

STATEMENT OF POLICY

This policy provides parameters to guide District staff, elected or appointed officials, and volunteers (hereinafter referred to as “personnel”) when social media tools are used on behalf of the District or when the District becomes part of a social media dialogue.

This policy applies to all online and mobile platforms for sharing content and information, whether hosted by the District or hosted by others. "Social media" refers to social networking services, short-message services, message boards, wikis, podcasts, image/video sharing sites, and other methods for sharing real-time information among users. Due to the ever-changing nature of social media, this policy applies to all new social media platforms, whether or not they are mentioned in this policy. All social media platforms are relevant and included.

In areas where this policy does not provide a direct answer for how personnel should answer social media questions, they should use their best judgment and take the most thoughtful and prudent action possible, bearing in mind the District’s need to preserve accountability for the use of its name in all social media, consistent with the core values of this policy. In complex cases, personnel should consult with a member of the District Lead Staff before taking any action.

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

1. All district social media accounts should be initiated by a District staff member, who will remain an administrator on the account. Volunteers and ministry coordinators may be added as administrators and actively manage the account, but they should not establish District social media accounts independently.
2. There are a variety of digital platforms available. Use the right medium for the message. For example, do not use a Facebook post to communicate sensitive or private information.
3. A blog, community post, or social media post is often visible to the entire public and can/will be shared by others in various ways that cannot be controlled on any level. Be extremely wise with all content posted, keeping in mind that posts may remain public indefinitely.
4. All the District’s policies, including those found in the District Operations Manual and the Personnel Manual, apply to the use of social media.
5. Misuse of the District’s social media resources in ways that violate the law or other ministry policies is grounds for disciplinary action as described in the District Personnel Manual.
6. A signed copy of this policy will be required of all District personnel during the onboarding process.

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

1. Always use Biblical wisdom and prayerful consideration when utilizing social media. For example, if someone has offended you, speak with them privately on the matter rather than responding publicly (Matthew 18).
2. Social media postings should take care to safeguard the information of community members. It is not acceptable to publish sensitive or confidential information, unless written consent to share said information is obtained from the individual it concerns. Written consent can be submitted via email or text. Confidential information includes meetings and internal discussions, prayer requests, financial information, and personal information or photographs we do not have permission to release.
3. When taking photos that might be used on the District’s social media pages, let individuals know about your intent whenever possible and allow them to “opt out.” Do not post photos

- of individuals or identify individuals on the District's social media pages when they have asked that their information not be shared.
4. Copyright and Fair Use Laws will be respected at all times.
 5. When communicating with youth via social media, employees and volunteers serving in children's and youth ministries must prioritize the safety of youth and always keep their own professional image in mind. Online conduct, comments, behavior, etc. affects this image. The District discourages staff members and volunteers from accepting invitations to "friend" youth group members within personal networking sites. Social contact outside the District's youth page may create serious risks for the ministry workers and negatively alter the dynamic between a youth leader and a student.
 6. Personnel are solely responsible for the content they publish online and should be mindful of this even when posting content on their own social media pages. Statements made by District personnel should not be taken as expressing the formal position of the District unless the speaker is specifically authorized to do so. Even when engaging in social media for personal use, the comments of a District employee, representative, or volunteer might be viewed as a reflection on the District.
 7. Remember that your online presence and posts have the potential to affect the ministry of the District. Do not say anything contradictory or in conflict with the Confessions and core beliefs of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.
 8. When in doubt, keep posts and comments positive. If someone has posted something unkind, rude, or distasteful, speak well of others and explain everything in the kindest way.
 9. In the event of a crisis, contact District leadership prior to responding to any posting or comments relating to the crisis.
 10. Moderators of official District social media are responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy. All comment and response areas should be moderated if possible and consistent with the goal of the forum. Leaders responsible for such areas should review and approve comments prior to posting and should not post any comments that do not meet our standards for civility, misrepresent the position of the District, or that include profanity, defamatory language or speech that is otherwise inappropriate or off-topic. In an unmoderated forum, leaders should delete any comments or content that does not meet the standards of this policy as expeditiously as possible. Anonymous comments should be avoided except in circumstances where anonymous or pseudonymous speech is essential to the protection of the identities of the vulnerable. Moderators should communicate standards of the forum and reserve the right to ban repeat offenders. Moderators who permit users to post materials such as documents or photographs should make clear to users that the site will not archive those materials or be responsible for preserving them.
 11. Any use of social media that does not comply with this policy should be brought to the attention of the Communications Specialist immediately.