

HLBC SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
Date Approved by Council: May 27, 2014
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Definition

For the purpose of this document the definition of Social Media is as follows:

“Social media are the online technologies and practices that people use to share content, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and media themselves. They are media for social interaction. You can tell social software because it is no fun to use by yourself” (H. Greenstein). Some examples of social media online platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, e-mail.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide staff, volunteers, and members of Heart Lake Baptist Church (HLBC) with guidelines that will promote appropriate and positive uses of social media. It is the aim of this policy to promote online community and exchange that reflects the gospel of Jesus Christ (e.g., grace, kindness, mercy, peace, etc.) and loving Christian community.

Benefits of Social Media and a Social Media Policy

Social media is a valuable format for connection and community. Such connection and community can be utilized by the church to minister the gospel and be a blessing to others. The social media policy for HLBC provides staff, volunteers, and members with guidance directed at engaging social media in a way that affirms the ministry of HLBC. In addition, having a clear set of guidelines may serve to protect staff and volunteers from inappropriate exchanges and false allegations. As social media technologies continue to evolve this policy may require revisiting to reflect such changes.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Invest in Others

Mark 12: 31 reads... “Love your neighbor as yourself...” Invest in others as opposed to focussing on yourself. Be considerate and thoughtful of others as you communicate. Keep your online communication above reproach. Titus 3:2 tells us “to slander no one, be peaceable and considerate, and always be gentle toward everyone”. Allow Titus 3:2 to be your guide for online exchanges.

Disclaimers and Representing the Church and Jesus

It is a good idea to include a disclaimer if you have a blog home page or a prominent social media site. Even with a disclaimer, staff, volunteers, and members of HLBC may be seen as representing the church. What you say in your tweets, on your blog, Facebook page, etc. may be seen as a reflection of the church and your own personal walk with God. If you discuss topics related to the church on your blog or on a prominent social media site please include the following disclaimer: **The posts on this site represent my own opinions and do not necessarily represent those of Heart Lake Baptist Church and its ministries.** 1 Cor. 5:20 describes Christians as “Christ’s ambassadors”. We represent Christ in all areas of our life including online activities.

Maintain Confidentiality

Proverbs 11:13 reminds us that a trustworthy person maintains a confidence. Obtain permission before discussing, reporting, or forwarding conversations or content that is meant to be private or for internal use only.

Know that online conversations and postings are public. What you post may be long-lasting and potentially shared with others. Avoid identifying others (e.g., church members, adherents, etc.) and divulging pastoral details that have not already been shared by pastoral staff (e.g., deaths, hospitalization, etc.).

Obtain permission before posting pictures of others.

Be careful not to disclose or distribute any intellectual property or information that is confidential or proprietary to Heart Lake Baptist Church without obtaining permission.

You Are Responsible

You are responsible (both legally and morally) for your online communication and activities. Take into consideration governmental laws (e.g., copyright laws, etc.) and consider the legal consequences of not following laws. Keep in mind that what you write will be read by others (friends, family members, pastors, church members, church visitors, co-workers, youth, etc.). Ask yourself if you are comfortable with all these people reading what you write or post online. Others may possibly land on your page via a Google search and things may remain on Google for a long period of time or indefinitely.

Be accurate about what you write; know your facts. If you make a mistake, admit it, correct it, and apologize.

Be careful that what you write or post will not have a negative impact on your ability to lead, work with others in your ministry team and other staff or volunteers, your credibility, and your ability to represent HLBC in the community.

Remember that sarcasm and humour does not always translate well online. Be careful in this regard.

Keep in mind that an appealing aspect of social media conversations is that they can take place almost in real time. If you choose to participate actively in social media interactions it is a good idea to stay up to date by doing things such as answering questions, updating information, and refreshing content.

Ensure your comments and posts are in keeping with the ministry, mission, values, General Operating By-Law, and policies of HLBC.

If you observe disparaging comments or posts about the church please go to the source first. If the issue is not resolved and/or the post is not removed, please inform the senior pastor, associate pastor or a member of the Elder's Board.

Length of Communication

If you have a lot to say it would be best to go to the source and communicate in person as opposed to lengthy exchanges online.

