SOCIAL MEDIA USE
Adopted by the General Board in 2017

The UPCI is committed to proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world by the whole church. Christians, and particularly ministers of the gospel, must demonstrate Christian love, respect, kindness, gentleness, peace, mercy, fairness, and authenticity. "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).

Social media presents the church with new and unique opportunities to spread the gospel, connect with and edify family and friends, and engage in public discourse. As with most technology, the potential also exists for damage to our Christian character, witness, and influence. James warned of the evil potential of the tongue, the oldest tool for transmitting thoughts between minds (James 3:1–12). Social media platforms are merely extensions of this powerful member of our body, and due to their impersonal nature, they can bring out the worst in us. As with every other aspect of our lives, our communication—both what we allow to enter our own eyes and ears and what we transmit to others—should be governed and guided by the Word of God. Christian communications should be different from non-Christian communications, especially the communication expressed by ministers. (See I Timothy 3:1–13; 4:12; II Timothy 2:24–26.)

The UPCI encourages all ministers to consider that the tone and language of all communications, including social media, should reflect Christian decorum, civility, and integrity. Moreover, one should never assume anonymity, privacy, or confidentiality of anything posted on social media. Because any post can easily be reposted, in whole or in part, to an open forum, posts to social media hold the potential to damage our public Christian witness. For this reason and in light of biblical principles, posts made to any social forum should not be demeaning, defamatory, divisive, or derogatory. Nor should they contain gossip, ethnic slurs, coarse language, or other such communication. The apostle Paul clearly asserted that communication becoming to saints does not include "filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks" (Ephesians 5:4).

Additionally, although spirited discussions and dialogue can bring greater understanding of varying beliefs and convictions, our ministers should be careful not to contend for their own beliefs in ways that bring disunity to the body or slander or insult others. We encourage our ministers to address disagreements and grievances in a biblical fashion. (See Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:1, 5; II Thessalonians 3:14-15.). In light of the divisive social and political climate of our society we must be careful that our social media communication is not spoiled by "philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8), by the tone and context of what we communicate.

Social media is often used to propagate unconfirmed, erroneous, or fabricated information. Such information should not be shared or forwarded as if it were verified and accurate. Even when sharing true information, one should consider whether it is constructive and edifying. We should convey love and respect for all through our communications since every human is created in the image of God and because Jesus' sacrifice was offered for everyone

without exception. Paul highlighted the value of clear, pleasant, and redemptive speech (Colossians 4:2–6). Additionally, a commitment to truth spoken in love separates those in the church from those in the world. (See I John 2:24; 4:1–3, 15.)

We stand out as witnesses to God's transforming power in an evil world by living righteous lives, which includes portraying such on social media and everywhere else. (See I John 1:8–2:6, 28–29; 3:2–10.) Paul described believers as living epistles "known and read of all men" (II Corinthians 3:1–3). Jesus also taught that our good works should cause people to glorify God (Matthew 5:16). Presenting our lives to others through social media gives us an opportunity to demonstrate the blessed life made available through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Everything that we say and do should be characterized by love for the world Jesus came to save. (See John 3:15–17.)

In conclusion, Proverbs 15:1–3 gives sound advice that should inform our contributions on social media: "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness. The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." This passage of Scripture teaches us the following principles that apply to social media:

• Respond with a soft answer. We should not allow ourselves to be provoked and respond harshly to others.

• Grievous words bring anger. We should not use harsh or incendiary words to provoke others or escalate anger.

• Wisely use knowledge. We should wisely use our words to proclaim the gospel and to influence others for good.

• Folly pours out of foolish people. We will be identified by what we say or post.

• The eyes of the Lord are watching. God holds us responsible for what and how we communicate.

The UPCI encourages our ministers to communicate in light of and in submission to these sound biblical principles.