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POLICY – SOCIAL MEDIA

Rationale:

Publication of, and commentary on, social media is difficult for churches to regulate. The freedom and right to publish and promote is offset by responsibilities toward others that are heightened in a Christian community (Romans 14). Speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) is balanced by the need for grace (Colossians 4:6) and wisdom (Matthew 10:16). Discretion is vital in seeking to avoid giving the devil a foothold (Ephesians 4:27) whereby church relationships, unity and witness can all be undermined. In resolving differences and managing emotional responses, the Bible encourages face-to-face or personal communication (Matthew 18:15, 2 John 12, 3 John 14) and therefore not the use of social media.

Aims:

To allow the church community to hold clear expectations regarding responsible use of social media platforms and websites including, but not limited to, blogs, wikis, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, Flickr, Instagram and YouTube. This is intended to optimise church relationships, respect rights to privacy and facilitate the public presentation of the church as a united, loving and welcoming family.

Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary. Members of the church should feel free to publish or comment via social media, but in accordance with this policy which intends to offer appropriate wisdom and protection for all. This policy therefore applies to all uses of social media, including personal use.

Implementation:

1. This policy is in addition to and complements any existing or future policies regarding the use of technology, computers, e-mail and the internet. All uses of social media must follow the same standards and expectations addressed in other policy statements, inclusive of the *Working with Children and Youth* policy.
2. It is inappropriate to use the church name or logo for a website, blog or Facebook page, or for any other purpose, except where this is approved by the church. It is also

inappropriate to imply that any unauthorised material or comment is representative of the views of the church.

3. Confidential information, including information about people not already shared by them on social media, should not be published. Use of information should follow the expectations outlined in the church's *Privacy* and *Leadership* policies.

4. Social media used by the church will be monitored by the church and comments deemed inappropriate, offensive or contrary to the church's core values will be removed.

5. Comments in social media should reflect Christian values and conduct, including the use of truthful comments and the avoidance of obscenities and slander (Colossians 3:8-9). Consideration should furthermore be given to the family and friends of those who become the subject of social media commentary, therefore requiring a positive and affirming approach to the use of these media (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Factual correctness should avoid unsubstantiated opinions and comments that are ill-informed, exaggerated or embellished. In the interests of upholding integrity in writing, plagiarism should be avoided as it constitutes a form of cheating and also of theft.

6. Where a social media comment has been found to be factually incorrect, it should be amended or deleted, as appropriate.

7. Though personal opinions and theological positions should not be restricted or controlled, church members are advised against promoting views and positions that contravene a clear position held by the church in the interests of promoting unity and avoiding offence.

8. Video, audio, photographs and other media may be acquired at church events and used by the church for promotional, archival or identification purposes. No unauthorised media may otherwise be acquired at such events or disseminated by any means without the express permission of any individual(s) involved or, in the case of those under eighteen years of age, of their parent or guardian. For public events, a designated photographer should be appointed and the taking of other photographs would typically be discouraged in the interests of respecting privacy.

9. Permission from a child's parent or guardian must be gained before contacting anyone under eighteen years of age via social media or before posting pictures, video, and other information that may identify that minor.

10. Adults eighteen years of age or older should not engage in contact of a personal nature with anyone under eighteen years of age without the express permission of that minor's

parent or guardian. In addition, written comments of a general, promotional or encouraging nature should be brief and sent to the parent or guardian wherever possible.

11. Church members should feel free to report any inappropriate use of the church name or logo or any other misrepresentation of the church.

12. Defamatory, libelous or slanderous comments against a leader, ministry, event, group or individual should not be used by any church member and, where received from any source, these should not be dignified or defended with a public response. Such comments on church social media platforms will typically be removed. The reporting or resolving of breaches should follow the protocols of the church's *Relationships and Reconciliation Policy*, where applicable.

Review:

This policy shall be reviewed annually by the church Eldership Board.

Date: December 2017