

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

1. **PURPOSE**

Collier Street United Church [CSUC] is committed to providing a safe and sacred space for the varying needs of its members, adherents, and the community. We strive to ensure that our interactions and communications represent our values and support healthy relationships as we remain centred with God, in Barrie, on YOU!

This policy is to:

- Ensure consistent, high-quality, and appropriate communications to and with all members of CSUC, prospective members, adherents and the neighbouring community;
- Ensure all communications are accurate and appropriate within the context of a United Church faith community;
- Effectively utilize the limited budgeted resources for approved communications; and
- Protect the privacy of all church members and associates.

2. **POLICY STATEMENT**

The Communications Policy outlines the values we wish to reflect in our relationships within the Christian community of CSUC. This includes relationships among and between congregants, adherents, leaders, staff, and others with whom we may be in the conversation. Further, it is intended to present clear guidelines and expectations concerning our communications with each other and the most effective use of communications tools on behalf of the church.

3. **SCOPE**

The Communications Policy applies to all types of engagement, interactions, and communications within, related to and on behalf of CSUC. This includes communications between congregants, leaders, staff, volunteers and others. Communication may be conducted in a variety of ways, including in person (i.e. face-to-face), verbally (i.e. by phone), in writing (i.e. hardcopy or electronic, printed materials, bulletin board posts, internal and external signs), via electronic means (i.e. email, social media comment, website post or comment), etc. Because technology and various platforms evolve, this policy is 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.

4. **PRINCIPLES**

The following states the values we wish to reflect in all our relationships within the Christian community of CSUC. This includes relationships among and between congregants, leaders, staff, and others we may converse with.

4.1 **Caring for each other**

- We seek to develop ways of relating to each other that are consistent with the love and compassion lived and taught by Jesus.
- This means going beyond ourselves to act in supportive and caring ways for others in the community.
- In keeping with our vision statement, we focus on creating a community of caring and unconditional acceptance among members of our CSUC community, those new to our church community, and those in the broader community.

- We recognize that our congregation exists within a broader community: locally, nationally, and globally, and we seek to speak and act for the greater good of all.

4.2 Communication

- Living as a Christian and in community means treating one another with respect, honesty, kindness, and openness, whether in agreement or disagreement.
- We strive to be as willing to listen as we are to speak.
- Building relationships means speaking from an “I” position without blaming others.
- We are respectful in our speech and our responses to one another.
- We do our best to refrain from gossip and offhand or intentional critical comments about a third party in the presence of others.
- We use email communication with care and refrain from using it in areas of sensitivity and criticism.

4.3 Meetings: Team, Board and Congregation

- In our Team, Board and Congregational meetings, we seek to be as concerned about how we conduct meetings, communicate with each other and make decisions as we are about the issues.
- We expect our leaders to consider the opinions of the broader congregation in making decisions but are also cognizant of the need for leadership in decision-making.
- We expect our leaders to inform the congregation through frequent and open communication, forums, and other ways of staying in touch.
- We expect the leaders to honour the confidentiality of their office. We use due process in all meetings when taking the initiative or making decisions.
- At the beginning of Team and Board meetings, we commit together to honouring the Covenant as follows:

Covenant (We say together):

*May we act with humility and respect;
 May the words we speak show truth and wisdom;
 May our thoughts be honest and courageous; and
 May everything we think, say and do,
 show gratitude and be wrapped in love.*

- We regularly review how well we have honoured the Covenant at the end of Team and Board meetings.

4.4 Disagreements

- We honour diversity and the uniqueness of each individual and strive for the inclusion of all.
- When we encounter situations with which we disagree, we will first address our concern with the appropriate person or group in a spirit of curiosity and openness.
- Mistakes and inappropriate choices are understood as part of a process from which we learn.
- We recognize that conflict is natural and view it as an opportunity for growth.
- When conflict arises, we acknowledge that it exists; we approach it fearlessly; we address it respectfully and in a timely manner; and we seek resolution in positive, non-adversarial ways.
- When we feel we must speak “our truth” to another person, we endeavour, as the Scripture says, to “speak the truth in love.”
- When congregants do not agree with decisions made, dissenting opinions are expressed respectfully, and those who disagree seek to find ways to continue in a spirit that supports the community. Where that is not possible, we conduct ourselves in a manner that does not adversely affect the community or our integrity.

