

Facebook Guidelines for Leaders Quail Holla Youth Ministries

Social media is a relatively new technology that has found its place in mainstream American culture, and, therefore, is in many ways uncharted territory for ministries and leaders. Like all new technologies and means of communication, there is going to be trial-and-error along the way to acceptable usage that builds the mission and witness of the church. With that in mind, these guidelines are meant clarify some of the more nebulous aspects of social media communication with youth and their families while relying on common sense for others. Many of the following clarifications draw on the wise leadership of St. Paul as he counseled and encouraged the churches he planted on his missionary journeys. While Paul obviously does not speak about social media, much of the direction he gives on being the Church applies to how we make Christ present on the internet through our ministry. The purpose of these policies is to equip leaders with guidelines that will help them to maintain the peace, unity, and purity of our youth ministry within the larger context of QHPC and the Church.

You would not be a leader in QHYM if we did not trust you to appropriately lead our youth in person, and the same goes for how you lead on Facebook. Therefore, it is my hope that these guidelines clear up any questions you or other leaders might have about appropriate interaction and leadership in a relatively new ministry context.

1. Friend Requests & Other Invitations

- a. Friend requests should be sent from youth to adults, *not* adults to youth. There are two reasons for this:
 - i. Ours is a relational ministry where adults are missionaries to a youth world. A friend request from a youth to an adult is a sign of acceptance that demonstrates a level of trust and intimacy has been reached. This is a tremendous asset to relationship building as it is an important “mile marker.”
 - ii. While we may not perceive ourselves as “powerful,” there is a power differential between adults and youth and a youth may feel like *s/he has* to accept a request if it comes from an adult. Again, we want to be admitted to *their* world on *their* terms. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7 Paul describes how he, Silas, and Timothy were “like children” (or “gentle” or “meek” depending on the translation) when they were sowing Gospel seeds among the people who would form the church at Thessaloniki. Thus we want to cultivate the same meek spirit among the youth we are just meeting.
- b. This same concept applies to page suggestions, app invitations, etc. Please limit invitations/suggestions to youth whom you know well and then limit invitations/suggestions to things directly related to our ministry or other faith/discipleship topics. Again, feel free to respond to any invitations from youth, but exercise discretion when sending out invitations.
- c. Games are a great way to interact and have fun with our youth outside of our ministry programming and there are tons of games on Facebook and mobile devices. Feel free to interact with youth through games but be sensitive to the fact that some games have a cost to download or try to sell upgrades/extra features within the game. We don’t want to unintentionally encourage youth to spend money to interact with us.

2. Status Updates/Posting Photos

- a. As adults, there are things we are permitted through the law and Christian freedom that the youth we lead are not. For that reason all leaders should exercise careful consideration when posting about age-restricted items or activities. This idea does not come from a place of legalism, but rather of sensitivity to those whom Paul might consider a “weaker brother or sister” (see Romans 14). For instance, middle schoolers often have difficulty distinguishing between proper and improper use of alcohol. Seeing a picture of a leader having a beer could cause them confusion about the moral character of the leader. This does not mean that leaders need to be dishonest or hide aspects of

their lives, but we do need to be sensitive that a picture on Facebook does not tell a whole story and that it would be easy for youth to draw an incorrect conclusion. Other examples of topics that should receive careful consideration before posting:

