



8 October 2014

## Synod guide to using social media

### Guidelines for Synod staff, Uniting Church members and volunteers

Social media is a fantastic and powerful tool that needs to be used as we would use any other media tool. Posts on and from official Uniting Church, Queensland Synod, sites and pages need to be done with the same level of professionalism we would use in an official press release or correspondence. The most important thing to remember is that you are not posting as yourself – you are posting as an officer or volunteer of The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod. If you would not say something to someone directly, don't say it in social media. Facebook, Twitter and all other social media are public forums. If you want to have a private discussion contact the person directly via email or phone. Also be aware of the platform's privacy settings and use them as necessary, but always assume anything you post will be permanently online and public.

### Why?

The first question to ask yourself is what your intentions are behind your social media site. Is it a personal site? Is it a way to connect and minister with/to people? Is it part of your ministry or separate? Will you be 'friends' with people under 18 years and if so, why? Will they have full access or be on a limited profile? What do you hope to get out of using social media in this way? Being clear about this should make the rest easy. If you can answer why you want to be on social media and what platform the people you want to communicate are using the most, it will help you create a strategy or guide around the type of things you post.

### What platform?

If you want to create relationships with people, use Facebook. If you like short, sharp bites of information then Twitter is probably for you. If you love photos, try Instagram or Flickr. For the film makers, YouTube is where to find and share great content and for the writers, why not start a blog? There are many different platforms and content for each is different. Choose one that works for you.

### Use

One of the best things about social media is that it enables discussion. People have the right to disagree with your opinion. Use disagreement to have an intelligent discussion. If a post or comment on your site is defamatory or just downright rude or disrespectful you have every right to delete it. In some cases you may wish to contact the person who posted it and explain why you are deleting it. You could even suggest that they repost something more respectful. Other times it is best just to delete the comment. If a post or comment is put on your site repeatedly you have every right to delete them all, but I recommend leaving the original post. Please delete any spam from your site. Remember, people have a right to question you and to disagree with you, but it is your site and you have the final say. In any case, be respectful. And if things get too heated, perhaps take the discussion offline and contact the person privately.

As difficult as it may be, we need to define what are official Synod social media sites (e.g. the Uniting Church Queensland Facebook page) and what are informal social media sites (e.g. congregational Facebook sites and minister's personal pages). Informal Uniting Church pages should state that their comments are their own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the whole Uniting Church in Queensland. Official sites should state that they are the "official" site and therefore means of communication, and that they represent the official line of



the Church, not necessarily all of its members. Official sites should also clearly state which part of the Church is running the page (e.g. the communications team).

To create a consistent presence, it would be helpful if all social media sites (and websites) related to the Uniting Church in Queensland clearly used the Uniting Church logo on their page and spelt out their name in full (e.g. Pine Rivers Uniting Church rather than PRUC). If the congregation's name does not have "Uniting Church" in their name please include it in the description. People searching for "Uniting Church" will find it more easily.

Below are a list of "dos" and "don'ts". Please use this as a guide as to how you interact using social media. Some of these are more relevant to official Synod sites but these could be useful to everyone. The most important thing is this: **think; then type.**

#### **Dos:**

- Before posting ask yourself if the Uniting Church has a policy regarding what you are about to say. (WWUCAD)
- Ask if your post/comment fits within the ethos of the Uniting Church in Australia.
- Post / comment respectfully.
- Find out the facts before commenting / posting.
- Inspire people (preferably with quotes from well-known Christian/religious figures or bible passages).
- Educate – have you found an interesting article/photo essay/film etc that is appropriate to link to? Share it and ask people their thoughts.
- If posting from an official page, sound like a real person; just a thoughtful, professional one.
- Use correct grammar and spelling.
- Respond to direct posts/comments as much as possible or necessary.
- Be interactive. It is a community; you need to be a part of it, not a fence sitter who only promotes what they are doing. Ask questions.
- Post photos, audio, video that are appropriate and copyright approved. Even if you are posting a video with someone you know in it, make sure you ask them if it is ok to post. They might help you spread the word too.

#### **Don'ts:**

- React to accusations without finding out the facts or, if it is a possible media issue, the media strategy. If in doubt, contact Mardi Lumsden (Synod communications director).
- Comment or post things that are unintelligent or flippant if posting from an official page (e.g. "JourneyOnline had beans for lunch.").
- Comment/'like' posts on fashion / pop culture from an official page unless directly related to the Uniting Church. It looks unprofessional.
- Insult, deride or make sarcastic comments/posts.
- Use abbreviations, acronyms or jargon.
- Make political comment from an official page unless related to something the Uniting Church in Australia has a policy on or has made public comment about.
- Feed the trolls. 'Trolls' are people who post/comment/harass in order to get a reaction. They have very few positive or constructive things to say. Sometimes it is best to let them say what they want to say and leave it at that.
- Post inappropriate or explicit photos, video or links.
- Repost something multiple times. If it didn't get the desired response the first time, consider why and try reposting it in a different way.
- Post your latest work on multiple people's profiles (unless they were also involved in making it). This is public. People can see you have reposted it several times and it looks like you are spamming.



## Using social media at Synod and other meetings

### Dos:

- Share news of Synod / meeting decisions and exciting stories with those not at the meeting.
- Inform people what is happening and where they can get more information.
- Encourage others at the meeting and discuss the meeting's topics.
- Avoid criticising or putting down other members of the meeting via social media.
- If Tweeting, use a hash tag to trace comments from the group (e.g. #unitingchurchqld), if using Facebook please tag Uniting Church Queensland in your posts if appropriate.
- Engage fully with the meeting and don't let your use of social media distract you from important discussions and decision-making.

### Don'ts:

- If the session is closed do not communicate what is happening (or happened) during the session via social media. This is to protect the safe space created inside a closed session and all members are expected to respect that.
- If you have something to say in a discussion please say it on the floor of Synod, not just via your social media.
- Your decisions during the meeting are your own. Do not be pressured to vote a certain way for a proposal by people you are communicating with outside the meeting.
- Don't tweet how boring the meeting is. Meetings can be long and the decisions made during it are critical for your community or the whole Uniting Church in Queensland. If you are not engaged in the discussion perhaps try to do something more useful than complain via social media.