

## **CRC Churches Social Media Guidelines**

This policy governs the publication of and commentary on social media by ministers of CRC Churches International Australia and its related organisations (CRC Churches). For the purposes of this guidelines document, social media means any facility for online publication and commentary, including without limitation blogs, wiki's, social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube. This policy is in addition to and complements any existing or future policies regarding the use of technology, computers, e-mail and the internet.

CRC Churches' ministers are free to publish or comment via social media in accordance with this policy. This policy applies to all uses of social media, including personal, by CRC Churches' ministers who are credentialed ministers, as their position with CRC Churches would be well known within the community.

Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary.

All uses of social media must follow the same ethical standards that CRC Churches ministers must otherwise follow, as stated in the CRC Guidelines for Ministerial Ethics.

### **Setting up Social Media**

Social media identities, logon ID's and user names may not use CRC Churches name without prior approval from the National Executive, through the National Administrator.

It is appropriate to use the CRC Churches logo for a church website or FaceBook page. Personal blogs, however, should not use the CRC logo or identify as related to the CRC in any way.

### **Don't Tell Secrets**

It's perfectly acceptable to talk about your ministry and have a dialog with the community, but it's not okay to publish confidential information. Confidential information includes information about people that they have not already shared on social media themselves. It is best not to disclose any personal information about other people, but it is okay to share posts made by others to your own timeline, so long as other ethical considerations are taken into account in doing this.

### **Protect your own privacy**

Privacy settings on social media platforms should be set to allow anyone to see profile information similar to what would be on the CRC Churches or your own church's website. Other privacy settings that might allow others to post information or see information that is personal should be set to limit access. Be mindful of posting information that you would not want the public to see.

### **Be Honest**

Do not blog anonymously, using pseudonyms or false screen names. We believe in transparency and honesty. Use your real name, be clear who you are, and identify that you minister in CRC Churches. Nothing gains you notice in social media more than honesty - or dishonesty. Do not say anything that is dishonest, untrue, or misleading. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, point it out. But also be smart about protecting yourself and your privacy. What you publish will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully and also be cautious about disclosing personal details.

### **Respect copyright laws**

It is critical that you show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use or fair dealing of copyrighted material owned by others; including CRC Churches own copyrights and brands. You should never quote more than short excerpts of someone else's work, and always attribute such work to the original author/source. It is good general practice to link to others' work rather than reproduce it.

### **Respect your audience, CRC Churches, and your co-ministers**

The public in general, and CRC Churches' ministers and church family members, reflect a diverse set of points of view. Don't say anything contradictory or in conflict with the CRC Churches' beliefs, vision, purpose, mission, values and ethics, all of which are available on the CRC website. Don't be afraid to be yourself, but do so respectfully. This includes not only the obvious (no ethnic slurs, highly offensive or defamatory comments, personal insults, obscenity, etc.) but also proper consideration of privacy and of topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory. Use your best judgment and be sure to make it clear that the views and opinions expressed are yours alone and do not represent the official views of CRC Churches.

### **Protect CRC Churches Ministers and Churches**

CRC Churches ministers or other churches should not be cited or obviously referenced without their approval.

## **Controversial Issues**

If you see misrepresentations made about CRC Churches in the media, you may point that out. Always do so with respect and with the facts. If you speak about others, make sure what you say is factual and that it does not disparage that party. Avoid arguments. Brawls may earn traffic, but nobody wins in the end. Don't try to settle scores or goad critics or others into inflammatory debates. Make sure what you are saying is factually correct, and it is not ill-informed, exaggerated or embellished.

## **Be the first to respond to your own mistakes**

If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so. If someone accuses you of posting something improper (such as their copyrighted material or a defamatory comment about them), deal with it quickly - better to remove it immediately to lessen the possibility of a legal action.

## **Think About Consequences**

For example, consider what might happen if a CRC Churches minister is in a meeting with a potential new Christian, and someone in that person's family has found a blog or post by the minister which is less than savoury, or derogatory of another church or of another ethnic or religious group.

Once again, it's all about judgment: using your blog to embarrass CRC Churches, other churches, ministers or people, is dangerous and ill-advised. Likewise, commenting on areas outside of your expertise or responsibility can open the door for problems.

## **Disclaimers**

Many social media users include a prominent disclaimer saying who they work for, but that they're not speaking officially. This is good practice and is encouraged, but don't count on it to avoid trouble - it may not have much legal effect.

## **Don't forget your day job.**

Make sure that blogging does not interfere with your ministry role or commitment to be a good witness of Jesus Christ.

## **Code of Conduct**

Violations will be subject to investigation and action under the CRC Churches International Australia Code of Conduct.

## **Social Networking with Children or Young People**

Ministers should be aware of the following expectations in considering their use of social networking sites;

- They have considered the information and images of children or young people available on their sites and are confident that these represent these people in a light acceptable of their role as a minister in CRC Churches International;
- While it is understood that being a 'friend' on a personal/private site with a child or young person can be useful in communicating and following up with them for both event marketing and pastoral care, there needs to be a transparency in the communications utilising this medium at is not present in reality. It is thus strongly recommended that ministers set up processes to monitor these communications. These could include boundaries around usage, such as not deleting electronic communications, and regular checks of these communications by a responsible line manager. Church personnel should save copies of conversations whenever possible, especially those that concern the personal sharing of a teenager or young adult.; and
- Comments on their site about their church, colleagues or children or young people, if published, would not cause hurt or embarrassment to others, risk claims of libel or harm the reputation of CRC Churches, their church, their colleagues or children or young people

Be sure to have permission from a child's parent or guardian before contacting the minor via social media or before posting pictures, video, and other information that may identify that minor.

Parents must have access to everything provided to their children. For example, parents should be made aware of how social media are being used, be told how to access the sites, and be given the opportunity to be copied on all material sent to their children via social networking (including text messages). While parents should be provided with the same material as their children, it does not have to be via the same technology (that is, if children receive a reminder via Twitter, parents can receive it in a printed form or by an e-mail list).

Make everyone aware of the CRC Duty of Care and Child Protection Guidelines, which outline appropriate methods for interacting with children less than 18 years of age.

### **How to Report and Monitor**

Ministers should immediately report unofficial sites that carry the CRC Churches logo to the CRC National Office. It is important that CRC Churches International Australia is able to protect its brand and identity.

Also inform the CRC National Office if you find misinformation on a site. This is especially important when responding to an incorrect wiki, such as Wikipedia, etc.

You are not expected to respond to defamatory, libellous, or slanderous comments—not original postings, but comments—on a site, such as a blog. Report such occurrences as above, and a response will be made on behalf of the Movement if it is thought appropriate to do so.