



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

CENTRAL JAMAICA CONFERENCE

GUIDELINES FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Social media and the World Wide Web have dramatically affected the way we communicate over the past 10 years. While there are many advantages to such advances in technology, it also poses a challenge to the way we manage communication within and outside the Church.

The challenges presented are as follows:

1. The Web is decentralized. “An individual or organization can add new information to the Web without asking permission from a central authority.”¹ This also goes for social media platforms.
2. Social Media gives each user immediate and free access to an audience without a traditional gathering. For example, the number of friends that the average Facebook user has is 338. Not to mention membership in WhatsApp groups and other social media.
3. The Web gives the user a global reach. It is not restricted to any country or geographic location. There are currently 3.3 billion users of the Internet from every recognized country of the world.

As mentioned above, while these characteristics of the Web and Social Media have positive implications for spreading the gospel, they also pose a challenge to the crisis communication arm of the Church.

In spite of these challenges, the Church (mainly the Communication Department) still has a responsibility to make sure that what is shared in the public domain is appropriate and only helps to enhance the image of the Church.

In responding to this challenge, the Communication Department of the Conference with endorsement from the Administration has prepared a set of guidelines to assist Church leaders, Communication Secretaries and members of the Church to safeguard the image of the Church while taking advantage of the use of new communication technology.

Some of the principles for these guidelines are taken from the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Working Policy and applied to the current context.

Premise: Social Media is a public forum. The Internet and Social Media have extended the field of operation of the Church to the virtual world.

1. Workers and members SHALL use the Internet for evangelism, social interaction, counselling, conducting business and other activities within the principles outlined in the Work Policy, Church Manual and Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

2. Workers and members should NOT use the Internet for sending, receiving or resending communications that contain -
 - a. Pornography
 - b. Material containing issues of child abuse, that may be, but not limited to child pornography
 - c. Material promoting homosexuality
 - d. Anti-denominational propaganda and teachings
 - e. Material attacking fellow workers and leaders
 - f. Material that is considered as indecent by generally accepted moral principles
 - g. Bootleg material or software
 - h. Information that exposes the sins and mistakes of a fellow worker/member
4. Always check the source of information before posting or reposting it. A good principle is to check with popular and reputable media houses to see if they have information on it. The premise is that these media houses still have thorough review systems and are more liable to lawsuit if they share false information. If the information concerns the Seventh-day Adventist Church, check with your local Church Pastor, Communication Department or Conference Administrator.
5. Do not speak to the Media (News Agencies, Press, Radio, Television) on matters relating to a crisis within the Church. This is the responsibility of the Communication Director of the Conference.
6. Before sharing information that concerns a situation that is considered a crisis or a potential crisis, please check with your Local Church Pastor, who, in such a situation, has responsibility to contact the Conference's Communication Director (who is responsible for crisis communication) or the Conference President, who is the Crisis Manager. Examples of situations that could be considered a crises are as follows:
 - a. Church employee accused of sexual abuse, theft or crimes
 - b. Conflict/protest group within the Church
 - c. Confrontations between Church and government
 - d. A disaster or terrorist attack
 - e. Lay-offs or closing down of an Institution
 - f. Media investigation of a Church officer, program, or Institution
 - g. A non-Church group produces advertisements in the name of the Church
 - h. Media confuses the Church with a non-Church organization
 - i. Litigation against the Church
 - j. Tragic/sudden death of a member or worker of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
 - k. Any event that has the potential to negatively affect the image of the Church.

¹ Quinn, Michael J. *Ethics for the Information Age* (Pearson: Boston), 2011