

Photos of Members: Best Practices for Congregations

Photos of congregation members bring your congregation's website to life, providing a window into the vitality and friendliness of the community that gathers on Sunday morning and through the week. How do congregations respect the privacy rights and concerns of members and protect the safety of children involved?

In most general terms, photos of adults engaged in congregational activities and used to report on congregational events can be used without seeking permission. In these cases, it is always prudent to let the people being photographed know that these images may be used by the congregation.

With photos of children (the relevant age is under 18 years old), or with photos that are used outside the immediate activity or news story (e.g. used instead as part of general website design elements, permission should be sought.

Here are some common-sense guidelines and resources to help address these concerns:

Develop and post a privacy policy for your congregation's website and include a section on the use of photos. This way, everyone – congregation photographers and members – will know the guidelines you strive to uphold. Here are some suggestions taken from a privacy policy of a United Methodist congregation:

- We try not to post anything that would be embarrassing, objectionable or hurtful to anyone in the photo. If we know someone is shy about such things, we ask them before posting the photo.
- We don't put names as captions with photos, except for pastors and other staff or other adult members who have given written consent.
- We will gladly provide credit for a photo if desired by the photographer, and we will honor any copyright wishes or restrictions.
- We will remove any photo immediately upon request.

Distinguish between using a photo for "news" content versus as a "design" element.

The Upper Columbia Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Church has five rules for photo use:

- Do not intrude into anyone's solitude, seclusion or private property without permission.

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- Do not publish (whether by photos or stories) private information without permission.
- Do not print any photo or story that presents the subject in a false light.
- Do not appropriate any photo of any person for any commercial use (such as advertisements or even for illustrations months after the news event) without permission.
- In addition, unlike the public media, congregational papers generally follow the rule of not publishing photos or stories that present people in a negative light, even if the facts warrant such coverage.

When appropriate member photos aren't available, find stock photos to meet your needs. Lots of sources exist for stock photos. Just enter the words “royalty free photos” in any search engine.

Add the word “religious” if you want to narrow your search. Here are some additional sources you may want to explore:

- Photos from the [ELCA Archives](#) are free to use for ELCA congregations.
- You can find free, high-quality stock images at [Pexels.com](#) or [Unsplash.com](#). Be sure to always include photo credits and/or sources.