Guidance Notes: Using Digital Media
C/2.2.1.1

Purpose

Outline the mandatory minimum requirements to demonstrate compliance with the Safe Church Policy. To be read and applied in conjunction with the Synod's Social Media Policy as well as the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA): Endorsed Principles to Counter Online Exploitation and Abuse.

Scope

Applies to all persons involved in worship or ministry online or using digital or social media.

Meeting the requirements to provide safe online ministry

1. **Parental permission**

    1.1. As with all Church activities, ensure that parents', carers, and guardians' permissions are obtained before children or vulnerable adults participate in online or digital groups. Operating within the wishes and permissions given by parents, carers or guardians is a demonstration of respect.

    1.2. Be sure to share details of the type and frequency of participation in online or digital groups, with the parents or carer, as part of the process in obtaining permission.

    1.3. Please obtain an email from a parent, carer or guardian providing their consent. Alternately, Attendee Information Forms are on the Synod website, and are also available via the church management software UCare to assist you with this process.

2. **Leadership ratios**

    2.1. Ensure the mandatory leadership ratios that apply to activities are applied in digital settings. At least two adult leaders must have administrator access to any digital church platform. Interactions must be 'in full view'.

3. **Confidentiality**

    3.1. Be careful to observe confidentiality and privacy in electronic communications, for example, do not publish the names, contact details or other personal information of people online, except if you have been given their permission, and/or their parent's, carer's or guardian's permission. The Image Release Form must be used to obtain written permission for the sharing or use of photos or images.

    3.2. Only share with parent's permission, the contact details of a person with someone else if you have gained permission from the person whose details are requested.

    3.3. If not using email list software, ensure that all emails are addressed to people in the BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) section to protect the recipient's privacy. A person's email address is as private as are their other contact details, so respect this accordingly.

4. **Privacy and sensitive matters**

    4.1. If someone initiates a sensitive or pastoral conversation with you using an electronic method, consider the best method to respond. Young and vulnerable people may not be as aware of boundaries. You, as the Church representative, need to be aware of when a conversation has crossed boundaries and is no longer appropriate, or is dealing with a topic that warrants a sensitive response. Consider the leadership to child ratio. One option is to ask the young person to continue the conversation later with a parent, a support person or other suitable leader present.

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4.2. Understand that sometimes prayer requests are indicators of or a request for a pastoral conversation. Be aware of your role, and capabilities and make appropriate referrals when you need to link someone to more specialised help.

5. **Age restrictions**

5.1. When using social media, be aware of and comply with the terms of use, age restrictions, privacy options and controls for each site prior to using it in your ministry. Most social media platforms apply age restrictions for young people with 13 being a common age. A group meeting such as one facilitated by the online platform Zoom may be favoured. Zoom allow a closed meeting to be set up for a specified group of people who are invited to participate by the host by email. Detailed age guidelines are provided in the document Digital and Social Media Age Guidelines.

5.2. If in doubt, check the appropriateness of the proposed digital or online media on the eSafety commissioner's website. If doubt persists, act with caution and utilise a known safer alternate to communicate online. More information about ways to effectively communicate online is available on the Synod website.

Social Media content

6. **Build a social media ministry team**

6.1. When building a social media team look for people with skills in photography, graphic design, writing and social media. Each social media account must have at least two admins so that the Church doesn't lose access if the main account holder leaves the Church.

6.2. Furthermore, you need a team leader who is part of the leadership of the church or reports to the church leadership to ensure the social media ministry team meets the church's goals and portrays the correct vision and values of the Church.

Reporting requirements

7. **Reporting**

7.1. Know your reporting obligations—read the Mandatory Reporting Process for Lay Workers, and if you have any questions about it, ask your ministry agent. Check the Reporting and Referral Guide for information on where to report. Ministry agents have a Mandatory Reporting Process also.

7.2. Mandatory reporting of suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of children, young people and adults apply equally to the digital world. You **must** make a report to the police in all cases where you suspect that sexual abuse or grooming has occurred.

7.3. In any engagement with children, whether direct or indirect, you are acting in your position as a leader or ministry agent. Therefore, some of your engagement with family and friends online may not be appropriate for the children or vulnerable people you work with. It is best practice to:
   7.3.1. Have a public page (with appropriate privacy settings) for ministry purposes and engagement; and
   7.3.2. Have more than one administrator able to manage and access the public page; and
   7.3.3. Reserve your private account for communicating only with family and friends.

7.4. If the type of social or digital media does not allow for a public page with more than one administrator to manage, then **do not** use that type of digital or social media to message or chat as part of your ministry. Drawing safe boundaries for your ministry in the digital and online media space demonstrates positive role modelling for young people and adults. Visit the Mission Engagement Teams communications tool kit for more information.

Taking, sharing/using photographs and videos

8. **Gaining permission**

8.1. You must obtain written permission from the parent/guardian of all children who appear in any photograph or footage prior to using the image in any format. In addition, you should ensure that the child is willing to allow their image to be used.

