Baptist Association of NSW and ACT

Communications Policy

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Contents

1. PREAMBLE

The Association of Baptist Churches of NSW and ACT (BA) is committed to ensuring that internal and external communications through all forms of media are responsible, respectful and lawful. This policy is part of the Association's overall risk management framework and is designed to incorporate procedures for appropriate communication within and from the BA.

2. SCOPE

The scope of this policy extends to all BA Staff including volunteers and those who serve on the Assembly Council and all committees or advisory groups (referred to as personnel in this document).

3. FOUNDATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

This policy is framed within the broad general principles of the commandment: *You shall love your neighbour as yourself* (Matt 22:38), and *so whatever you wish that others would do to you do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets* (Matt 7:12)

This policy supports openness, transparency, and telling the truth in love. It is not intended to stifle freedom of speech. However it does call for integrity, respect, and expressions of the fruit of the Spirit - for the Association as a whole, and for each individual within the Association.

4. POLICY FRAMEWORK

This policy incorporates the appropriate use of:
- 'Traditional' Media;
- Electronic Systems; and
- Electronic Communications Guidelines (for Telephone, Email, Internet, Social Networking Media)

5. TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Traditional media is broadly defined but is generally segmented into the following:
- External media (such as TV, newspapers, magazines, radio, public addresses, sermons or journals); and
- Internal media (e.g. Together Magazine, newsletters, BA websites, emails as well as any other communication originating from BA).

External Media

- BA personnel need to refer any requests from external media immediately to the Director of Ministries (DOM).
- BA personnel are not permitted to discuss BA issues with the external media, without the express permission of the Director of Ministries (See media content policy in this document).
- The Director of Ministries is to inform the Assembly Council Chair of any communication with the external media.

Internal Media

BA personnel will follow the standard operating procedures for any 'internal' style communication. Personnel must ensure that all official communication is approved by the Communications Manager before distribution.

6. USE OF ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS

BA personnel's use of IT equipment and systems is primarily intended for BA related communications. BA personnel need to ensure only reasonable personal use of BA's computer systems and Internet gateway is acceptable, and this is provided such use does not interfere with the performance of their duties, or expose them or BA to any potential liability or claims which could bring them or BA into disrepute nor allow access by malicious software to BA systems.

However, BA recognises that access to electronic communication is useful for general research and the organisation of social activities. BA will not restrict reasonable use of its systems for such purposes. However, the use of BA equipment and systems is subject to Electronic Communication Guidelines (see below).

During the course of employment, BA personnel are expected to adhere to BA's guidelines for the use of BA computers and its computer systems.

BA personnel need to be aware that it is not permissible to:
- cause a computer to perform any function with intent to secure unauthorised access to any computer program or data or to make unauthorised modification to any computer program or data;
- by-pass any security mechanisms or access controls that may be built into any computer system; and
- access, download and/or distribute material that is otherwise discriminatory, illegal, or likely to cause offence, via BA's systems (this is a BA disciplinary offence which can lead to summary dismissal and possible criminal prosecution).

7. ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES

Electronic communications include (but are not limited to) use of the internet, intranet, email, electronic bulletin boards, instant messages services, mobile phone SMS, news and discussion groups such as Facebook or Twitter, and any on-line services which send, receive and search for information.

BA personnel need to consider their use of electronic communications including:
- Appropriate use
- Personal Privacy
- Privacy of Others
- Security
- Respect of Confidentiality
- Liability
- Email
- Internet
  - Inappropriate use
  - Messaging
  - Blocking strategies
  - Disclaimers
  - Information downloads
  - Social Networking Media

- Facebook, Twitter, Blogs or similar networks

Appropriate Use

BA personnel must not use the system in an inappropriate manner. BA considers 'inappropriate use' to include any use which may be harassing, discriminatory or likely to cause offense. For example, BA personnel must not send messages to individuals or groups that include abusive or offensive language about a person's race, age, disability, theology, political view, gender or sexual orientation.

Personal Privacy

Electronic communications and specifically emails are not private communications. BA personnel should not view electronic communications as confidential, secure or private. One easy test of this principle is to consider whether you would be comfortable with your supervisor or co-workers reading your commentary.

Privacy of Others

When using social media personnel must respect the privacy of all persons associated with the BA. Staff must not discuss others without their permission, and must ask permission before posting their picture. Social media should not be used for internal communications amongst fellow personnel. [See *BA Privacy Policy*.]

Security

Any information sent or retrieved across the internet or intranet (which includes emails) can be intercepted and possibly altered by another person. Accordingly, before transmitting information via the internet or sending email, BA personnel should consider whether that form of transmission is appropriate.

Respect of Confidentiality

While it is acceptable for personnel to discuss their work and have a dialogue with various communities, it isn't acceptable to publish or disclose confidential information. Personnel must take care not to purposefully or inadvertently disclose any information that is confidential or proprietary to the BA. The privacy of all volunteers is also to be respected.

