

Social Media

Policy

Background

Social media is the umbrella term used to describe websites and applications that allow users to share content (that is words, images and web links) with others and/or to participate in social networking. The best-known platforms are Facebook, Instagram, X (previously known as Twitter) and YouTube, but the term and these guidelines also cover online forums and blogs as well as less well-known applications such as Pinterest and Flickr.

Christchurch seeks to encourage ministry leaders and members to explore, adopt and utilise these platforms for communicating and sharing the Gospel. When used well social media applications are effective communications tools, clearly benefitting the Church by providing an online space for conversations, wider exploration, learning and discussion on issues of faith, church and society and offering opportunities for forming and deepening relationships locally and globally.

Good practice guidelines

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Galatians 5:22-26 NIV

Basic principles

1. The golden rule: Remember that you are a representative of Baptists Together – therefore it is important that you are a responsible ambassador for Christ, the Church and your part in it. In essence, if you wouldn't say it, in a loud voice, in your local pub on a Saturday night, or wear it on a very big badge saying: "I'm a member of Christchurch Baptist Church" then don't say it online.
2. If you have any known public role within Christchurch, for example Trustee, Ministry leader, Member, then, when you post, you are posting as a representative of the church. This applies whether you're posting in an official capacity on a Christchurch account or on your personal account – you are representing Christchurch and cannot hide behind statements made on personal social media accounts. What you say privately (and on social media is far from being a private forum!) will reflect on you, Christchurch and Baptists Together.

3. Although it may appear that the internet has little or no regulation, all content is subject to the same laws that apply in the 'real' world. You are completely responsible for the things you post and so could fall foul of the laws relating to libel and defamation.
4. There is an internet code of conduct. Although not an exclusive list, some specific examples of legally prohibited social media conduct include: posting commentary, content or images that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libellous, or any material that could be seen to create a hostile environment.
5. It is important to remember that any content you post to social media could attract wider media interest – so be prepared for additional publicity, both positive and negative. If you do receive media interest (hopefully positive interest because you have posted some good news about local church life on a social media platform) then do feel free to contact the Baptist Union's press and media line for advice, if you feel you need it. If you have posted something that attracts negative media interest, you should contact the Media line for advice by calling 01235 517709.
6. Social media is fast-paced and if you do decide to enter the arena, then stay present and active – monitor your output, keep it fresh and up-to-date, and regularly review information about Christchurch. Aim to post/update content regularly to encourage people to engage with what you are posting, to whet their appetites and to keep them coming back for more.
7. It is important that you separate your personal social media account(s) from the 'official' Christchurch account(s).
8. Double check your privacy settings on social media platforms. Be aware that Facebook is particularly prone (especially during updates) for resetting or creating new options for privacy. There are privacy policies and settings on each platform, including explanations of the different levels of privacy. When you post, bear in mind what effect your levels of privacy will have on who will – or could – see your post.

Some dos and don'ts

Do:

- At least two people must monitor and manage Christchurch's social media accounts. These 'account managers' should include a minister, staff member and/or a trustee. Anyone with access to the account(s) becomes the 'public voice' of Christchurch – anyone with such access must understand the power of social media, be in a position to post with authority and be able to respond quickly and appropriately to any comments. (See the 'Don't' section for more information).
- Use an organisation Facebook page (as opposed to a personal one) as this will make it very clear that Christchurch is an organisation and it will also allow us to manage better our output and interaction.
- Be respectful of theological viewpoints you do not agree with. Public slanging matches between Christians are never a good thing.
- Respond to queries quickly – you might find that newcomers to your area are looking for a place to worship. Be welcoming.
- Be credible, fair and honest.
- Respect the privacy of our congregation. Discussion of pastoral care in

relation to individuals not only contravenes data protection but, for ministers and church employees, could become a disciplinary matter.

