

SOCIAL MEDIA USE POLICY FOR BYRON UNITED CHURCH

PURPOSE

At Byron United Church (the "Church") we are committed to providing and maintaining a safe and respectful environment for all. Consistent with this commitment, the Church has established this Social Media Use Policy (the "Policy") to apply to all staff and volunteers, as well as children and youth in any of our Church programs.

BACKGROUND

In 2010, Session approved a revised Liability Plan for our Church to replace its previous Vicarious Liability Plan. This document, *Liability Plan - Policies and Procedures*, encompasses issues of "liability" in a broader sense than the earlier Vicarious Liability Plan it replaced. The main objectives of this 'Liability Plan' document are

- i) To provide a safe and secure environment for the children/youth (newborn through age eighteen) (i.e., minors) entrusted to the care of Byron United Church, and
- ii) To promote a safe and secure environment for all who use our facilities and programs.

In seeking to accomplish these objectives, two other important objectives are being accomplished:

- i) The protection of the Church's workers from false allegations, and
- ii) The reduction of the Church's legal risk and liability exposure.

In 2017, the Church changed its liability insurer to Robertson Hall. The new insurer requires specific abuse prevention strategies to be in place. One of these is a Social Media Use Policy. At the time the Church's Liability Plan was developed and approved, Social Media was not part of our everyday lives as extensively as it is now. A Social Media Use Policy is now common in most organizations which involve minors.

In a Robertson Hall publication in September 2012, Ken Hall included the following statement:

"RISK MANAGEMENT AND CHRISTIAN MINISTRY DO GO TOGETHER!"

Not only are they compatible, they are essential to both the testimony and the long-term effectiveness of any church or para-church organization. Managing social media risk responsibly is about building a more effective ministry, one that can enable leaders, ministers and volunteers to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by electronic communication. Managing risk is not about saying "no" to the ministry opportunities offered by social media; it's about how to say "yes", responsibly and wisely."

INTRODUCTION

Social Media is defined as an Internet-based community where members post information and media pertaining to themselves and have the opportunity to find and interact with other members, particularly those with shared real-life interests or experiences.

Social media and electronic communication encompass software, applications, including those running on mobile devices, e-mail and websites, which enable users to interact, create and exchange information online. Examples include, but are not limited to, sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, YouTube, Wikipedia, Snapchat, TikTok, Pinterest, etc.

SCOPE

This Policy outlines acceptable forms of electronic media and content between the Church's workers (both staff and volunteers) and the children and youth involved in our Church programs. It includes communication to parents/guardians of the minors, as well as to our Church family and beyond.

Professional Boundaries

Maintaining professional boundaries in all forms of communication, technology related or not, is vital as staff and volunteers interact with the minors in our care and their parents/guardians. This expectation applies to communications from staff or volunteers as well as when minors initiate electronic interaction. At all times, Church staff must use social media tools in ways that are consistent with the mission and vision of Byron United Church. It is up to staff members to know and respect proper professional boundaries with children and youth, even when youth initiate electronic interaction. The following guidelines apply to electronic communications with minors involved in our Byron United Church programs.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- In general, staff will only communicate electronically with children under 16 years of age (i.e., minors) via their parents' email address. This leaves parents responsible to review messages and convey the information to their children verbally or electronically.
- If an allowance is made for staff to use text messaging with minors, it will require formal written consent of parents/guardians. Content will be limited to information and announcements to promote upcoming events.
- Questions in the text message should be kept simple, requiring only a "yes" or "no" answer (e.g., about attending an event or requiring transportation).
- Pastoral care or counselling will not be conducted through text messaging.
- Volunteers are strictly prohibited from communicating directly with unrelated children via text messaging under any circumstances.

GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Church staff should adhere to the following guidelines when using online social media applications that may be frequented by Church families:

- Maintain a formal, courteous and professional tone in all communications with families who attend our Church.
- Generally avoid exchanging private texts, phone numbers, personal e-mail addresses or photos of a personal nature with youth who attend our Church.
- Be cautious of accepting or issuing "friend " requests from/to Church youth.
- Seek permission of the Senior Pastor before using social media or networks for Youth group activities. Such activities can occur only under supervision of a designated staff member or approved adult leader. Notify parents/guardians and the Senior Pastor before such social media activities commence. Obtain parental/guardian written consent for their youth to participate in these activities.
- Set and maintain strict privacy settings by choosing settings that limit what others can do. Blanket invitations that use e-mail contacts automatically should be avoided.
- Monitor regularly all comments that youth or others include in their social media accounts and remove anything that is inappropriate.
- Obtain the appropriate consent forms before posting any youth created work, digital pictures or information about Church activities.
- Ensure that comments do not incite others to make discriminatory, harassing or other professionally unacceptable comments. Church staff will actively monitor their site, threads and blogs for inappropriate responses and, if necessary, follow up through established reporting protocols.

Church operated social media accounts

- Only staff members authorized by the Senior Pastor or designate may use or post on Church-operated and owned social media accounts and profiles.

Non-Church operated social media accounts

- The Church does not own or operate some social media accounts, such as Twitter. For use of a personal social media account for a Youth activity, approval is required from the Senior Pastor or designate in advance of the activity commencing, and parents/guardians must be notified that this is not a Church operated account. The staff member or other adult, authorized by the Senior Pastor or designate, leading this Youth activity involving this social media tool will be responsible for monitoring of all activity by the Youth and ensuring the guidelines for social media use are followed.

Church Youth should adhere to the following guidelines when using social media and/or online tools for any Byron United Church Youth Group activity:

- Be safe online. Never give out personal information. Do not share your password with anyone besides your parents.
- Do not share passwords or accounts with others and make all efforts to protect this information from unauthorized users.
- If you receive inappropriate material that makes you feel uncomfortable, or is not respectful, tell your leader and parents/guardians right away.
- You should not respond to any messages that make you feel uncomfortable or are threatening or intimidating.
- Be courteous and polite. Respect the opinions of others.
- You must follow the Church's Social Media Use Policy when using software on the Church's network or on Church property.
- Do not share the Church's or anyone else's confidential information online (such as their names, physical and online address, telephone or contact information, etc.).
- Do not post, publish or display any defamatory, abusive, obscene, threatening or intimidating material.

RELATED ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION ISSUES

- The Church's website frequently uses photographic images of our events or activities on our website and social media. Sometimes we use far-away shots for group activities in which participants cannot be identified. If a close-up shot of children (up to age 16) is needed, the Church will seek permission from parents/guardians to use photos (for both the website and social media). A standard Media Consent permission form will be used, with copies of forms signed by parents/guardians retained by the Church office.
- Wireless Internet connections are increasingly popular for the convenience of smart phone, laptop and game console users in public spaces, including Church premises. Many of these wireless networks are unsecured and therefore vulnerable to hackers, illegal use and access by minors to potentially inappropriate websites.
At Byron United Church, open Internet access will not be made available to children or youth who are unsupervised. The Parental Control Filter for the Church's Internet has been turned "ON". This will significantly reduce the likelihood of anyone using the Church's Internet from being able to access inappropriate websites, images, and videos.

Approved by Session - September 19, 2023

SOCIAL MEDIA USE POLICY FOR BYRON UNITED CHURCH

YOUTH POLICY

PURPOSE

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GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Church Youth should adhere to the following guidelines when using social media and/or online tools for any Byron United Church Youth Group activity:

- Be safe online. Never give out personal information. Do not share your password with anyone besides your parents. Keep all social media accounts set to private and only allow followers with whom you know.
- Do not share passwords or accounts with others and make all efforts to protect this information from unauthorized users.
- If you receive inappropriate material that makes you feel uncomfortable, or is not respectful, tell your leader and parents/guardians right away.
- You should not respond to any messages that make you feel uncomfortable or are threatening or intimidating.
- Be courteous and polite. Respect the opinions of others.
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