



RESPONSIBLE SOCIAL MEDIA

FOR CHURCHES & YOUTH GROUPS





DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

The United Methodist Church

This pamphlet was produced by Young People's Ministries.

If you would like to learn more about the resources that
Young People's Ministries offers, visit us at:

<https://umcyoungpeople.org>

This resource is made possible by your generous support of The World Service Fund of The United Methodist Church, individual giving, and through the sale of books, magazines, and other products.



RESPONSIBLE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR CHURCHES AND YOUTH GROUPS

The Internet has seen an extraordinary amount of change and innovation in the past few years, particularly in the realm of social media. As of 2015, we have seen the rise of new social media applications and websites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, Yik Yak, Periscope, and more.

This is an exciting time to see what innovators and tech entrepreneurs come up with next and it is important to be ever aware of these new platforms and the way youth use them.

There is an observation in computer science called “Moore’s Law.” The law originated with Gordon E. Moore, who was a cofounder at Intel. Moore’s Law says that the overall processing power of computers will double every two years.

This rapid pace of technological development leads to more advanced processing power of computers, and also to new applications being developed—whether in the World Wide Web, mobile apps, or social media. Not only are we seeing new platforms developed at a more frequent rate, but the number of users is also increasing.

According to the PEW Research Center, 87% of American teens ages 13-17 have access to a computer, while 73% have smartphones.¹ Often referred to as “digital natives”, these young people are increasingly connected to the World Wide Web, and various social media platforms.

While social media makes communication between family

¹ AMANDA LENHART. (2015) A MAJORITY OF TEENS REPORT ACCESS TO A COMPUTER, GAME CONSOLE, SMARTPHONE, AND A TABLET
PEWRESEARCHCENTER: INTERNET, SCIENCE, & TECH. ACCESSED FROM [HTTP://WWW.PEWINTERNET.ORG/2015/04/09/A-MAJORITY-OF-AMERICAN-TEENS-REPORT-ACCESS-TO-A-COMPUTER-GAME-CONSOLE-SMARTPHONE-AND-A-TABLET/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/a-majority-of-american-teens-report-access-to-a-computer-game-console-smartphone-and-a-tablet/) ON 25 NOV 2015.

and friends easier, it also has its challenges. Even at church, it's now common to see people checking Twitter or Facebook in the middle of the worship service.

Social media can be both a blessing and a curse for those who work with young people. It's easier to communicate with youth on social media, yet these same technologies can keep them occupied and distracted when instead you want them to be focusing on worship or other activities.

In this booklet, you will find information, insights, and practical tips that can guide you in dealing with social media as it relates to the young people in your church.



ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Using social media comes almost as naturally as breathing to young people, and stereotypically young people are associated with social media. However, in the past few years adults have begun to use many social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as frequently as young people! They have come to realize and enjoy the many benefits and advantages of social media.

GLOBAL CONNECTION. The beauty of social media is that you can connect with anyone in the world, as long as they have access to an internet-enabled device and internet connection. Media content found in YouTube, blogs, Flickr, and Instagram come from all over the world. It is also easier now to be exposed to news and events that are happening in other countries.

MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS. Social media allows for friends and family to maintain their relationships, regardless of the distance. Photos, special events, and announcements can easily be shared with friends and family members. Even while traveling abroad, people can communicate with their family and friends. It has also become easier to make friends from other countries based on shared interests.

NEWS SPREADS QUICKLY. When William Kamkwamba built a windmill from junk and helped provide electricity to his village in Malawi, the world took notice. Pretty soon, the news went viral on blogs and Social Media, turning him into an online celebrity. Through Social Media, news and events from one place can spread quickly, bringing widespread awareness.

NETWORKING. If you are looking for like-minded people who share your passions and interests, you can find them online. Whether you are a youth minister who needs help in programming and managing your youth group, or if you want to learn about United Methodist ministries around the world, you can use social media to network with other people and ministries.



POTENTIAL DANGERS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is useful. Churches and youth workers need to be aware of potential dangers as well.

PRIVACY CAN BE COMPROMISED. Information posted online can stay online for a long time even after a user has deleted that information. If personal information is shared online, it can be accessed by close contacts as well as total strangers. There are cyber stalkers and hackers who want to gain access to people's information for their own devious purposes.

SCAMMERS. We've all heard about that prince from an unknown kingdom who wants to give away all of his money, (just send him your bank account information). Most email providers have a good way to detect suspicious messages. But if you have online accounts that store financial information, they may be potential areas of scam exposures.

PREDATORS. Online predators mask their identities and attempt to manipulate children and teens, typically in sexual ways.

CYBER-BULLYING. Cyber-bullying can be worse than real life bullying in some ways because bullies have the ability to remain anonymous. There have been reported incidents of self-harm and suicide as a result of cyber-bullying.

SEXTING. Social media applications such as Snapchat provide an easy way for young people to send sexually explicit photos to each other with the assumption that no else will see the photos after 10 seconds.

Churches and youth ministries need to address these dangers by engaging young people in meaningful conversations about ways to protect ourselves online.



USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN YOUTH MINISTRY

Here are several ideas on how to use Social Media for youth ministry in your church.

DISCOVER RESOURCES FOR YOUTH MINISTRY. If you need videos to illustrate next week's Bible Study, you can look at YouTube or GodTube. If you need graphics, you can check out Pinterest, Instagram, or Flickr. There are also thousands of websites that offer ideas to help make your youth grow spiritually. Always check ownership of online materials and give credit/ask permission where needed.