Liability

Any electronic communications sent by BA personnel may be attributable to BA, and as such may be assumed to be a statement of BA's position for which it may be held liable. BA personnel need to ensure that the content is accurate and care is exercised to avoid mistakes, misstatements, misrepresentations and defamatory imputations.

Defamation occurs when a statement or publication injures the reputation of another person, and can lead to a civil action or a criminal offence under relevant legislation.

Email Usage

BA personnel will ensure that:
- all emails are polite and respectful of others and their opinions;
- BA email addresses are not used when subscribing to non-work related newsletters, bulletins, email groups or websites;

- all attachments and emails from unknown origins are deleted without opening them to view their contents;
- advice is given to BA immediately when any documents or files are found to contain viruses. The person sending the infected file should also be requested to install or update their virus checking software to prevent further contamination; and
- they respond to any system support request to reduce the size of email files in a responsible manner.

Content

BA personnel will ensure that:
- good judgement and common sense is used when creating and distributing email messages;
- they are aware of possibly being liable for any defamatory or misleading or deceptive statements contained in email messages;
- addresses and spelling are carefully checked prior to sending any email correspondence.

Personal Use

BA acknowledges that on occasions email may be used for 'personal use'. If email is personal BA personnel should make it clear that the message is not being sent on behalf of BA. Neither one's work signature nor the BA logo is to be used with personal emails.

Prohibited Use

Email (including personal email) cannot be used to:
- send email messages which contain inappropriate or offensive material;
- distribute electronic chain letters;
- send unauthorised email from another user's email address or impersonating another user;
- send non-urgent or non-work related emails to large numbers of users at any time;
- send personal email to any person who does not reasonably wish to receive it; and
- harass, bully, insult or objectify others.

Discovery

BA personnel should be aware that email communications may be discoverable in any legal proceedings in the same way as any other communication.

Email Management

BA personnel will:
- use appropriate language;
- check emails regularly;
- file and organise emails; and
- delete unnecessary messages regularly, especially those with large attachments.

Internet

BA requires personnel to use the Internet in a lawful and ethical manner, while protecting all proprietary information belonging to BA. In all cases, use of BA's Internet gateway must be guided by common sense and the ethics, security and employment policies of BA. Limited personal use of BA's Internet gateway is acceptable only when carried in accordance with the following:

- it does not interfere with work responsibilities or those of other BA personnel;
- it does not interfere with the use of the Internet for BA's business purposes;
- it is not used to operate a business other than that of BA's business;
- it is not used for political or similar promotional activities; and
- it does not result in undue expense for BA.
- it isn't used for other business endeavours.

Under no circumstances should BA's Internet gateway be used to offend or harass other employees or third parties, or be used to the detriment of BA's reputation or business activities. Improper use of the Internet may result in disciplinary proceedings.

Social Networking Media (SMN) (e.g. Webpages, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, Bebo, YouTube, Wikis, Tumblr, Behance, Instagram, online forums and blogs)

Social networking sites, such as Facebook, are becoming increasingly popular in organising people's lives and communications, but they can also cross over the boundary of work versus private life from time to time. BA personnel need to be aware that anything said or published on SMN's is relatively public and can be regarded in the same way as comment passed to a BA colleague in the office or as a position held by BA.

BA personnel are strongly encouraged to use a general disclaimer on their personal social media site/s, such as:

> *"The views expressed are my own and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Baptist Association of Churches in NSW & ACT or its affiliates and partners."*

BA personnel need to be mindful of personal or confidential postings becoming public (in relation to BA matters), and the amount of time that can be consumed updating personal postings and the potential for lost BA productivity in viewing new postings. BA personnel should be aware of how much information they are revealing, and how to secure and maintain privacy. Personal postings should not use their workplace signature or the BA logo.

Interaction on social media (whether personal site/s or official BA site/s or comments on unrelated sites) should have the following characteristics:
- the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) – "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.";
- respect (respectful interactions);
- transparency, accuracy, and honesty;
- apologising, where appropriate, for causing offense or hurt.

Before posting, ask yourself:
- Does this post reflect those characteristics?
- Am I comfortable with what I am about to post (and with a wide range of people potentially viewing this)?

- Am I comfortable with personally owning and being associated with this comment?
- Will this comment inflame or offend your audience?
- Am I happy to be responsible for the consequences that might arise from this post or comment?
- Am I posting this in a gracious, respectful, prayerful, Christlike manner?

BA allows the positive use of social media as a means of actively engaging in the marketplace of ideas. The use of social media by BA personnel during work time should be focused on areas that are related to areas of expertise, BA's activities and/or the fulfilment of workplace responsibilities (as described in the position description). Social media is not to be used in a way that contravenes this policy's guidelines for general Internet use, or in a way that may bring BA into disrepute.

8. ADDITIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY INFORMATION

Personal participation in online forums and social networking sites such as, but not limited to, Webpages, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, Bebo, YouTube, Wikis, Tumblr, Behance, Instagram, online forums and blogs, are to be treated as public. When personal participation impacts the BA in a negative manner it becomes an employment issue that may require performance management.

The public representation of BA in online forums and social networking sites is the sole responsibility of the Director of Ministries & Communications Manager and is required to be approved by the Director of Ministries.

Definitions

- **Social Media** - Websites and applications used for social networking.
- **Online Social Networks** - A service, platform, or site that focuses on building and reflecting social relationships among people.

Procedure
- Never identify or discuss confidential details of BA, BA personnel, BA Churches or Affiliated Groups on social media platform.
- Keep work discussions or conversations out of social media to ensure confidential information is not exposed and to avoid imposing on the personal time of other colleagues.
- Do not post material that may damage the reputation of BA, BA personnel, BA Churches or Affiliated Groups.
- Be professional, responsible and thoughtful about how you present yourself in online social networks. Carefully consider if social media is the appropriate communication channel and do not post any statement on social media that is not intended for wide public distribution.
- Do not publish personal thoughts that may be misunderstood as expressing BA positions. For example, a BA staff member or volunteer making comments on political or theological issues need to be clear that they are not communicating an official BA position but rather their personal view on the issue.
- Contributions to all approved BA social media platforms including Facebook are to be forwarded to the BA Communications Manager for approval and posting.
- Never create a BA social media profile without authorisation. Requests to form new social media platforms that represent BA are to be sent to the Communications Manager for approval.

- Make sure online activities do not interfere with your work or commitments to BA Churches. Personal use is preferred to be in your own time and is not to interfere with your employment duties or those of your colleagues.
- All employees and volunteers participating in social media should do so with the understanding that BA monitors this environment for any mention or part mention of the organisation's name, and current issues. For example, a Twitter message sent about BA Assembly will be seen by BA.
- Employees and volunteers found to be in breach of this policy and procedure will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Virtual worlds present a number of unique circumstances which may not be covered in this policy and procedure.

9. APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Refer to other BMC policies:
- *Code of Conduct*
- *Equal Opportunity and Anti-Bullying*
- *Privacy Policy*

10. PUBLIC MEDIA INTERACTION

Our commitment is to effectively respond to the media, wider community and stakeholders in a professional, timely and positive manner. All contact with the media, including media releases and interviews, will be managed by the Director of Ministries & Communications Manager. No employee or volunteer is authorised to make contact with the media without consent from the Director of Ministries. [In the absence of the Director of Ministries, consent must be sought from the Chair of the Assembly Council.]

Definitions
- **Public Media** - includes television, radio broadcast, newspapers, magazines and other communication channels that reach a wide group of people.

If media make contact with you:

1. Immediately notify the Director of Ministries or Communications Manager.
2. Take their details and ask them to get in touch with the Director of Ministries or Communications manager who handle BA' media contact.
3. If they persist, explain that you are not authorised to speak with the media.
4. Never speak 'off the record'; always assume everything said may be used and/or published.
5. Never release sensitive information that the media may get hold of and use to damage the reputation of BA. This includes all official BA documents classed as confidential.
6. Never let media on site unless agreed with the Director of Ministries & Communications Manager.
7. If you are inadvertently drawn into contact with the media that was not prearranged please advise the Director of Ministries or Communications Manager with details of what has occurred. Examples may include if a camera crew approached you outside your workplace and asked you to comment about a BA related issue, or when a journalist has approached you on your doorstep requesting an interview.

Report Potential Issues

1. If you become aware of an issue that could result in damage to BA's reputation contact Director of Ministries & Communications manager immediately.
2. The Director of Ministries & Communications Manager will assess all issues reported and decide whether or not others need to be informed or briefed.

In A Crisis

1. The Director of Ministries & Communications Manager will develop holding statements which will be distributed to key personnel who may be asked by the media for comment. If you are provided with this holding statement it will be accompanied by instructions on when to give this to media and when you can use it to speak with the media directly.
2. If necessary the Director of Ministries & Communications Manager will develop and distribute a media release.

Good News Stories

BA desire to promote their good news stories through various media channels and encourages news ideas, story leads, and draft media releases from across the association of churches. Please contact the Communications Manager with these stories.

11. ACCOUNTABILITY

All personnel are accountable for acting within the guidelines of this Communications Policy. Disregard of this policy will lead to disciplinary procedures (as set out in the relevant BA policy document).

If you are concerned about any dimension of this policy or about whether you are acting appropriately in any of these areas, please speak with the member of the Baptist Ministry Centre Leadership Team to whom you are accountable.

12. FURTHER INFORMATION

If you wish further details or explanation of the application of this policy, please see either the Director of Ministries or the Communications Manager.