8.2. If a person refuses to give permission, the image must not be used. Tools have been developed to assist in this process. Photo permission clauses are included in the following tools which can be downloaded from the Synod website, or alternately obtain an email which specifically gives permission for the use of images:
8.2.1. C/2.2.1.2 Image release form
8.2.2. Attendee information form

9. **Taking and sharing images**

9.1. Photos of children should focus on small groups rather than individuals. Leaders should not identify in writing the person/s in the photograph (e.g. tagging on Facebook or Instagram) unless permission has been explicitly gained from the person themselves and the young person's parent/guardian.

9.2. All young people must be appropriately dressed when photographed (e.g. not in swimsuits or pyjamas). Children should not be able to be identified or tracked down because of the manner in which photos are taken and shared (e.g. because of school uniforms, name tags, etc).

Live streaming and broadcast

10. **Clear signage**

10.1. When recording of services or activities is distributed or streamed on the web or via other broadcast media, signs and/or notifications **must be** clearly posted to advise all attendees and participants that the service or activity is being or will be broadcast. Consider using large font, and whether signage in other languages is also required for your congregation or community. Ensue signage is placed in several obvious locations, to be viewable as easily as possible by all persons attending the event or service.

10.2. Best practise is to also make a verbal announcement at the commencement of worship, ensuring that any persons that are vision impaired can be made aware that the service or activity is being broadcast.

11. **Participation**

11.1. All persons participating in the activity or service, for example a person doing a bible reading, must be advised prior to their participation that the activity or service will be recorded or broadcast.

12. **Sensitive information**

12.1. Prior to sensitive parts of a service or activity occurring, for example a personal sharing time or personal prayer requests, a reminder should be given that the service or activity is being recorded.

12.2. For a youth service, with a number of the participants or youth sharing testimonies or prayer requests, **stopping** the broadcast or **muting** the broadcast during the sharing time may be necessary to protect privacy of participants.

12.3. If prior approval and agreement has been obtained from the parent/s around the content and the process of sharing their testimony, then the broadcast or streaming may proceed without interruption. Each young person sharing their testimony in this manner will be required to have a signed Image Release Form.

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13. Children

13.1. **All** children or young people under the age of 18 **must have** a signed Image Release Form to participate in a worship service or activity that is being broadcast or streamed (e.g. a child aged 12 doing a bible reading or a 16 year old leading a worship service). All documents are available on the Safe Church Webpage of the Synod website.

Creating a safe online community

14. Communication

14.1. Wherever possible, communicate electronically with groups rather than individuals. A group chat is ideal. If you're using social media for group ministry purposes, consider using closed groups or community pages with known security limits. If the social media platform or app doesn't have this capability, then it **should not** be used to communicate for ministry purposes. Always direct people to the group account rather than your individual account.

14.2. If using the closed group model, ensure several leaders/ministry agents are administrators of that group to provide transparency and safety for all. Best practice is to provide a schedule of the proposed meeting times to parents and ensure that all children have been given express permission by their parent/s or guardians to participate.

15. Social media

15.1. The Mission Engagement team have resources to support churches to communicate better via social media. Platforms such as Facebook allow churches and ministry groups to easily communicate information, share details of upcoming programs, pictures, video, articles and more. The way people interact with Facebook groups versus Facebook pages is significantly different and should be considered when determining which is best for your ministry.

15.2. Consider how you can build up the church community, avoid being divisive or showing favouritism that could make others feel excluded or inferior.

15.3. Be aware, particularly with requests from young people, that to accept some and not others could be seen as favouritism and counterproductive to your ministry. Bear in mind that social media friends are subject at times to content not authored by you that may be inappropriate. If you choose to accept friend requests, you should keep very clear boundaries, and be aware of subject matter or posts which are inappropriate or ambiguous. As part of a Christ-centred ministry, interactions need to be appropriate, non-discriminatory, and inclusive. It is particularly important that you also adhere to the age guidelines provided in the document Digital and Social Media Age Guidelines.

16. Pages

16.1. These are excellent for broadcasting information, though a well-developed page will build its own community around it. The security settings of the page can be altered to enable anyone to post, anyone to post through owner moderation or only the owner can post. These kinds of systems can be good for developing community and communicating information where all is public.

17. Community groups

17.1. These are well used for developing smaller subset communities and can be completely public and open to join or inclusion moderated by group administrators.

Information and support

Information and support can be obtained from the Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer on 07 3377 9833 or safechurch@ucaqld.com.au

Most training materials are now available online, using the Synod's Learning Management System (LMS) edUCate. For information or support to access online training, please contact the Learning and Development Team: 07 3377 9990 or learning@ucaqld.com.au

Visit the communications tool kit from the Mission Engagement Team on the Synod webpage.

For concerns relating to any social or digital media application ('app'), search the name of app (eg 'SnapChat') on the eSafety Commissioner's website.

Revisions

Document number	C/2.2.1.1				
Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
6.0	16.01.2024	Strategic Risk Manager	16.01.2024	Strategic Risk Manager	Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer
Next scheduled review	02.08.2027				

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