

UUCP Guidelines for Healthy Electronic Communications

For Leaders and Members on
Social Media, Email, Text, Facebook and Twitter
Adopted by the Board December 7, 2017

Electronic Etiquette for Right Relations

Bringing our Best Selves to electronic communications (social media, email, text, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) is important with the rapidly increasing use of electronic communication tools for conducting church business. Like all forms of communication, we need to bring our best selves to the task, especially when handling conflict responsibly and according to our UU covenant.

BEWARE: Electronic communication of ANY kind is the least effective medium for dealing with differences that have escalated into conflict, and in fact, can exacerbate tensions unnecessarily by inviting emotionally charged communication that is unlikely to occur in face-to-face conversation, and that is too easily misinterpreted or misunderstood.

Our UU covenant encourages us to honor our differences. With any emotionally charged topic is it best to seek out a face-to-face exchange where we can speak our concerns directly with the person with whom we feel we have an issue of differing perspectives. Bring your best self to the issue and conversation by practicing empathy, active listening, and humility.

Our UU covenant encourages us as a practice of our faith to work through our differences. If we cannot agree, we can agree to disagree in a spirit of mutual respect and appreciation.

Emotionally charged disagreements rarely disappear by themselves, although sometimes the most caring choice is to withdraw until tensions settle before seeking to reach a resolution to a misunderstanding, disagreement or impasse.

Some Friendly DO's and DON'Ts

Practice best manners and thoughtful behavior in electronic communications. Share from your own experience without making assumptions or attempting to speak for others.

Reply to conversations only if you have something to add or to confirm receipt when requested.

Identify yourself when replying and include only relevant information. Be sure to send messages that do not apply to the whole group only to the appropriate person.

Address any issues of miscommunication privately and directly with the person or persons involved, being careful not to draw unrelated people into the conversation.

If you have a problem with someone's written communication, are upset, offended, angry or have something critical to say, it's best to deal with the person privately in person or by phone once you have your emotional energy in a calm state. If you are tempted to send an angry message, take a break first and reconsider the situation. Much of verbal tone and physical expression are LOST in communications that aren't face-to-face.

Don't "flame" a conversation by sending messages that are far more belligerent, sarcastic, accusatory or just plain mean than if said in person. If you are angry or upset it is best to avoid any form of written electronic communication. It's especially important to avoid using "reply all" when your emotions are running high.

Be careful before making a written response to check the intended audience. Selectively choose "reply to sender" (one person) or "reply all" (a group), as is appropriate.

Use brief, informative subject lines to identify communication topics in emails.

Review messages before they are sent for clarity, brevity and tone. Refrain from use of negative language including shouting, inflammatory words, sarcasm, defensiveness, and rudeness. We expect courtesy and respect in all our UU communications.

Some topics are simply inappropriate for electronic communications if they are too complex (requiring step-by-step planning), or include harmful words, speculation on motives, or complaints about any program or person.

Having debates on a topic via electronic communication is not effective and can actually create more conflict than would occur if discussed directly in person. Electronic communication is not an appropriate medium to attempt to persuade a community member to change their mind on an issue or topic.

Somewhere, somehow, ALL our email and online communications are stored in a WayBackMachine or something similar. Electronic communication is ultimately not private space and needs to be considered as publically accessible, even 10 years down the road. Choose your words carefully.

Don't use electronic written communication to avoid personal contact or an uncomfortable situation.

Don't assume a smiley face emoji will defuse a difficult message; use face-to-face instead. Also beware of using acronyms that may be unfamiliar to readers.

Avoid using all UPPER CASE text since it is often interpreted as SHOUTING.