

Social Media

Policy & Guidelines

Document Revision

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1. Introduction

As the Church moves into the modern era, it is important communication channels and styles are adaptable to the expectations of our intended audience. Social Media has become an important communication channel and needs to be overseen in a responsible manner by mature Christians within our church to ensure messaging, branding, language and content remain true to our Values and Purpose.

This document is intended to extend, but not replace the existing “Social Media Policy Southern Illawarra Church of Christ, April 2016”.

1.1 Our Values

Under the authority of Christ, Southern Illawarra Church of Christ is:

- Christ centred
- Biblically based
- Prayer focused
- Loving, compassionate, hospitable and generous
- Committed to connecting with and serving our community
- Deliberately involved in local, national and global mission, so all can know Christ
- Served by dedicated people

1.2 Our Purpose

Our purpose is to be a Christ centred community, offering love and compassion that encourages and enables us to be growing closer to God, so that we can reveal Christ to all.

2. Definitions

- **Social Media (*Social Media Platform*)**

Any online communication platform not directly managed or facilitated under the existing church website and email systems. Examples include, but not limited to:

 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - YouTube
 - WhatsApp
 - Vimeo
 - etc.
- **Social Media Presence**

A specific representation on behalf of the church or one of its ministry teams. This could be a “page”, “group”, “community”, “handle”, “channel”, etc. as determined by the platform being used.
- **Administrator**

A person with the ability to publish, modify, moderate or otherwise control the content or access to a Social Media presence.
- **Editor**

A person with the ability to publish or modify content but not necessarily control access or moderation.
- **Member**

A person who has been granted access to a Social Media Presence which would not normally be possible by a Visitor (for example access to an invite-only group/page etc.)
- **Visitor**

A person accessing a Social Media Presence without any special permissions or access.
- **Anonymous Visitor**

A person accessing a Social Media Presence without an account on the Social Media Platform.

3. Oversight

Any intended Social Media Presences need to be approved by the Southern Illawarra Church of Christ Leadership Board prior to being established. This will ensure new Social Media Presences are vetted for:

- Necessity
- Uniqueness
- Appropriateness
- Ongoing Management

3.1 Necessity

When evaluating a proposed Social Media Presence, the Leadership Board should evaluate if there is actually a genuine need for the its creation. What is the target audience and are they best served by this new presence?

3.2 Uniqueness

Care needs to be taken to avoid duplication of existing Social Media Presences. Whilst duplication across Social Media Platforms may be advantageous (for example a Facebook Page, Twitter Handle and Instagram account to maximise coverage for a single ministry team etc), it can divide the intended audience if there are multiple presences for the same ministry on the same Social Media Platform.

3.3 Appropriateness

A new Social Media Presence should align with the Values and Purpose of Southern Illawarra Church of Christ (*see 1.1 and 1.2*).

3.4 Ongoing Management

Who will be responsible for the day to day management, updating and life of the new Social Media Presence? How are they equipped to manage the platform(s) they intend to use? The Leadership Board needs to take an active role in ensuring Social Media Presences are a vibrant, living part of our overall communication and engagement strategy. A Social Media Presence needs to be updated regularly with relevant content, and Administrators need to respond in a timely manner to questions/comments/etc.

At least one Leadership Board member should be a “backup” Administrator on each Social Media Presence to avoid orphaned accounts/presences.

For more detailed guidelines on managing a Social Media Presence, please review the section “6. Social Media Management”.

3.5 Linking and Publicising

As per “5.1 Branding”, the Social Media Presence should be readily identifiable as being associated with Southern Illawarra Church of Christ, and should also be shared/linked from the church’s main website (<https://southernchurch.com.au>).

Additional advertising can be undertaken by Administrators using channels that comply with tests for appropriateness. For example, adding to a personal email signature will usually be appropriate, whereas advertising on a controversial secular chat forum may not.

4. Reviews

A review should be undertaken at regular intervals throughout the year to ensure compliance with this policy is being maintained. By having a Leadership Board member as an Administrator on each Social Media Presence, this could be a routine part of their own social media engagement.

However, a formal review should be discussed and included in the minutes for each Social Media Presence in accordance with 3.1 - 3.4 and 5.1 - 5.3 during at least one board meeting a year.

5. Conduct

5.1 Branding

Where ever possible, a Social Media Presence should use the approved logo for the given ministry within the church. Where an official logo may not be available, any branding/artwork should include the text “A ministry of Southern Illawarra Church of Christ” or “A ministry of Southern Church, Albion Park”.

