Instructions for Use of Conference E-mail System

Please read these instructions completely before requesting that e-mails be sent using the conference's e-mail system.

As e-mail increasingly becomes one of the preferred methods of communicating with people — because of its ease and cost effectiveness — it is important for conference staff to ensure the e-mail system is being used as effectively and wisely as possible.

Since the conference office first began communicating with conference leaders via e-mail, staff have received feedback from people, especially clergy, that they do not want to be inundated with e-mail from the conference office. Additionally, when the conference communications office first began producing e-Review Florida United Methodist News Service it sent articles to subscribers — everyone in the conference database and others who had individually subscribed to e-Review — nearly every day. Subscribers overwhelmingly said e-mailing with that frequency was neither necessary nor desired.

As a result criteria were established to help make the best use of the e-mail system and identify what could be communicated effectively through other means. The criteria also help ensure the e-mail system does not become another form of communication that is considered "junk mail" to be ignored.

Additionally, some messages are not appropriate for mass distribution and/or can be disseminated more effectively through other means of communication. Often, sending e-mail messages to a limited number of people — a targeted group — is more effective than disseminating it broadly because the information is geared toward those who are most interested in it or greatly affected by it.

Below are guidelines for sending both types of e-mails — those considered mass e-mails and e-mails targeted to specific groups.

MASS VERSUS TARGETED E-MAIL

MASS E-MAIL: Information that is time sensitive, urgent or cannot be disseminated through other means and is of broad interest to large or multiple groups of people within the conference is appropriate for a mass e-mail. A message that needs to be sent to all clergy[1] and local church lay leaders, for example, would be considered a mass e-mail.

Information about disaster relief or administrative matters affecting all churches is often urgent and of broad interest to a large group of people and would be appropriate for mass e-mail distribution. Information about upcoming events typically does not need to be distributed through a mass e-mail message because it is often not urgent and can be communicated through other means, such as the Opportunities section in e-Review and through direct mail to churches/individuals.

TARGETED E-MAIL: A targeted e-mail is one sent to smaller, specific audiences. The conference database includes multiple groupings of local church leaders, from chairs of local ministries to lay leaders, facilitating the ability to send e-mails to select groups of people.

Event information is often more appropriate for a targeted e-mail because it is typically not urgent or time sensitive and can be communicated through other means. Additionally, it often garners more interest when it is sent to smaller, specific audiences that are most interested.

Before requesting that a mass e-mail be sent, determine if the information is, in fact, appropriate for a mass e-mail.

STEPS TO SENDING AN E-MAIL MESSAGE THROUGH THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM

Targeted E-mails:

- Prepare your message. (Instructions on preparing e-mail messages are listed below).

- Determine who should receive your message.
    * The conference's data management office is the group that sends e-mails from the conference offices using the conference database system and e-mail blaster. Staff in that office will assist conference staff in selecting their targeted groups from the database and will train conference staff so they may send targeted e-mails to their area(s) of ministry in the future.
    * Staff can send targeted e-mails to individuals involved in their area of ministry as needed. If conference staff want to send a communication to individuals who work outside their area of ministry, they should consult with the staff person(s) whose area of ministry relates to those individuals.

- E-mail your request to send a targeted e-mail to the data management office at LabelOrders@flumc.org. In addition to the text of the e-mail, provide:
    * The information that should be included in the subject line,
    * The recipients of the e-mail and
    * An appropriate reply-to address.

- Staff in data management will review your request and contact you to confirm they have received the request and/or to gather more information.

- Data management staff will send the e-mail within 72 hours, unless otherwise notified.

Mass E-mails:

- First, consider if your e-mail is time sensitive, urgent or cannot be communicated through other means and is of interest to a broad segment of the conference. If not, a targeted e-mail will be more appropriate.

- If a mass e-mail is appropriate submit your request, providing as many details as possible, to the director of communications, who will work in consultation with the director of Connectional Ministries to determine if a mass e-mail should be sent and/or how it may be accommodated. This step will help ensure the number of mass e-mails being sent is monitored, those being sent are appropriate for mass e-mailing and e-mails are being coordinated effectively (for example, if there are several requests for e-mails to the same audience, those individual messages may be included in one e-mail in order to avoid sending multiple messages to the same people).

- The director of communications will reply within 72 hours to let you know if your request has been approved.