"Resources" may also come in the form of people who can help you grow in your ministry. Young People's Ministries' Field Guide Network (<http://fieldguideumc.org/>) can connect you with youth and young adult workers with diverse knowledge and expertise to help you.

CELEBRATE YOUNG PEOPLE'S TALENTS. Help young people express their creativity by allowing them to create their own content – articles, videos, photos, and graphics—that celebrate their faith. By doing this, youth also learn how to share their faith online through their creative outputs.

PROMOTE EVENTS AND CAMPAIGNS ONLINE. Social media can be an effective and cost-efficient way to promote events for youth among church members, and to the broader community.

BUILD COMMUNITY ONLINE. Online groups could be a great way for young people to share spiritual insights, questions, and creative outputs in between youth group sessions and events.

TRAIN YOUTH TO BE CRITICAL OF INFORMATION THEY ENCOUNTER ONLINE. Teach them to verify information, search for the source of what is presented as fact, cross-check with other sources, and identify potential hoaxes and sensationalist approaches to media.

Philippians 4:8 is an excellent verse to help young people talk about online information consumption: *“Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”*

SET BOUNDARIES. In the end, social media is simply a communication platform. It can be misused, or abused, and to prevent that, you should set boundaries. Remember Safe Sanctuaries guidelines. You can get started with Safe Sanctuaries by going to this link: <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/getting-started-safesanctuaries>

CUSTOMIZE PRIVACY SETTINGS. This applies to personal accounts and online groups. Make sure that only the people who need the information get access to it. Most social media sites allow you to switch your profile between public and private. Some like Facebook even let you create custom audiences (family, church, friends, et cetera) so that you can tailor your message accordingly. The Privacy Setting of Facebook groups, in particular, can be customized: you can set it to Public, Closed, or Secret.

BE TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE. If you are a youth worker, use your church or youth group's official accounts as much as possible. Before contacting a minor on Social Media, secure permission from their parents. To protect yourself and the youth you work with, keep copies of online communication.

BE MINDFUL OF THE DIGITAL DIVIDE. Keep in mind that not all young people have access to Social Media 24/7. There are still young people and families who do not have access to these technologies. Think about them as you create web-based programs and also plan for alternative resources.

DON'T USE SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR IN-PERSON CONNECTION AND CONVERSATION. Always remember that while social media may facilitate almost instantaneous communication, nothing replaces personal relationships with youth.

DEVELOP YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY OR GUIDELINES. Talk with the leadership in your church to come up with a Social Media Policy or set of guidelines. United Methodist Communications came up with 6 Questions Every Church Social Media Policy Should Answer, which you can find here: <http://bit.ly/6-questions-social-media-policy>.

PolicyTool (<http://socialmedia.policytool.net/>) is another online tool that helps you create your own Social Media Policy. This tool asks several questions about how your church or organization uses Social Media.

Online technologies will continue to change, and they will influence the way we communicate with each other. As a church, we may not be able to catch up with every new technology that comes along. Since young people tend to be at the forefront of adopting and using these technologies; it could be one of the many gifts they bring to the church. Whether offline, or online, remember that our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.



YOUNG PEOPLE'S MINISTRIES

YOUNG PEOPLE'S MINISTRIES (YPM), part of **DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES**, is a global organization that supports youth, young adults, and those who invest in the lives of young people. We create and sustain relationships that help make young disciples. We do this to integrate young people into the life of the UMC and help them live out their faith in the world.

YPM program staff are available as consultants, speakers, and leaders as part of their ministry role.

EVENTS

Young Leaders Summits | Annually, in the Philippines and African Central Conferences.

General Conference | Supporting young delegates and attendees, and coordinating the Young People's Address.

Global Convocation | Every four years, young people selected from around the globe learn from each other and participate in legislation.

YOUTH Event | The national event for United Methodist Youth in the United States, every four years.

MISSIONS

UMYouthMissions.org | Map of youth-friendly, UM-related sites. Browse, explore, and connect.

RevGo.org | Crowdfunding tool for young people and missional engagement ministries.

RESOURCES

FieldGuideUMC.org | Free, online coaching from experienced ministry leaders.

UMConnector.org | Connect to all the opportunities for young people available from United Methodist Agencies.

YouthServiceFund.org | By youth/for youth grant program accepts applications until June 1 for funding to begin the following year.

Scholarship.UMC.org | Find funding for higher education or for a ministry.

Devotions | Check out GlobalYoungPeople.org for devotions by and for young adults, youth, and leaders of young people's ministries.

Blog | Every week, new entries and thoughts from around the connection.

Grants for Ministries with Young People | Available at GlobalYoungPeople.org

Downloads & Books

- **Sex: A Christian Perspective on Our Bodies, Decisions, & Relationships** | 4 core sessions on human sexuality, along with additional modules for purchase at **YPMFaithAndSex.org**
- **Everyday Disciples** | Covenant Discipleship with Youth – An encouraging start-up resource adapting covenant discipleship practices for youth. Part of an intergenerational 3-part series.
- **Building Spiritual Muscle** | A 6-week video-based Bible study designed to introduce spiritual exercises into the lives of Youth.
- **Leadership Lab for 6-8 Grade and 9-12 Grade Youth** | 4 and 7 sessions on leadership development, direct PDF download, customizable for your context

LEARN MORE BY VISITING: **UMCYOUNGPEOPLE.ORG**