The account name and/or title of the Social Media Presence need to reflect the intended ministry or group. For example, “Southern Youth” etc.

5.2 Messaging

As stated in 3.3, all messaging must align with the Values and Purpose of Southern Illawarra Church of Christ (*see 1.1 and 1.2*). It should also avoid theological/doctrinal misrepresentation of scripture, i.e., heresy.

If anything published is deemed by the Leadership Board to fall outside the standards in this section, the presence Administrators and the individual(s) responsible for the inappropriate messaging will be held accountable. Having said this, removal of the offending content with any remedial actions should be the most common outcome.

5.3 Language and Images

Language used on any Social Media Presence needs to be consistent with the Values and Purpose of Southern Illawarra Church of Christ (*see 1.1 and 1.2*). This includes, but not limited to:

- No profanity, sexual innuendo, etc.
- Avoidance of language that could be interpreted as racist, exclusionary, vilifying, inciting hatred/violence, etc.
- Not publishing copyrighted material (*without permission of the copyright owner*).
- Not publishing any personally identifiable information without a person’s **explicit written approval** (*eg, name, address, phone number, email address etc.*)

5.4 Republished Content

It is common on social media to share content other people have published. Care needs to be taken when republishing other people’s content to ensure it also meets the expectations of sections 5.1 - 5.3. However, in addition to the requirements already stated, the extra consideration of the reputation of the original source needs to be considered.

- Does the original content publisher align with the Values and Purpose of Southern Illawarra Church of Christ (*see 1.1 and 1.2*).
- Does the original author’s values and behaviours align with the Values and Purpose of Southern Illawarra Church of Christ (*see 1.1 and 1.2*)

If either of these questions are “no”, then the material should not be republished under a Social Media Presence associated with our church.

6. Social Media Management

As every Social Media Platform has their own security, account, presence and publishing procedures (which change regularly) the following guidelines should be used in when considering how to manage the chosen platform involved. Some ministry and platform combinations are more appropriate to use a closed/invite-only model, where others may benefit from a completely open presence.

6.1 Access

Care should be taken to consider who can access and/or modify the content being published. Considerations should include;

- Is the information available to anonymous internet users who may not have an account on the Social Media Platform in use?
- How much access do people need? A principle of “minimum required access” should be employed at all times. If people do not need to be made an “Editor”, they shouldn’t be etc.
- If something is published in error, can it be modified or deleted in a timely manner?

Secondly, care needs to be taken to

6.2 Inclusion

When implementing a Social Media Presence in accordance with any necessities outline in 3.1, care must be taken to ensure the target audience can engage with the Social Media Presence appropriately. Considerations should include;

- Is this intended as a secure/safe place for people to discuss ideas with like-minded individuals? If so, a closed or invite-only model is probably most appropriate.
- Is this intended to advertise to a wide audience about events, functions or news around a particular topic (eg, “Parenting”)? If so, an open model is probably most appropriate.
- Does this Social Media Presence have the potential to be controversial or confrontational (eg, “Christian Ethics”)? If so, very careful management of comments/feedback needs to be undertaken (see “6.3 Moderation”).

However, any Social Media Presence has the potential to trigger controversy, confrontation, or discomfort in an individual or group. Therefore, it is absolutely essential Administrators and Editors pay careful attention to the information they publish, the comments they allow (see “6.3 Moderation”) and people they permit to access the Social Media Presence.

6.3 Moderation

In the context of Social Media, “moderation” is the process by which Administrators control access and publishing of comments/material/etc.

6.3.1 Content Moderation

All s for Southern Illawarra Church of Christ should employ active (as opposed to automated) moderation where possible for any content not submitted by another Administrator or Editor. Any content submitted for publishing needs to be reviewed for compliance with section 5 (Conduct) and rejected if deemed it does not align.

6.3.2 Personal Moderation

Additionally, moderation includes conduct review of individuals interacting with either the Administrators and/or others engaged with the Social Media Presence. People (other accounts) who are insolent, stir up trouble, intentionally mistreat people, etc. should have their access revoked if possible. Within a closed/invite-only group this may mean removing their access, or in an open model banning them entirely.

This activity is one of the hardest aspects of managing a Social Media Presence and needs to be approached with grace and understanding. Sometimes, people can be reasoned with in private (chat etc) or they could simply be having a “bad day”. Administrators should take an effort to understand and counsel against aberrant behaviours before resorting to exclusionary methods.