



# Social Media Policy

Approved by:  
SLT and version current  
at September 2021.

## 1. POLICY STATEMENT

The Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (the Synod) is committed to ensuring that all internal and external communications, including social media communications, are responsible, respectful and lawful.

## 2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Synod staff members, contractors and volunteers.

## 3. OBJECTIVE

To ensure that the publication of and commentary on social media are responsible, respectful and lawful.

## 4. DEFINITIONS

Definitions for the purposes of this policy are as follows:

'Social media' means any facility for online publication and commentary, including without limitation blogs, wikis, forums / online communities, social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest, Vimeo, Periscope and YouTube.

'Synod staff' means all persons whether lay or ordained who are appointed to a particular job responsibility within the Synod operations.

'Volunteers and contractors' means people who are not employed directly by the Synod, but are working for it in either a paid or unpaid capacity.

## 5. CONDITIONS OF PUBLISHING OR COMMENTING VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

Provided that synod staff adheres to the conditions of this policy they are free to comment on, publish or otherwise engage in social media activities including, but not limited to adding content to official social media pages and/or weblogs, and making references to the Synod within a personal capacity on a social media platform.

Conditions are as follows:

- (a) that the reputation of the Synod is not brought into disrepute (see some guidelines below under Item Number 2. Disclaimer that you may find helpful).
- (b) that normal media authorisation processes apply in relation to making any kind of statement or comment on behalf of the Synod, checking with Synod Communications team if you are unsure of these processes.
- (c) that compliance is maintained with relevant legislation including copyright, privacy and anti-discrimination legislation.
- (d) that no person is defamed. Defamation comprises intentional false communication, either written or spoken, that harms a person's reputation; decreases the respect, regard, or confidence in which a person is held; or induces disparaging, hostile, or disagreeable opinions or feelings against a person.
- (e) that information which is not in the public domain is not published.
- (f) that use of social media is in accordance with the Synod's Code of Conduct.
- (g) that personal use of social media, messaging and browsing is conducted within appropriate breaks and not in work time.

## 6. IT SERVICES

Are responsible to monitor and regularly report to the Senior Leadership Team the level of internet usage as well as the costs incurred as a result of excessive usage and downloads. Therefore it is important to be mindful that access can be revoked if conditions of use are not adhered to.





## 7. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

There are a number of related policies and procedures including:

- Appropriate use of the Internet Policy
- Appropriate use of Email policy
- Privacy Policy
- Media Policy

If you are unsure of any policies please contact People and Culture.

## SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

### 1. SETTING UP SOCIAL MEDIA

Before engaging in work-related social media, representatives must contact the Synod's [Web Administrator](#) to provide assistance in setting up social media accounts. If you are setting up a page that represents a section of the Uniting Church, you may also find it helpful to let the Synod Communications team know by contacting our Web Administrator to pass on the name of your page and your page administrator(s). This way, the Communications team can look for opportunities to share and promote your page.

In managing a page that officially represents a section of the Uniting Church, the posts you create become one of the official 'voices' of the church. This automatically means the Social Social Media Policy August 2015 Media Policy and Guidelines should be adhered to. If you think a post may not reflect Church policy and theology, contact your manager or the Communications Team for advice. In any large organisation, managers of official social media pages need to consider the effect on all aspects of that organisation.

### 2. DISCLAIMERS

To help reduce the potential for confusion if you are using your personal name account, it is recommended that you prominently display and make it clear to your readers that you work with the Synod, however the views you express are yours alone and do not necessarily reflect or represent the views of the organisation. This is good practice and is encouraged, but don't count on it to avoid trouble - it may not have much legal effect.

Be aware that even though you have made it clear your views are personal, the public may automatically assume you are speaking on behalf of the Church, particularly if you are in a leadership role. The public may also incorrectly interpret what you are saying as Church policy when you are speaking on topical issues. It's a good idea to re-read your posts before you publish thinking about how a stranger would interpret them and how they could affect the organisation you represent.

### 3. PROTECT YOUR OWN PRIVACY

Be mindful of posting information that you would not want the public to see. Use common sense in all communications. If you would not be comfortable with your manager, co-workers, or the executive team reading your words, do not write them.

### 4. RESPECT CONFIDENTIALITY

It is perfectly acceptable to talk about your work and have a dialogue with the community, but it is not acceptable to publish confidential information. You must take proper care not to purposefully or inadvertently disclose any information that is confidential or proprietary to the Synod. Respect the privacy of stakeholders, colleagues, and fellow representatives of the Synod. If you are unsure about the confidentiality of any information, consult your Manager or the Communications Unit before publishing on social media.

### 5. RESPECT YOUR AUDIENCE

Don't be afraid to be yourself, but do so respectfully. This includes not only the obvious (no ethnic slurs, offensive comments, defamatory comments, personal insults, obscenity, etc.) but also proper consideration of privacy and of topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory. Remember that social media is read internationally, and topics and views that are acceptable in Australia, may have cultural sensitivities for audiences in other countries. This does not mean relevant subjects should be avoided, more that it is good practice to think about everyone you may be talking to.



## 6. RESPECT COPYRIGHT LAWS

It is critical that you show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use or fair dealing of copyrighted material owned by others, including the Synod's own copyrights and brands. You should always attribute quotes or work to the original author/source. It is good general practice to link to others' work rather than reproduce it. If you are unsure, consult your Manager or the Communications Unit before publishing on social media.

## 7. BE HONEST

Do not blog anonymously, using pseudonyms or false screen names. We believe in transparency and honesty. Use your real name, be clear who you are, and identify that you work for the Synod. Do not say anything that is dishonest, untrue, or misleading. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, point it out. But also be smart about protecting yourself and your privacy. What you publish will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully and also be cautious about disclosing personal details.

## 8. CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

If you see misrepresentations made about the Synod in the media and wish to point that out, always do so with respect and with the facts. If you speak about others, make sure what you say is factual and that it does not disparage that party. Avoid arguments. Make sure what you are saying is factually correct. It is also very helpful if you advise the Synod Communications team when you see misrepresentations made about the Synod.

## 9. BE THE FIRST TO RESPOND TO YOUR OWN MISTAKES

If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. If someone accuses you of posting something improper (such as their copyrighted material or a defamatory comment about them), deal with it quickly - better to remove it immediately to lessen the possibility of a legal action. Be aware that even if you decide to delete a post, often people have already made screen grabs of your posts. Being transparent and honest regarding mistakes is the only good way to practice social media.

## 10. MOVING ON

If you are finishing your employment at Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, make sure you have advised your manager of any social media pages you manage and that you have passed on information regarding log-ins and passwords. You should also update your personal social profiles to reflect that you are no longer working with the Uniting Church or have transferred to a different role or geographical location within the Church. This is particularly important if you have a profile on LinkedIn, as LinkedIn relies on individuals keeping their profile current and correct.

## 11. THE LAW

Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania requires all employees to respect Australian and State laws relating to cyber bullying, cyber stalking, cybercrime and child abuse and sexual grooming. Grooming can include conduct online, for example via interaction through social media, web forums and emails. Many perpetrators of sexual offences against children purposely create relationships with victims, their families or carers in order to create a situation where abuse could occur.

## 12. SOCIAL MEDIA TRAINING

The Synod Communications Team based the Centre for Theology and Ministry in Parkville provides media training covering any aspect you require at a discounted rate for staff and Uniting Church entities. If you have enough participants interested in training the team can travel to your location. You can find more information and who to contact here.

