

# Social Media Guidelines for Clergy and Lay Leaders

## St. Luke's Episcopal Church Baton Rouge, Louisiana

These guidelines are intended for use by clergy, vestry members, church staff members, committee chairs, committee members, and church volunteers.

### **Social Media Defined**

Social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to advance interactive communication - both public and private - to include instant messaging, texting, emailing, and video chatting. These include platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. Because social media continues to evolve, this document will need to be revisited as necessary.

### **Responsible Use of Social Media**

Creating community - the body of Christ - is the core function of Christian congregations. In all we do, we reflect the love of Christ to and for the world. In the world of social media, this applies to the content of our posting to various social media sites. Clergy, lay staff, and vestry members in particular are held to a high standard of behavior while online.

### **Social Media and the Church**

Social media is a useful and necessary means of developing relationships and making disciples of Jesus Christ. The purpose of the following guidelines & practices is to encourage the intentional and appropriate use of the various forms of social media.

### **Best Practices for Social Media**

1. When using social media, observe [John Wesley's "General Rules"](#)
  - Do no harm
  - Do good
  - Attend to the ordinances of God<sup>1</sup>
  
2. Be friendly and fair, collegial and discreet
  - Ask yourself: "What can church members and the community learn about me online? How does that reflect on my character? Does it reflect positively or negatively on St. Luke's?"

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<sup>1</sup> By attending to "the ordinances of God," Wesley means regular participation in public worship, the reading and study of Holy Scripture, receiving Holy Eucharist, family and private prayer, and fasting or abstinence.

3. Use care in your language, as meaning and tone are often lost in translation.
  - Ask yourself: “What is the purpose of this post? Does this do harm or good? Does this help others attend to the ordinances of God? Does this reflect love of God and neighbor?”
4. With social media, the line between public and private communications is thin, blurry, and often non-existent. Once you say something on the Internet, it remains accessible forever - even if you delete it.
  - Ask yourself: “What if this were printed in the Sunday bulletin or shared in the weekly E-vangelist?”
5. Be accurate. Check “news” out before sharing with others.
  - Ask yourself: “Am I absolutely sure this is true?”
6. Always “Tweet sweet.” How we say things matters as much as what we say. In the world of social media, what is intended as playful might be read as flippant. Direct, brief wording can come across as dismissive, arrogant, or mean. We should strive to be winsome in our demeanor so as to hope people see the love of Christ in us, just as we would in face-to-face interactions.
  - Ask yourself: “How might this be interpreted?”
7. Always remember that you represent St. Luke’s.
  - Ask yourself: “Would I like to see this post as a quote attributed to me in a local newspaper or on TV? How does this posting reflect on St. Luke’s? Would it attract or repel? Does it convey love and grace, or judgment and condemnation?”

This document draws on “Social Media Guidelines for Clergy & Congregational Leaders” of The North Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church (February 2016).