

Guidelines for Effective Use of Digital Communication and Social Media Tools

Modern forms of communication encompass a wide array of devices and services that may be used both to communicate interpersonally and as methods of broadcast communication. Tools such as email, texting, blogging and social media services offer novel ways to connect with one another. Of course, the proliferation of tools also increases the opportunity for misuse.

This document is intended to provide guidelines for the safe and effective use of digital communication. It is not intended to comprehensively deal with every possible use of digital communication and social media tools.

As with all communication, thoughtfulness, kindness, and a desire to share the love of God with others should inform our efforts as we use digital communication tools. In his day, John Wesley asked the members of his Society to think about their words and actions in daily life. He crafted a rule of life for his Society that was based on three principles: do no harm; do good; attend to the ordinances of God. These principles can be applied to the use of digital communications tools by churches, pastors, and conference leaders.

Do No Harm

Take care that in your use of digital communication tools you avoid causing harm to yourself or others.

- Care should be taken to abide by all policies of the Annual Conference, including the Sexual Ethics Policy.
- Speaking or writing about colleagues, parishioners, and others in ways that undermine their integrity or personhood is never acceptable in any forum.
- Harassment, discrimination, and hate speech should never be indulged in digital communication. Sexual harassment violates the policy of the Annual Conference and is a chargeable offense for clergy and laity in the *Book of Discipline*.
- Viewing and/or sharing pornographic images or videos violates the policy of the Annual Conference and is a chargeable offense for clergy in the *Book of Discipline*.
- Disclosing confidential information is a violation of trust; and, for those who are licensed or ordained, it is a violation of ordination vows, and a chargeable offense in the *Book of Discipline*.
- Posting photographs or videos of others without their consent is unacceptable; doing so with minors violates the principles of Safe Sanctuaries and may be a violation of the law.

Do Good

Digital communication tools offer tremendous opportunity to connect with parishioners and members of the community who are not involved with your church.

- Post about what God is doing in your ministry context, advertise ministry events, use digital communication tools and social media to share the Gospel.
- For pastors who are using social media, be mindful of accepting friend requests from parishioners: don't play favorites; and maintain appropriate boundaries.

Attend to the Ordinances of God

Digital communication and social media tools offer us an opportunity to spread the Gospel message in previously unimagined ways.

- Streaming worship services are a great way to give potential visitors a taste of what your faith community is like.
- Online worship also offers those who are seeking a relationship with God the chance to hear God's word wherever they are in their journey.
- It is inappropriate to offer sacramental ministry online.