

St. Philip Lutheran Church Communications Policy

FINAL DRAFT 11/3/11

Following are some basic guidelines for use in all communication related to St. Philip (email, social media, written, website, facebook, etc.) This policy is meant to be a guide, but is NOT meant to address every potential scenario.

Use common sense

It's good business practice for churches (and individuals) to keep certain topics confidential. Please respect confidentiality. Refrain from speculation and do not disclose non-public church information or the personal information of others.

Mind your manners

Treat past and present congregation members and attendees, staff, volunteers, partners, and yourself with respect. Avoid posting materials or comments that may be seen as offensive, demeaning, inappropriate, threatening, or abusive. Acknowledge differences of opinion. Respectfully withdraw from discussions that go off topic or become profane.

Acceptable use of member contact information

Use of member lists of email, mailing addresses and phone numbers provided by St. Philip Lutheran Church (hereafter called, "SPLC") or provided by any other outside agency, by staff/employees, contractors/consultants, and/or congregation members/guest (hereafter called "e-mail user(s)") of SPLC is permitted and encouraged where such use supports the goals and objectives of the Council, staff, and congregation. For brevity, the phrase "messages" will be used to encompass all forms of communications..

Church members, staff and volunteers are welcome to use segmented lists (i.e. lists of just members of a committee, or members of choir, etc.) to distribute information with the approval of the appropriate committee head and/or staff supervisor.

No member's contact information will be shared with any outside individual or organization without prior consent from that individual for communications not previously approved by the SPLC Communications team or Church Council.

Message Content, Distribution and Storage

Careful judgement should be used when sending messages—particularly emails because of the ease with which they can be forwarded and posted online.

Congregation-wide emails ("email blasts") should be limited to situations where time is of the essence, and use of other forms of communication would not be effective (mail, church bulletin, website, phone trees).

The following are examples of unacceptable behaviour involving official and unofficial SPLC related messages:

- Forwarding SPLC confidential messages to external locations
- Broadcasting unsolicited personal views on social, political, religious or other related matters to congregation members or guests
- Transmitting unsolicited commercial or advertising material
- Undertaking deliberate activities that waste staff effort or networked resources
- Distributing, disseminating or storing images, text or materials that might be considered indecent, pornographic, obscene or illegal
- Distributing, disseminating or storing images, text or materials that might be considered discriminatory, offensive or abusive, in that the context is a personal attack, sexist or racist, or might be considered as harassment
- Accessing copyrighted information in a way that violates the copyright
- Breaking into the SPLC or another organization's system or unauthorised use of a password/mailbox
- Introducing any form of computer virus or malware into any network
- **Using email blast messages when another form of communication would be more appropriate.**

Digital and Social Media Guidelines

The Internet remembers

Search engines and other technologies make it virtually impossible to retract something you've put online. Be sure you mean what you say, and say what you mean.

Be honest about who you are

If the conversation relates to SPLC, you should identify yourself and how you are connected to SPLC in the content of your post/comment/other content.

Make it clear that the views expressed are yours and not those of SPLC.

You speak for yourself, but your actions reflect those of SPLC

Unless you have been authorized by the Communications Team or St. Philip staff, you cannot speak on behalf of SPLC. Do not portray yourself as a spokesperson, even an "unofficial" spokesperson, on issues relating to SPLC. Keep in mind that that people are likely to form an opinion about SPLC based on the behavior of its members or attendees.

The Internet is a public space

Consider everything you post to the Internet the same as anything you would post to a physical bulletin board or submit to a newspaper. Many eyes may fall upon your words, including those of reporters, fellow parishioners and SPLC staff. Assume that all of these people will be reading every post, no matter how obscure or secure the site to which you are posting may seem.

An official response may be needed

If you spot a potential issue and believe an official SPLC response is needed, please bring it to the attention of a member of the Communications team or the staff before it reaches a crisis situation. Potential issues can often be resolved more effectively and efficiently if they are identified quickly.

Respect the privacy of offline conversations

Protect those people connected to SPLC by refraining from sharing their personal information or any conversations or statements unless you have their written permission to do so. Bringing someone else into an online conversation without their permission can be destructive to a relationship and/or the church, cause misunderstandings or violate laws, and/or confidentiality agreements.

New medium: Same rules and laws

Due to the nature of the digital medium, extra diligence is required in respecting intellectual property (such as copyright and trademark), financial disclosure laws, false advertising and the like.

Policy pertains to any related SPLC e-mail

It is expressly implied, that by sending an e-mail to any SPLC staff member, congregation member, volunteer or guest, in even the slightest context related to SPLC even unofficially, that this policy shall be strictly adhered to.

Reporting & Sanctions

If it is believed that a congregation member, guest, volunteer or staff member has failed to comply with this policy, the compliance failure will should be reported to the Communications team. If the e-mail user is found to have breached the policy, the matter will be reported to the SPLC Council for further discussion and analysis. Any reprimand, penalty, or action taken by the Council, including potential blockage of the user's e-mail address by the SPLC e-mail system, will depend on factors such as the seriousness of the breach and the user's history with e-mail usage as it applies to this policy.

Monitoring (add this to the personnel policy)

SPLC accepts that the use of email is a valuable informational and, pending the circumstances, communication tool. However, misuse of this tool can have a negative impact upon the reputation of SPLC, within and external to the congregation.

In addition, all of SPLC's e-mail resources are provided for official congregation business purposes. Therefore, SPLC maintains the right to examine any systems and inspect any data recorded in those systems.

In order to ensure compliance with this policy, SPLC also reserves the right to use monitoring software in order to check upon the use and content of emails. Such monitoring is for legitimate purposes only and will be undertaken in accordance with a procedure agreed with employees.