

Best Practices for Technology in our Churches

April 2025

In living out our Social Principle of the Social Community (2020/2024 BOD ¶162.G), specifically the last line of Media and Communication Technologies which reads:

“We believe that media and communications technologies should be open and accessible to all, foster norms that promote civility and respect, and protect the dignity and worth of all people, including society’s most vulnerable”

the Communications, Trustees and Safe Sanctuaries Committees have created this best-practices document on the use of local church electronic systems such as but not limited to computers, internet use and wi-fi systems.

Eastern PA Resolution 2016-10, *Resolution Relating to Computer Network and Internet Access Policy*, outlined the importance and commitment to ensuring safe access and use for all. This document furthers that work and outlines the best practices whose purpose are to protect all congregants and guests of any UMC local church of the Eastern PA Conference.

Best Practices

- It is suggested that any paid employee or volunteer using the equipment provided in or by your church, including the wi-fi network, should sign an agreement created by each church’s SPRC and Trustees. This signed agreement should be kept with your Safe Sanctuaries background checks as mandated by the policy your church has on file.
- As outlined in the 2023 Safe Sanctuaries policy for youth and older and vulnerable adults.
 - Still use the two-adult rule so that there is NEVER one-on-one contact. At no time should one adult be holding any one-on-one conversations with any youth without other adults knowing there are conversations occurring. In addition, online meetings need to begin with two adults, not from the same family, and then allow youth to join.
 - Still use all selection, screening, and training policies. In the virtual world and space, it may feel right to let new volunteers that are untrained and lack clearances to lead discussions. Any online discussion should be considered no different than a face-to-face meeting. Volunteers need to be screened and trained before taking on leadership roles.
 - Use “ministry-based” on-line platform accounts instead of personal accounts. This means the local church should own an on-line account with

access by several church leaders and/or staff so there is accountability of meetings.

- Maintain the same communication with parents and youth about meetings including times and links to access the meeting. This way everyone knows what is going on. With younger children under sixth grade, syllabus and activities should be shared with parents or caretakers prior to online meetings so everyone is transparent as to what is occurring. For children sixth through twelfth grade, leaders should provide parents and caretakers with the same outlines of meetings and topics that are typical for your youth group with more transparency being utilized than less.
- If your current release forms do not give you permission for picture/video sharing either get them updated or do not share pictures/videos of virtual meetings. This includes tagging your youth in the virtual environment. If you do not have permission do not post and tag them. Also add this to any forms for Vacation Bible School and use a release form for the sporadic attendance of youth who may be focused and tagged during worship. (Note, this does not mean a span of the congregation by the camera person – only when children are present at your altar as mentioned for a special moment or part of your worship).
- For streaming church services, always advise that you are streaming your services at the beginning of worship and/or note this on doors as well.
- **ZOOM usage:** When holding a ZOOM meeting for many participants, use the waiting room feature in ZOOM. This will provide you as a sole facilitator for the meeting to have other people at the meeting from the beginning to end, so wait for another one or two persons to admit all. Should you need to record the Zoom meetings there is a feature that the participant can accept when recording begins by clicking a blue OK button on their screen.
- If you are holding a meeting for children, being under 18 years old, and vulnerable adults, be sure to follow the two-adult rule. Do Not record these meetings without express consent of the parents/guardians.
- If all participants are adults and there are no identifying vulnerable adults or older adults (over 60), then no background checks are required.

We, the Trustees, Communications Team and Safe Sanctuary Committee, are making every effort to keep our churches safe for our congregations, visitors and all the people attending our events. This is a team effort, and we recognize the great differences in our

congregations from geography, economic, identity, race, ethnicity, age, ability, etc. Our differences make us a family and our likenesses stem from our faith and love of the Lord.

(Please feel free to keep this document as a guideline or add to your policy as your church deems necessary and keep with your Safe Sanctuary policies.)

Technology and Wi-fi Agreement with the Local church – SAMPLE ONLY

Our Church _____SPRC and Trustees has created a policy for the use of Church's technology and Wi-Fi network. I understand and agree with the policy provided.

(Local name) United Methodist Church

Signature

Date

Printed name