Handbook, especially as it relates to rules regarding conduct outside of your employment.

You agree not to post material that contains viruses, Trojan horses, worms, time bombs, cancelbots, or any other computer programming routines or engines that are intended to damage, detrimentally interfere with, surreptitiously intercept or expropriate any system, data, or information.

You agree not to post or conduct any activity that fails to conform to any and all applicable local, state and/or federal laws, including, without limitation, 15 U.S.C. 6501 et seq. (the “Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998”).

You acknowledge that any reliance on material, content and/or links posted by other parties will be at your own risk. You assume full legal responsibility and liability for all actions arising from your posts.

You agree to remove any materials from your blog after receiving a request from the church administrative staff.

You agree to spend no more than ___ hours per week on the blog during work hours. (To be determined by job description with approval of supervisor)

You may submit materials to the designated administrative staff member for approval before posting it.

Signature _____ Date _____
Printed Name _____

Simple Guide to Safe Social Media Use

Below is an outline of guidelines for online behavior for those representing the church to follow when participating in social media activities. As new tools on the Web are introduced, and new challenges emerge, this document will, of necessity, evolve.

I. Creating and Managing Content

All content will follow the guidelines listed below:

- a. Be direct, informative and brief.
- b. Credit appropriately. Identify all copyrighted or borrowed material with citations and links. When publishing any material online that includes another's direct or paraphrased quotes, thoughts, ideas, photos, or videos, always give credit to the original material or author, where applicable.
- c. Fact-check posts. All content for posting will be evaluated for accuracy and truthfulness.
- d. Spell and grammar check everything. Content never disappears entirely once it's been posted.
- e. Correct errors promptly. If errors or mistakes are found, they will be corrected immediately.

II. Online Identity

When posting, each post will always be in line with the online identity of the church. All online postings/correspondence will:

- a. Be transparent. When participating in any online community, identity and affiliation will be disclosed. When posting to a blog, aliases or being anonymous are not options and real names will be used.
- b. Obey the law. There will be no posting of information or conduct via online activity that may violate applicable local, state or federal laws or regulations.

III. Leaving Comments

When responding to comments or postings, each post will follow these guidelines:

- a. When posting, controversial or potentially inflammatory subjects are not allowed.
- b. The tone of all comment will be respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud."
- c. All correspondences will be in sentence case format, not capital letters for all social media interaction.

- d. Personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications will be avoided. If a blogger or any other online influencer posts a statement that is untrue or disagreeable to the mission and purpose of the church will be voiced, but the situation will not be escalated to a heated argument.
- e. All correspondences will be written reasonably, factually, and with good humor, understand and crediting the other person's point of view, while also avoiding any communications that could result in personal, professional or credibility attacks.
- f. Never disclose proprietary or confidential information.

IV. Customer Service Engagement

Regarding customer service through social sites, the following will happen with each customer service request/engagement:

- a. Field all requests/questions.
- b. When appropriate, answer with prepared responses that have been pre-approved.
- c. When unable to answer, respond to question saying it has been forwarded to the appropriate department for answering and follow-up accordingly.
- d. Forward all requests/questions to management for retention and future reference.

V. Potential Crisis and Red Flag Situations

The following steps detail the different levels of crisis situations and the steps taken to remedy each situation. Regardless of the situation, canned responses will be formulated and pre-approved for different situations. For unique situations, a response will be crafted rapidly and forwarded for administrative staff approval.

- a. Low Level Situation:
 - i. Neutral/slightly negative post
 - If an online participant posts an inaccurate, accusatory or negative comment, we will respond, reach out to remedy the situation and post additional, prepared/pre-approved content to push the comment “below the fold.” If need be, we will work offline to ensure that the person’s issue is resolved or their inaccurate perspective is corrected.
 - ii. Real-world issues filtered online
 - If an online participant posts a real-world issue with a third party we will respond, take information that can be used in the real world to remedy the situation and work to ensure that the person’s issue is resolved.
- b. Moderate Level Situation:
 - i. Negative/inflammatory post

If an online participant makes a negative or inflammatory post in regards to Belin Memorial United Methodist Church, we will contact

the person immediately, immediately remove the post and remedy the situation offline.

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c. High Level Situation:

- i. Real-world issues filtered online
 - If an online participant experiences an issue with Belin Memorial United Methodist Church, we will contact the person immediately, immediately remove the post and remedy the situation offline.
- i. Social media sites become compromised
 - If any of the Belin Memorial United Methodist Church social media sites become breached, we will inform followers via email and the corporate site. We will also reset all passwords for social sites and remove any erroneous, false and/or needless posts.