

# Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church Communications Policy January 2021

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## Purpose

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are also being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” ([Ephesians 2:19-22](#)).

When we communicate effectively to our community and to those who are part of the Fair Oaks’ body and ministry, we participate in building a sense of belonging and ownership in this “household of God”. Our goal is that each member, visitor and neighbor sees themselves as an insider, fully informed and invited to fully participate in the life and ministry of this congregation.

Fair Oaks’ Communications Policies and Guidelines are intended to present clear guidelines to staff, lay leaders, and congregants to help them use communications tools to build this sense of belonging and welcome.

The policies apply to printed materials, mass emailings, ongoing publications, bulletin boards, interior and exterior signs and to all electronic, social media groups and pages, online scheduling tools and other electronic communications media or messages identified with Fair Oaks

Presbyterian Church and any of the church's ministries, committees or groups, online or mobile-based communications tools, whether controlled by Fair Oaks or hosted on other social platforms.

Because technology and various platforms evolve over time, these policies are meant to apply to all communications channels and tools now and in the future, whether or not specified by name or in use at this time.

The Community Outreach and Engagement Committee is responsible for implementing and maintaining these policies and guidelines. This policy will be reviewed annually.

## General Policies

The **purpose of mass communication** (via Constant Contact, Realm, and the e-Weekly, for example) is to support and serve the congregation in connecting to one another and to the work and life of the church. Mass communication processes should be used in such a way that individuals of all ages and levels of technological sophistication are kept informed of news, events and concerns of the church.

Out of respect for staff time and resources, all mass communications should be sent to the church office 5 days prior to publication. These communications should be reviewed by a member of the staff before publication or release on behalf of the church. Communications specifically concerned with church activities or events should be submitted to staff for review after first being reviewed by the pertinent committee moderator. Unauthorized mass communication using the church name and targeting all or selected congregants and/or external audiences is not permitted.

In this day of rapid media transmission, it is advised that members of the congregation not speak to reporters as representatives of the church without advance knowledge and coordination with the pastors. All **media inquiries** should be directed to the church office, which will work with the pastors to respond.

**Announcements** to be made at the beginning of the worship hour are due to the office by noon on Thursday. If time allows, exceptions may be made for late announcements brought forward by a committee moderator, active task force, or staff. Announcements to be included in the worship bulletin are due to the office on by noon on Thursday.

Fair Oaks does not publish **commercial messages** promoting for-profit businesses or professional practices, including offers of free products or services intended to promote a for-profit concern. Individuals' **advertisements** to buy or sell goods and services or concerning employment opportunities are not appropriate for the church publications, including social media pages and bulletin boards. This does not apply to church events raising funds for ministries of the church.

All information maintained by Fair Oaks in its **member database** is kept private. Fair Oaks does not release names, contact information or other personally identifiable information, or provide

information to third parties, about individuals' health status, living conditions or other private matters. Should a request for information about an individual be received by the church, it will be referred to the individual or their immediate family to respond to as they wish.

Fair Oaks obeys **copyright laws** and publishes only materials for which the proper licensing fees have been paid and/or permissions secured.

## Photography, Videography and Audio Recording

Fair Oaks sometimes records or photographs services, programs and events of the church. Photography, videography and audio recording are allowed so long as they do not disrupt or detract from worship or ministry.

Photographers, videographers and audiographers are encouraged to share their photographs and audio/video recordings with the church office for use in church publications.

Photographers, videographers and audiographers should ask clergy, musicians' or speakers' permission before photographing or recording services, classes and other live presentations, especially small groups. Any instance when such technology would disturb the worship, prayer or small group dynamics should be considered before taking photographs or making video or audio recordings.

Flash photography is not permitted during church services and should be used sparingly during classes and events, and only after gaining permission from the person leading the class or event, to minimize distraction.