4.5 Personal Responsibility and Power

- We realize that the life and mission of the congregation is the collective responsibility of all; therefore, we offer our share of support in presence, finances, and gifts of time and ability.
- We recognize that our strength as a church community is the active involvement of our people. As we encourage community members to be involved and to take on leadership roles in our various teams and initiatives, we acknowledge our joint responsibility to nurture and provide support and appropriate opportunities for skill development and personal growth.
- We celebrate the use of personal power and influence for the empowerment of others and the development and implementation of community goals. We strive to use our power in ways that respect individuals and the community, leaving room for the participation of others.
- We follow due process when taking initiatives or making decisions. We avoid conflict of interest in decision-making and dealings on behalf of the congregation.

4.6 General

- We govern and conduct ourselves in ways consistent with the ethos and the policy of the United Church of Canada.

5. TYPES OF COMMUNICATIONS

5.1 Congregational Communication

All communication will be handled appropriately. When communication is sent to the Church Board by members/adherents and others, it will be addressed to the Secretary. Outside of a Board meeting, the Secretary and the Minister will ensure that appropriate steps are taken for the communication to be addressed, communicating to the Board when it next meets. During the Board meeting, a summary of information will be shared. Additional information may be requested from the correspondent as needed. Collier shares information relating to personnel for information and decision **after** it has been appropriately or adequately addressed by the Ministry and Personnel (M&P) Team.

5.2 Mass Communication

The **purpose of mass communication** (i.e., e-newsletter) is to support and serve clergy, staff, and leaders in furthering the ministries of CSUC and promoting the programs to the church members and community. CSUC's mass communication initiatives serve active members of all ages by informing them of news, events and concerns of the church using print and digital communication channels. In the interest of intentional management of the communications process, all official mass communications intended to represent or be distributed on behalf of CSUC or its ministries must be sent to the church office for review and approval 7 (seven) days before publication. These communications need not be created by staff, but they must be reviewed and approved before publication or release on behalf of the church. Unauthorized mass communication using the CSUC name and targeting all or selected members and external audiences is prohibited. Regular, programmatic emails to selected members/adherents may be approved for extended periods on a case-by-case basis.

5.3 Media Inquiries

The Minister and the Board Chair are the official representatives to speak on behalf of the congregation on media releases or to give media updates. All **media inquiries** should be directed to the Minister or Board Chair, and appropriate follow-up will be done in a timely manner. Event Coordinators may be the spokesperson for their event only, with advance coordination with the Minister or Board Chair.

5.4 Publications

CSUC **publications** are to communicate news and information for and about CSUC. In the spirit of good stewardship of its limited resources of staff time, editorial space, and audience attention, CSUC limits its publications to promoting only ministries, programs and events sponsored or co-sponsored by CSUC, Shining Waters Regional Council and the United Church of Canada. Exceptions may be made if there is a similar or complementary mission and an established connection or ongoing relationship between the sponsoring organization and CSUC. The interest or involvement of CSUC members *as individuals* does not confirm sponsorship by the church itself. Using CSUC facilities does not necessarily establish such a relationship.

5.5 Print, Electronic Newsletters and Announcements

The Minister or designate acts as editor of **print and electronic newsletters and announcements**. That is, determines to schedule and directs church office staff and the communications portfolio board member regarding placement of articles and announcements in the various publications and websites. Materials submitted by clergy, staff, members, and others for use in CSUC publications may be edited for clarity, style, tone, spelling, grammar and length or to comport with policies or the mission of CSUC, Shining Waters Regional Council and the United Church of Canada. Space limitations and production schedules may preclude the publication of submissions. Inappropriate or editorially unsuitable materials, as determined by the editor, will not be published. **Any changes deemed significant by the editor shall be reviewed** with the original author before publication. Every effort will be made to retain the original tone of the message.

