Email and Text Spoofing and Scams

Scammers and phishing attacks are targeting more and more congregations and ministries. These emails or text messages often pretend they are a pastor or bishop. The scammers ask for private conversation or the need to ask a favor or to purchase gift cards.

These attacks are phishing or spoofing scam. This means that the email account or phone number has probably NOT been hacked. Attackers are using an alternate email address or phone number, and contacts are found using A.I. software.

This kind of attack is often called CEO Phishing or Business Email Compromise. In 2019, the FBI reported that this is a $26 billion scam.

HOW TO AVOID OR STOP SCAMS

1. **Check the email address or phone number that sent the message.** Modern email programs often only display the name as a default and not the email address. The attackers use this to their advantage and create addresses with the real name but use a bogus email address. Often using Gmail or Yahoo accounts. Text scammers will use area codes in the area you are in, claiming it is a new phone number.

HOW IT WORKS



The attackers decide on a target (a congregation, ministry, or synod), and they search for names and email addresses of leadership.



The attackers create email addresses with a convincing name or domain to look similar to that of the leadership.



They then use software to find email addresses or phone numbers associated with their target.



They send emails or texts to found addresses posting as a pastor or bishop to solicit money, gift cards, or information.

2. Look for red flags in the tone and grammar of the email or text. Attackers will want to create a sense of urgency to prey on your desire to help. They will often claim the bishop or pastor needs something and is in a meeting. Or that they need to have a private conversation urgently. These emails will often contain misspellings, strange punctuation, or grammar that is just "off" a bit. Read messages with requests carefully.

3. Ask someone. Have someone else read the message for you to see if they notice anything weird. Call or email the church or synod office to check the person's email address or phone number.

4. Do not purchase gift cards or give out information. These scams often ask for gift cards or want you to provide further information (for more scams.) Never share information make purchases from a text or email request without verifying information.

5. Report it. Please report it to the person or leadership. The chances are good that if you received a scam or email or text, then someone else did too. Also, report it to the FCC. If you are the victim of a scam, report it to local law enforcement.

SOME EXAMPLES

These are real scam emails and texts.

From: **Robert F. Humphrey** <bishopoffice.vasynod@gmail.com>
Date: Thu, Apr 22, 2021 at 8:10 AM
Subject: Request for your assistance
To:

This is not a @vasynod.org email address

They usually request assistance

Good morning! Do you have a moment I have a request I need you to handle discreetly. I am in a meeting with no calls so just reply to my email.

They request for the receiver to reply back to the email

Yours Sincerely,

Robert F. Humphrey
Bishop

Virginia Synod, ELCA

-----Original Message-----
From: Robert F. Humphrey <rhumphrey.vasynod@gmail.com>
To: Ja[redacted]
Sent: [redacted]
Subject: Re: Please communicate with me

This is not a @vasynod.org email address

Good morning [redacted] I'm just seeing this email now

Great! Here's what i want you to do for me because i'm a little busy
right now, I have been working on incentives and i aimed at surprising some women going through cancer with gift cards today. This should be Confidential until they all have the “Gift cards” as it's a surprise.

Can you get this done? and how soon?

Notice punctuation and grammar that is "off"

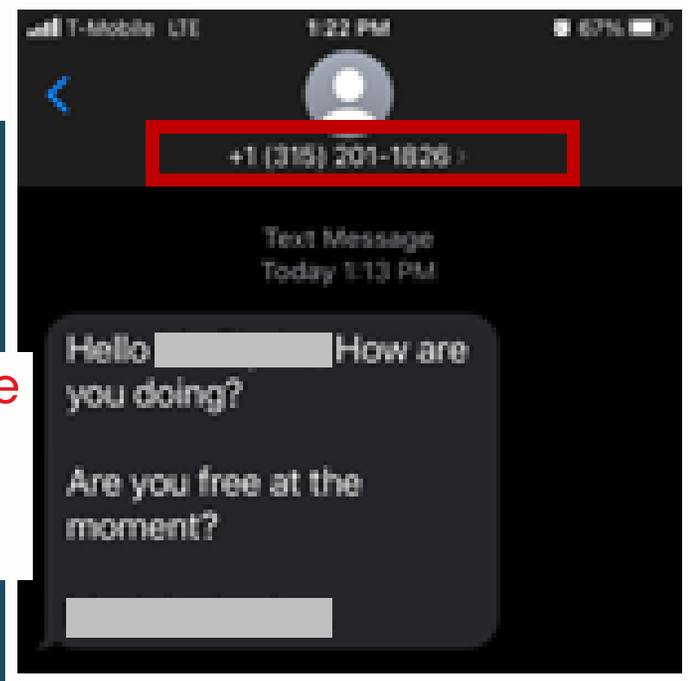
Sent from myMail

From: [redacted] <executivecommitte3783@gmail.com>
Subject: Important
Date: July 1, 2021 at 1:15:44 PM EDT
To: undisclosed-recipients:;

Hello, are you free at the moment?

[redacted]

This is a scam text. Notice the sense of urgency. This text came from an unknown number.



RESOURCES

- From the FBI: Business Email Compromise
- From the FBI: Gift Card Scams
- From the ELCA: Tips for Computer and Internet Security
- From the ELCA: Information and Security Webinar
- Security Awareness: Article about Messaging Attacks
- Blog Post with more examples of phishing attacks

REPORT SCAMS

- Report spoofed or fake gmail addresses to Google
- File a complaint to the FCC

- If you are a victim of one of these scams contact local law enforcement and file a claim with the FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center

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