Photos of minor children should not be used unless permission has been obtained from a parent/guardian within the past year using the Child-Youth Registration Form. Minor children are not to be identified by name in photographs and videos published by the church.

Adults who do not want any likeness of themselves to be used in church publications should notify the church office. Every effort will be made to exclude them when shooting photographs, although they may still appear in group shots.

## Photographic Images

Photographs submitted for use in church publications are welcomed, provided the contributor owns the image or has secured permission from the owner to supply it to the church for publication and has secured the permission of all persons shown in the image (unless the image is of a large group and/or individuals, especially children, are not readily identifiable). In submitting photographic images for use by the church, contributors grant Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church non-exclusive rights to edit and publish the images in various print and digital media as determined by the church office. Photo credits are usually given.

## Digital & Social Media Communications

**All General Communications Policies apply to Internet and social media channels.**

With or without approval of the person(s) involved, Fair Oaks does not render pastoral care or publish private, confidential information about individual congregants, staff members, or employees through any web site, public social media channel, or other public forum. Prayer requests are handled according to established policy, through the church office.

Digital communications received by staff and clergy will be treated with confidentiality and respect to the best of our abilities and following these policies.

While clergy and staff intend to respect confidentiality of electronic communications, the inherent risks such as hacking and sharing or reposting always exists, regardless of the intent of the original author or the staff. **For this reason, congregants and clergy/staff should be aware that all communication sent digitally (email, social networking sites, notes or posts, etc.) should be considered NOT CONFIDENTIAL.** All digital communications should be considered as potentially part of the permanent, public domain. Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent, just as a window in the door provides transparency in the physical world.

In the virtual world healthy boundaries and Fair Oaks' Safe Practices Policy must be adhered to as they are in the physical world. Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world.

The Fair Oaks website contains hyperlinks only to non-commercial web sites. Fair Oaks website will not link to other websites endorsing any politician's or political party's campaign.

Fair Oaks disclaims any association with or responsibility for uncontrollable content displayed on third-party web sites, such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, especially when content shared/posted is in violation of these communications policies. **Care should especially be taken when reposting a third party's comments or posts**, since reposting assumes agreement with and responsibility for its content.

Only the office manager or pastors may create new social media sites, pages or groups on behalf of Fair Oaks. Any existing site, page or group set up on behalf of the church, using the church name, must include the office manager or pastors as an administrator and must be set to require administrator approval of posts.

Staff and congregants who set up accounts on behalf of the church for the purpose of using online tools (for example, Sign-Up Genius, Google docs, etc.) are asked to provide a user name and password to the church office in case access to the account is needed.

## Interactions with Children and Youth

In the virtual world, Fair Oaks observes healthy boundaries and safe church practices as in the physical world. The church's Safe Practices Policy is the guiding document for determining appropriate communication approaches for children and youth. To the extent that what is stated in this Communications Policy conflicts with the provisions of the Safe Practices Policy, the provisions of the Safe Practices policy will govern.

## Interactions with Adults

Congregants may act as administrators of pages to support programs and ministries of the church, provided they are familiar with and agree to follow the church's social media policies.

## Video Chats, Blogs or Video Blogs

Video chats with youth should include two adult participants. Participants in a video chat or blog should consider what will be shown in the video such as their surroundings, their clothing/state of dress, etc. Those engaged in ministry with youth should consider the content and nature of any post that will be read by or visible to youth. Your voice is often considered the voice of the church. Video chats (e.g., Zoom or Teams meetings) in which minors participate should not be recorded without the consent of the minor participants' parents/guardians.

## Publishing/Posting Content Online

Church leadership must inform participants when they are being videoed because church buildings are not considered public space.

Any video of worship services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media **MUST** be preceded by posted signs that indicate the service will be broadcast.

Signed Media Release forms must be obtained from parents or guardians of minor children who will or may participate in activities that may be photographed or videoed for distribution.

Photos that are published on church sponsored sites should not include name or contact information for minor children or youth.