Although there are often exceptions, announcements are usually started about four weeks before the event is promoted or, if applicable, the registration deadline. Reports are generally presented in chronological order and continue in the publications, as space permits, until the registration deadline has passed or the event has occurred. All **event announcements** should include a descriptive title, date, time, location, cost and registration deadline, if applicable, and a contact person's name, title, phone number and email address; and announcements should be written in the third person, ideally with the major points included in the opening sentence. **Bulletin notices are due in or to the office on Mondays** to be included in the week's publications; submissions via email or website are preferred; however, a written form for announcements is also available in the church office. **At least one month's advance notice is appreciated for events requesting brochures, posters and social media campaigns.**

5.6 Commercial Messages and Advertisements

CSUC 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 inappropriate for church publications, including social media pages and bulletin boards. This does not apply to church fundraisers, raising funds for church programs, such as silent auctions, holiday fairs, etc.

5.7 CSUC Member/Adherent Directory

Printed copies of the **CSUC member directory** are available at the front desk for use by congregants in contacting fellow members individually and carrying out the church's ministries. The directory is not to be used to create contact lists for solicitations on behalf of individuals or other organizations. Outdated copies should be shredded to protect identity and confidentiality. Electronic copies are available upon request from the church office.

All information maintained by CSUC in its **member database** is kept private. In keeping with privacy laws, CSUC does not release members' names, contact information or other personally identifiable information or provide information to third parties about members' health status, living conditions or other private matters. Should a request for information about a member be received by the church, it will be referred to the member or their immediate family for a response.

5.8 Copyright Laws

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

5.9 CSUC Church Logo

The CSUC logo should be used only in connection with official programs and ministries of the church and only in materials and contexts that reflect favourably on CSUC.

5.10 Photography and Videography

- CSUC clergy, staff, A/V operators, congregation members and visitors sometimes record services, programs and CSUC events, architectural features, gardens and other scenes around the church. Photography and videography are allowed so long as they do not disrupt or detract from the service or event.
- Photographers and videographers are encouraged to share their photographs and videos with the church, with files and copies, to the church office for use in church publications.
- Photographers and videographers should ask clergy, musician or speakers' permission before photographing or recording services, classes and other live presentations or tiny groups. Any instance when such technology would disturb the worship, prayer or small group dynamics should be considered before taking photographs or making a video.
- Flash photography is not permitted during church services. It should be used sparingly during classes and events and only after gaining permission from the person leading the class or event to minimize distraction.
- Minor children are not to be identified by name in photographs and videos published by the church.
- Individuals who do not want any likeness of themselves or their minor children to be used in church publications should notify the Minister or Office Administrator. Every effort will be made to exclude them when shooting photographs, although they may still appear in group shots.
- Wedding photographers should refer to the Wedding Guide for further details regarding wedding photographs.

5.11 Digital & Social Media Communications

- **The Principles outlined in Section 4.2 apply to all interpersonal, digital, and social media communications by congregants, leaders, staff, volunteers, and others.**
- All CSUC clergy, staff and leaders should consider the content and nature of any post or re-post that will be read by or visible to members and friends of the church. **Your voice is often considered the voice of the church, even in cases of personal social media accounts.** The respectful, appropriate language honouring all persons' dignity is encouraged. Common sense, discretion and decency should be employed. Special care should be taken to transcend differences, embrace similarities with love and inclusion, and foster peace and respectful relationships.
- With or without the approval of the person(s) involved, CSUC does not render pastoral care or publish private, confidential information about congregants, leaders, staff, and others through any website, public social media channel, or another public forum.