Stay Cool

If something online upsets you (e.g., snarky comment) stay cool and avoid a negative response in return. Proverbs 29:11 tells us that "...the wise bring calm in the end". Remember Eph. 4:29:

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

It is best to be positive and take the high road, sometimes that may mean saying nothing at all. It is better to say nothing than responding in kind.

Remember that the effect of the comment may not match the intent. Go to the source in person and talk about the effect of the comment on you and possibly others.

Conflict Resolution

No conflicts or differences shall be discussed or addressed through social media, including e-mails, texting, Twitter, Facebook, etc. Frustrations and concerns are best expressed in person. For direction regarding conflict resolution, consult our General Operating By-Law and Relational Commitments Policy.

Distribution

A copy of the HLBC Social Media policy shall be given to all staff and volunteers of HLBC including oncoming staff and volunteers.

GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH MINISTRY (IN ADDITION TO GENERAL GUIDELINES)

All youth ministry staff and volunteers are required to familiarize themselves with the **Canada.ca stop hating online** web site material. Every September at the beginning of the youth ministry calendar a summary of the contents of this web site is to be presented to all youth participating in youth ministry.

1. Leaders should not submit “friend” requests to youth and others to whom they minister. The disparity of power may not give the other person the ability to decline such request.
2. Leaders need to be cautious as to not “creep” students profile pages. Even though you may have access to their profiles, please maintain a level of respect and privacy when accessing a student’s profile.
3. Social media can and should be used as another form of connection with students and sharing information.
4. Leaders who want to connect via a social networking website with youth are strongly encouraged to set up a group account that all youth may join.
5. Leaders should consider the impact of declining a “friend” request from youth. These encounters may create a tension in “real world” relationships. Leaders can direct “friend” requests from youth to the church’s youth group page.
6. If a leader is found to be posting inappropriate comments or material online, the leader will be asked to remove such content. If the issue continues the leader may have to be disciplined.
7. The use of instant chat is inadvisable and could potentially leave a worker open to allegations.
8. If leaders want to communicate a message with students through a private message, it is recommended that if it is to a group of students to include another adult in the conversation.
9. If a leader is to send a private message to one student, see the email guidelines below before sending said message.
10. Leaders must add one of the following: (associate pastor/ youth pastor/ senior pastor) and an elder from the church to all their social media accounts if possible.
11. It is recommended that youth leaders hold each other accountable for their online behavior. If a leader has concerns about another leader, share those concerns in a graceful manner with the person in question. If they disagree or you feel it not possible to share with the person in question, contact the associate pastor/youth pastor. If the associate/ youth pastor is the person in question, bring up the issue to the senior pastor or an elder if you do not feel comfortable speaking to the associate/youth pastor directly.

12. If adult leaders are accused of inappropriate behaviour through social media or email, they will be asked to submit records of the conversations in question. Adult leaders may also be asked to submit their login name and password to an elder or pastoral leader to verify if any inappropriate behaviour occurred. For this reason it might be wise to have two separate accounts for Facebook and Twitter: one for interaction with students and one for personal contacts.

Recommendations for Publishing/Posting Content Online

1. Photos that are published on church sponsored sites (including but not limited to Facebook, church website or Twitter.) should not include name or contact information for minor children or youth and should not be used without permission. A written permission form must be signed by parents of the children 17 and under and should be kept on file for the ministry year.

Recommendations for Use of Email or Texting (Includes Twitter)

1. Email can be an appropriate and effective means of communicating basic factual information such as the time of an event, agenda for a meeting, text of a document, etc.
2. Email is not an appropriate communication method for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or require extensive conversation.
3. If an email message is longer than a couple of sentences, then the matter might more properly be addressed via live conversation.
4. Humour and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted in an email.
5. All email users should take a moment to consider the ramifications of their message before clicking on the "send" or "reply to all" button.
6. As a general rule when texting students, be mindful of the time you are texting. If you are texting at an hour you would not call their house phone, it is recommended you wait till a more appropriate time to respond to the text, so long as it is not an emergency.

If you are unsure of whether you should submit/post/send anything, then DON'T!!