




Adventist Risk Management, Inc.



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How to Safely Use Social Media for Your Ministry

 November 13, 2018

Some have called social media the “bane of our existence.” Others have called it the “greatest thing since sliced bread.” The reality of social media lies somewhere in the middle of those two sentiments. No matter your view on social media, it can be a valuable tool for outreach in your ministry. However, social media has its own pitfalls that your congregation may need help navigating.

Following the Law

Protecting your church from social media hazards starts with following the law. **Copyright law** protects original works of authorship, including literary, dramatic, musical, and artistic works. **Trademark law** protects words, phrases, or logos that identify a source of goods or services. When posting something on social media, the first question you should ask yourself is “Do I have proper authorization to post this?” A best practice is to assume that most things online are protected by copyright or trademark law unless you have definitive evidence that it is not. Just because something is posted elsewhere on the Internet or doesn’t have a copyright notice attached to it does not mean that the work is free for your use. If you are in doubt about using a photo or a video, always seek permission.

Adopting a Social Media Policy

In concert with following the law, your church or conference should adopt a social media policy. The purpose of this type of policy is to protect the church and to encourage the appropriate use of social media. The policy should include various items, including, but not limited to, best practices for using social media, guidelines on what is appropriate to post, and assigning persons to maintain and monitor the social media profiles. Once a social media profile or website has been created, the person designated to manage and monitor it should regularly update the site. Because social media is considered to be an instant contact and communication portal, an old or outdated page is worse than no page at all.

The policy should also focus on communication boundaries and privacy settings. Social media platforms often have both public and private ways to communicate. Your policy should address appropriate times, content, and recipients for private messages, as well as govern appropriate posting guidelines for public messages.

What to Post?

One of the most important parts of social media use is knowing what and when to post. Your policy should cover what is appropriate to post. As a general rule, personal attacks, threats of violence, and cyberbullying should never be allowed on your social media postings. There should not be any promotions of goods or services. You should respect the privacy of your church members and avoid posting any of their personal information, whether you have proper permission or not. Remember that much of what you post is public. All social media interactions reflect on our Church, and you are held to a higher standard of online behavior.

Think ahead before sharing pictures, especially those with minors in them. Always ask yourself, “Do I have permission to share this?” Take care in crafting your social media posts, as meaning and tone are often lost in translation online.

Do not let this article deter you from using social media as a means for outreach. Many churches use social media as a way to broadcast their service online or reach out to different members for ministry purposes. Much good can be done with social media. The key is protecting yourself and your church from the harm it can do as well.

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