New Conversations: Building Relationships Through Social Media

Notes from the Social Media Seminar on February 7 and 8, 2014 with Rev. Eric S. Anderson, Minister for Communications and Technology, Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ

The 45 participants who attended the Social Media seminar were well informed and entertained by Rev. Eric S. Anderson's presentation. Some highlights (minus his delightful stories, videos, and examples) are included in this article. A special thanks to the Connecticut Conference for sharing their Minister of Communications and Technology.

Most Important Thing to Remember: If it passes through the Internet, IT IS PUBLIC. Don't put anything on the internet that you do not want to share with the WORLD.

There are two ways to broadcast information to a large number of people and get them to respond: **Push** and **Pull**. Mediums that PUSH require very little from the receiver, e.g., mass email, text messages, tweets. Mediums that PULL require the recipient to take some action, e.g., website, attachments to email, worship.

To effectively share information, follow the rule of seven: publish seven times in seven different media: Website, Email, Newsletter, Twitter, Face-to-Face Announcement at Meeting or Service, Facebook, Video, Skit (recorded or live), etc.

Consider who is in your congregation. What media do they use? Consider who is in your neighborhood but not in your congregation. How can you reach them? PSEC churches can use this login to [MissionInsite](#) to learn more about their neighbors.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Website – Every church should have a website that shows your passion in ministry. Use pictures of people (with written permission) doing mission and ministry. But, be aware that search engines use words to sort. So, your front page should contain words that describe your church; your contact information: name, address, and phone; social media feeds; and times of worship services. (NOTE: Even if your church does not have a web page, you can create a Prayer Partner page on the PSEC website. This page will appear in the search for your church name.)

Email – 88% of Internet users use email. When sending a large quantity of emails, use a bulk email service, e.g. Constant Contact, Mail Chimp, etc.

Facebook – There are 1.23 billion people on Facebook. For a sizeable and still growing portion of the population, it is a primary and preferred method of communication. Individuals have profiles; institutions (like churches) have pages with administrators (who are individuals with profiles). You can friend individuals, but you like pages. You can respond to a post by liking it, commenting on it, or sharing it. Sharing has the greatest reach. Posts are most visible when shared on an individual's profile. Management of groups for youth in social media: Groups should have at least 4 administrators – 2 adults (can't let kid's run the show yet), 2 youth (agency & responsibility).

Twitter – Twitter is a 140-character message designed to be read on a mobile device. You can follow someone's Twitter feed and retweet their tweet to those who follow your feed.

BOUNDARIES

Learning Together during New Conversations

Power Dynamics – Who has the power? Who doesn't? If you are in the position of greater power, do not send a friend request. The person with lesser power has agency. Ask to be in contact in another medium and let the person

you are asking know that the choice is theirs, and they are free to say no.

Confidentiality – Whose story is it? If it is not your story, do not tell it. Don't share Facebook stories on Facebook without asking. Prayer concerns should come directly from the person. Exception: DEATH - dying is personal, death is public. Email communications are inherently risky. Messages are encrypted at source and decrypted at end. Connection between sending and receiving servers is not encrypted. Never use last names. You should be clear about the limits of your ability to ensure privacy in email: "If you are comfortable, OK, but I cannot guarantee privacy in this venue."

Transparency – Make certain that others are able to monitor your behavior (like window in office door). Don't use private messaging in Facebook. Someone else should always be able to see and prevent problematic behavior. You have the option of providing your username and password to another trusted person.

Ownership of Content – If it is not your story, do not tell it. If it is not your picture (video, document), do not use it. Do not use it, UNLESS you have written permission from the individual or institution that owns it. It is always better to ask for permission than to pay for forgiveness.

Transitions – Responsibility for healthy exits falls on the outgoing pastor. She/he must be clear, "I'm not coming back, except at request of existing pastor." How do you handle pastoral transitions on social media? The cleanest and most direct solution is to set a hard line and end Facebook relationships with former congregants. Know your ability to maintain space of separation - Blanket unfriend – or selective

unfriend. Remember that you are not able to block others from reading your Blog. It is also difficult to block on Twitter, so use good judgment.

Behavior –Don't badmouth on social media. Information on the internet has an infinite life. When you make a mistake, be prepared to apologize and do something different. Eric's Rule: Ask yourself this question before you push the button, "Will it help build healthier relationships and community?" If not, don't.

Rev. Anderson has given us permission to share these handouts used during the presentation: [Thou Shalt Not Steal...Intellectual Property (And How to Make Sure You're Not)](#) and [Internet Safety Guidelines](#). These resources and [Considerations for Churche Website Design: Three "W's" and and "H"](#) are linked from the Connecticut Conference website.

Other Resources are available from the Insurance Board [SafeConduct Workbench](#). The Insurance Board is a non-profit insurance and risk management ministry that serves churches and camps of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Presbyterian Church USA and United Church of Christ. The materials they provide are based, in part, on guidance provided by Praesidium, Inc., their business partner and consultant in matters of abuse preveintion. Materials include a self-assessment tool, training and background checking services, staff and volunteer training, and a [SafeConduct Policy & Procedure Template](#) that includes a section with Social Media-Electronic Communications guidelines.