- If the request is approved, the director of communications will contact data management staff to let them know an e-mail needs to be sent and an approximate distribution date.

- Individuals should work with the director of communications to compose the message to ensure it is effectively communicated to the intended audience. Staff may either draft the message and e-mail it to the director of communications for editing or request help in composing the message.

- Once the message has been written and approved, the director of communications will forward the message to the conference data management office for processing and distribution.

- Staff in data management will review the request and contact you to confirm receipt of the request and/or gather more information.

- Please note:
  * Mass e-mails are also sent to all conference employees.
  * Mass e-mails will generally not be sent more than once.
  * Reminders after the original e-mail has been distributed will not be sent.
  * Each request is considered on an individual basis and exceptions may be made as necessary. That determination is made by the director of communications and Connectional Ministries in consultation with other staff as necessary.

PREPARING YOUR MESSAGE

- Use Microsoft Notepad (or a similar text editor) when composing the e-mail message you want distributed. Do not use Microsoft Word (or a similar program) with formatting features. There are several reasons for this:

* The program used to send the conference-wide e-mail blast strips the formatting from a document. Text that is formatted, numbered, underlined, bulleted or displays with some other effect will be stripped or altered by the e-mail blast program.
* Churches and persons with various levels of computer equipment, browsers and experience will be receiving your e-mail message. It is likely that a message sent with formatting will not be received the way it was sent by a significant number of people because their Internet browser or browser settings do not accept or handle the formatting. Some of the information could be skewed, misread or misinterpreted if it does not arrive in the same format it was sent.

• Remember to keep your message brief — the key to reaching the most people via e-mail. A document that requires a lot of formatting or is lengthy should NOT be sent via e-mail. Rather, the document should be posted to the conference Web site with a link embedded in the e-mail message (data management will add the link) that takes the reader directly to the document by clicking on the link.
    * If you have a lengthy document that corresponds with the e-mail message being sent and needs to be posted to the conference Web site, please attach that document with your e-mail message and specific instructions explaining where the document should be posted on the conference Web site. (The e-mail program used to send e-mails does not allow attachments to be sent with the e-mail so attachments must be posted to the Web site.) Please allow sufficient time for your corresponding document to be posted to the Web site. Data management staff will not send the e-mail communication until the corresponding document has been posted.

• If writing a targeted e-mail please have someone other than the author of the message proof the text. It is often difficult for the individual who has written the message to catch spelling or grammatical errors or sentences that may not have been communicated as effectively as possible. If you would like someone in the communications department to proof your message please contact the director of communications.

• The e-mail should not be lengthy, but it should provide enough information to allow the reader to respond in some way. Include the facts: who, what, when, where, why and how. Also include a contact name and number/e-mail address for those who may have questions or need more information. Provide a reply-to address if appropriate (some messages may include instructions to request more information or submit questions by e-mailing a specific e-mail address; a reply-to address would not be necessary in that case.)

• Attach the text file of targeted e-mail messages to your e-mail request. Do not put the body of the text directly in the e-mail request.

• It is very important that you allow time in your planning/deadlines for both communications and data management staff to process your request — from writing/editing/approving to e-mailing your message — when determining when you would like people to receive your message. Data management and communications

staff coordinate multiple projects and must work e-mail requests into initiatives already in progress. Also remember you must factor enough time into your planning for people to respond to or act upon your message.

- Do not rely solely on e-mail to communicate your message. People often need to receive a message through a variety of means in order to remember it and act upon it. Your message may need to be mailed as a letter, postcard or brochure via the United States Postal Service. It may also be appropriate for inclusion in the Opportunities section of e-Review or as a feature article. Communications staff can help make that determination.

- It is important to consider the tone of your e-mail message and write it accordingly. Because the e-mail message is being sent directly to individuals it needs to be expressed in a more conversational, personal tone. It is not appropriate to send copy from a brochure or advertisement. Excerpts from promotional materials may be noted, but the overall message should be stated in a more direct manner. If your message sounds like a publicity piece it should be rewritten in the tone of a letter or brief message. Typically, information designed for publicity purposes does not carry a sense of urgency.

[II] Clergy may also be considered a targeted e-mail group. It is extremely important for clergy to be considered carefully when determining if it is appropriate to send an e-mail to them. Because of their role in the conference it is easy to overload them with information.