

More from Adam Copeland on church policies for social media

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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[CCblogger](#) Adam Copeland, who recently [did a stint here](#) as a guest blogger, [has posted](#) a grad-school paper of his on church policies regarding social media use. He wrote this after inquiring [here](#) and elsewhere about what policies might be in place.

Not many, as it turns out--Adam's research didn't turn up much. In the paper he takes a close look at four he did find: one from a national body (the PCUSA, [written specifically for General Assembly](#) last year), two from state-level bodies in Connecticut (the [UCC conference](#) and the [Episcopal diocese](#)) and one from an individual congregation ([Holy Trinity Catholic Church](#) in DC). Adam examines each policy's take on privacy concerns, the issue of multiple social contexts converging (and sometimes colliding) and specific questions raised by youth ministry (where both the opportunities and the risks of using social media in ministry are brought into sharp relief).

Whether you're gung-ho about social media or think it's useless at best, the fact that it's widely used and presents unique situations is a pretty good argument for having a policy. But it's not easy to come up with a good one. Here's Adam:

Perhaps the challenge of writing such policies is best summed-up in the glossary of the UCC policy. In it, "inappropriate content" is defined, but with a caveat. Inappropriate content "refers both to content that is improper or offensive, but also content that might be suited to the medium but not to the relationship." The challenge, of course, is that both relationships and social

media change every single day, so judging propriety with a static written policy is a challenging task. But, from this pastor's point of view, at least, it's a task that should be tackled since social media, like all forms of human communication, is being and will be abused. The situations are vast and varied--pastors wondering if they should "un-friend" old congregation members once they move to a new call, youth pushing the bounds of appropriate Facebook rapport, youth leaders text-messaging youth daily with notes of support and suggestion, pastors counseling couples whose relationships began (or ended) by way of the Internet.

Such situations require care--and perhaps protocol. But as one commenter quipped in response to Adam's earlier post here, a policy is by definition something put into place after someone has already violated it.