- Digital communications received by clergy and staff will be treated with confidentiality and respect to the best of our abilities and following these policies.
- Congregation members, leaders, staff and clergy should be **aware that all communication sent digitally (email, social networking sites, notes or posts, etc.) is NOT CONFIDENTIAL and may be shared or reposted to others, regardless of the intent of the original author (member) or the clergy/staff.** All digital communications should be considered part of the permanent, public domain.
- In the virtual world, healthy boundaries and safe church practices 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 and physical worlds.
- In the virtual world, “friend” can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate through that medium. In the physical world, a friend can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self-disclosure, mutuality and expectations for the relationship.
- CSUC disclaims any association with or responsibility for uncontrollable content displayed on third-party websites, such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, especially when content shared/posted violates these communications policies. **Care should be taken when reposting a third party’s comments or posts since reposting assumes agreement with and responsibility for its content.**
- Only permanent staff members may create new social media sites, pages or groups on behalf of CSUC. Any existing site, page or group set up on behalf of the church, using the church name, must include the Minister, Office Administrator or current Board Member as an administrator and must be set to require administrator approval of posts.
- Staff members and congregants who set up accounts on behalf of the church to use online tools (for example, Zoom Meetings, Google docs, etc.) are asked to provide a username and password to the church office in case access to the account is needed.

6. ACCEPTABLE USE OF WIRELESS INFORMATION (WIFI) SYSTEM

Activities conducted online through the WIFI System shall be appropriate and not violate any law or regulation or the rights of CSUC or any third party. CSUC does not actively monitor the use of the WIFI System under normal circumstances. Access to the WIFI System may be denied, blocked, suspended, or terminated by CSUC at any time for any reason, including but not limited to violation of this Agreement, actions that may lead to liability for CSUC, and violation of applicable laws and regulations. CSUC will fully cooperate with law enforcement upon receipt of notice that using the WIFI System violates applicable law.

Examples of prohibited activities include, but are not limited to:

- Accessing, copying, storing, or transmitting offensive and otherwise inappropriate information, including, but not limited to, information that can be considered defamatory, abusive, obscene, profane, sexually-oriented, racist, threatening, discriminatory, harassing, or that uses language or graphics which offends or tends to degrade others;
- Involvement in an activity that violates regulatory, federal, provincial or local law.
- Distribution of internet viruses or other destructive activities;
- Interfering with or disrupting the WIFI System or servers or networks connected to the WIFI System, or disobeying any requirements, procedures, policies or regulations of networks connected to the WIFI System;
- Any other actions that may otherwise violate policy, be unlawful or be deemed inappropriate.

7. ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES

The Communication policy is the responsibility of the CSUC Church Board. It is the role of every person involved in communication at CSUC to keep faith in this policy. The Board will seek to review bi-annually during March through the appropriate team. The Board will act on the recommendation and communicate to the congregation.

8. DEFINITIONS

adherent

A person attached to a congregation who regularly contributes to its life and work is not formally a United Church of Canada member.

church board

The Church Board is the unified governing model of CSUC. It makes decisions on behalf of the congregation and recommends matters of ministry and mission to the community.

church board member

A Board member is an Elder who maintains oversight of all the congregation's affairs. The work includes discussion and decisions on mission priorities, projects, committees, building, finances, retreats, etc., with each decision seeking to fulfill the mission/core values of CSUC. The main requirement would be "to participate intentionally" in the life of the governing body of our congregation. See the United Church of Canada Manual for more information.

communication

The imparting and exchanging of information or news.

congregant/congregation member

A person who is formally a member of the United Church of Canada.

elder/leader

A person elected by the pastoral charge is entrusted with leadership among the congregation. Elders are full members of the United Church of Canada.

governance

The structure of authority and processes of decision-making used by a congregation.

staff/staff member

Clergy and lay staff whom CSUC employs.

9. REFERENCES

CSUC Code of Conduct

CSUC "Workplace Discrimination, Harassment and Violence Response Policy."

CSUC "Rental Policy – Acceptable Use of WIFI System."

10. APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Church Board, CSUC

11. APPROVED (Church Board):

Board Chair (Name)

Board Chair (Signature)

DATE APPROVED: _____