- i. Tobacco use
 - ii. Movies, books, and/or music with adult content
 - iii. Commentary on scandal, celebrities, etc.
 - b. Please note that there are ways to share status updates and photos without youth being able to view them. Feel free to make use of the ability to make posts visible only to certain lists of friends that you create. Again, this is not an attempt to stifle your freedom as a Christian, but to be sensitive to our weaker brothers and sisters.
 - c. Also worth due consideration are status updates on politics or faith/religion that could be interpreted as divisive. When tempted to weigh in on one side or another of an issue, please be mindful that the Spirit that animates us to be the Body of Christ in this world is a spirit of *unity*. Or as Paul puts it in Ephesians 4:3: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” When we are confronted with a seemingly clear-cut but divisive choice, it is helpful to look to Christ’s example when in a comparable situation. Time and time again Christ would point the disciples and pharisees and anyone else to a *third* choice, a Godly choice. Facebook is a powerful venue for the witness and testimony of God’s children who choose to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) while the rest of the news feed is tearing each other apart. This is not to say that there is not objective truth about right and wrong, but when stating subjective opinions we need to put the emphasis on building consensus rather than walls.
 - d. And finally, Paul has some good general advice on posting *anything* on Facebook: “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Colossians 4:6).
3. Photos and Tagging
 - a. Facebook is on the forefront of changing how we perceive privacy on the Internet and we need to be sensitive to the multitude of attitudes towards that privacy. Starting in fall 2012 we will be requesting parents to submit a rather detailed media release outlining whether or not their children’s names and faces can be tagged in photos and videos we post to Facebook. Once permission is obtained we will make available a list of those whom we have permission to tag. This is an extra step, but it is important to protect the privacy of those entrusting us with their children.
 - b. On the other hand, whenever it is possible to take pictures, do so (and tag them)! A busy and active QHYM (www.facebook.com/quailholla) page is attractive to the friends and family and friends of friends of our youth! It’s the equivalent of having a big event on QHPC’s front yard. See the youth director for the mobile upload email address so you can send in pictures you take on your phone.
4. Checking In
 - a. If checking in at a location while accompanied by a minor or minors, only check yourself in so we do not give away the location of minors.
5. Interaction with Youth
 - a. Hebrews 3:13 tells us to “encourage each other daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” Facebook gives us an excellent opportunity to encourage our youth in a variety of ways: let them know they’re in your prayers when they post about a bad day, offer reassurance and hope when they post about insecurity or fear, offer congratulations for accomplishments, and so on. Beyond encouraging them, your comments allow their friends to know that there is a community of adults who care for their friend and gives those friends a glimpse into that community.
 - b. Facebook can also be a venue for immaturity and poor decision making. If you see a post by one of our youth that is distasteful, immoral, and/or something that would concern you as a parent, take some time to reflect and consider a response. If you choose to confront him or her, be gentle and loving and state your concern for him or her as well as

- what you found negative. Share scripture that speaks to the situation when appropriate, but be sure to speak *truth in love* (Ephesians 4:15). Invite conversation and listen especially; there is often more to the story than what appears in a status or photo. Also, please consider *where* this conversation happens. While praise and encouragement is appropriate for public posts, correction and rebuke should happen via a FB message or chat or, better yet, in person or over the phone. Should a conversation not go well or a situation escalates in some way, do not hesitate to approach the youth director and/or pastor for help. Please be aware that it may be helpful to see the actual conversation if it took place over Facebook. This is not intended to be an invasion of privacy but rather to ensure we have the full story and thus able to handle the issue effectively.
- c. In the case of something illegal, self-destructive, and/or harmful to others, be prepared to take more direct and immediate action. If possible and necessary, take a screenshot of a status or save an image so that there is a record of it later. If you do not feel comfortable confronting the youth and/or his/her parents, *please contact* the youth director and/or the pastor. Examples of this might be posts or photos concerning:
 - i. Suicide
 - ii. Drug or alcohol use
 - iii. Cutting/self-mutilation
 - iv. Bullying
 - v. Vandalism
 - d. In all cases, please keep the youth director and/or pastor aware of any and all situations so we might provide you with counsel as you walk with our youth and their parents. Also, please review the “Policy on Self-Destructive Behaviors” periodically.
6. Interaction with Other Leaders
 - a. The community we form as leaders can be a great model for the community of our Youth Ministry. Interacting with, encouraging, and appreciating each other publicly on Facebook invites the same behavior from our youth.
 7. Our Commitment to You
 - a. These policies have little meaning or significance if you do not feel supported, trusted, or heard. You would not be involved in this ministry if you did not discern God’s call to shepherd our young people, so the goal of QHPC’s staff is to make your pursuit of that goal as fulfilling and enjoyable as possible. Therefore we will do everything we can to keep communication open, be proactive in dealing with upcoming issues, and give you the space and time you need to develop as a Jesus follower and leader. But to do any of that, we need to know what’s on your mind from time to time. If you have any questions, comments, suggestions, etc., please don’t hesitate to share them!

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider these guidelines! Your continued leadership in QHYM is appreciated more than you know!