

The Board of Ordained Ministry as social media police

By [Allan R. Bevere](#)

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Jeremy Smith at [Hacking Christianity](#) has written [a post](#) on the United Methodist Kentucky Annual Conference's decision requiring candidates for ministry to open all their social media to Board of Ordained Ministry review. Jeremy has concerns about this, as do I. Jeremy writes,

While I applaud integrity

and exhibit it in my own word and deed, integrity enforced by fear is not what we as clergy are called to preach and teach and I reject efforts that put that on the clergy. There's enough fear in the system already: fear of the future, fear of upsetting the wrong people, fear of speaking prophetically.

Personally, I think every **business and church needs a water cooler:**

the place where people gather to complain about their bosses. It's the pressure-release valve that allows the individual to vent in healthy ways. Does that mean Facebook is all about pastors griping about their congregation? Of course not, I rarely see that and I know a LOT of pastors. But pastors (just like employees) need space to express themselves and release...to hold them accountable via an illegally-created online profile in an impossible-to-police method is not the way.

For a church to be prophetic, it must allow space for thoughtful musings.

What would the BOM do if they saw pastors updating their statuses saying they "struggle" with Rob Bell's 'Love Wins'...would that become a mark on their chart? What if they shared a link for immigration reform...would that become a question of whether they heart America? What

if people like me have really weird humor...would that become an issue?

Jeremy

is spot on. Now I am not suggesting (and I doubt Jeremy is either) that pastors, nor anyone else, should not be held accountable for what they say. Indeed, I argued for the significance of such accountability in a [recent post](#), but what such a policy will ultimately do is have a chilling effect on serious theological and ecclesial discussion and debate. Some of the best theological and moral discussions I have had of late have been on Facebook.

Now,

I have no doubt that most members of Boards of Ordained Ministry in every Annual Conference will allow for such theological, ecclesial, and moral probings, but there are always a small handful who may very well use opinions expressed in social media threads by candidates for ministry against them. Some people are able to react rationally when someone expresses a different point of view on a hot button issue, and some are not.

It's the latter individuals who are of concern.

What do you think?

Originally posted at [Allan Bevere's blog](#).