- Make sure you have the child's agreement and the written permission of parents/guardians when posting photographs of children on Christchurch's social media sites. See section on 'Using images of children' later in the guidelines for more information.
- Use social media to share good news of church life and congregation members – first checking that the particular person/people involved is/are happy for the news of their engagement/pregnancy/marriage/anniversary/recovery from illness etc. to become public. Before posting ask yourself: "Is this my story to tell?". If it's not, then ask permission first.
- Post or share (on Facebook) and/or retweet (on Twitter) appropriate stories, reflections, prayers marking key events in the Christian calendar/life of Baptists Together etc. All posts on the Baptists Together Communications Facebook page/X account can be freely shared and retweeted.
- Monitor church community group pages on sites such as Facebook – take care to remove quickly posts by others that are visibly offensive, threatening or indicative of bullying.
- Stay within the legal framework and make yourself aware of safeguarding issues; respect copyright, libel and defamation and data protection laws.
- Bear in mind that what you post has the potential to be misinterpreted or misread: Emotions and attitudes are hard to convey in print – so be careful how you phrase things.
- Be patient. It takes time to build a following on social media.
- Expect to get better at it as you go on – check out what others are posting and tweeting, see what works and feel free to try similar things yourself.
- Relax. Enjoy the journey. It's just a conversation and shouldn't be a chore.

Don't:

- Respond censoriously to every little remark just because you don't like it! Take a judgement call between someone who is expressing a view that you or Christchurch doesn't hold and someone who is writing abusive comments.
- Never make any comments that could be considered racist, sexist, or homophobic, or engage in any other conduct that would be considered unacceptable in a Christian environment.
- Never engage with people posting who are being deliberately hateful. Remove the post. It is advisable to keep a copy of the post prior to deletion.
- Neglect the wider community who may be genuinely interested in Christchurch or new to the area and looking for their next place of worship.
- Gossip or engage in conversations about personal/pastoral matters that directly relate to individuals. Do not disguise gossip as 'prayer points'. If it's not your story to tell, then don't tell it. Remember that there are data protection and safeguarding considerations, and that anything published online is subject to libel laws.
- Engage in verbal aggression via social media; it's ugly and has no place on a social media site run by a church. Would Christ say it? No? Then please don't say it either. Misinformation can be corrected but done so with grace. People are entitled to their opinions – but they are not entitled to share

abusive or derogatory opinions and comments on Christchurch's Facebook page.

- Expect overnight success – social media is all about building relationships. And that takes time.

Safeguarding

Social media can be used to bully, harass, intimidate or groom children, young people and adults at risk. Christchurch's online connections and friendships must not give easy access to children and adults at risk in the church. For example, links between young people and church workers must only be made on a church or youth group organisational page and not a personal page.

Safeguarding and Photography

Since the Data Protection Act 1998, organisations must take care how they take and use photographs or film footage of people. This does not mean that pictures should not be taken or that filming should be prohibited. However, certain protocols must be followed to comply with the legislation, and in order to safeguard children, young people and adults at risk.

Using images of children: Ministry leaders must ask the permission of the child/parent/carer before taking pictures/videos of children and ensure that the parent/carer signs consent forms. Even with permission, use group photographs of children rather than individuals. When captioning photos/videos of children, never include any personal details about them, including their names.

If videos are posted on YouTube and these videos include any images of children/young people, ensure that you have the written consent of a parent/carer. Also remember that if the clip includes any music, you will require a licence from PRS for Music (prsformusic.com) and direct permission from the copyright owner if you present the song/hymn words – please check with CCLI.

Using images of adults: Ministry leaders must always remember to ask the person's permission before they take and use their photo and explain how they plan to use it. Leaders must be aware that issues such as domestic abuse or online abuse might mean that individuals do not want to have their pictures published in the public domain.

Copyright

It is important that Christchurch does not use content that is subject to copyright. Never publish items that the church doesn't have permission to publish (e.g. poems, prose extracts, song/hymn lyrics). Permission from the copyright holder must be obtained before we post relevant items on the church website or print it in any newsletter.

Don't download images from the web and assume it will be ok, it almost certainly will not be. A good place for free images with no or little copyright stipulations is www.flickr.com Select the 'advanced search' option, and search in the 'Creative Commons-licensed content' section. Do acknowledge the photographer/artist, even when the image is copyright free. And, of course, you can always take your

own photos.

Additional sites with images that can be used in the same way are:

<https://unsplash.com>

<http://www.gratisography.com>

<https://pixabay.com>

[The Christian Copyright Licensing International \(CCLI\) website](#)

(<http://ccli.co.uk/copyright/>) is an excellent source of information on copyright law.

Appendix to Social Media Policy

In recognition of the challenges that social media raise for the life of a church, particularly in relation to young people, Christchurch Baptist Welwyn Garden City CIO ("Christchurch") was prompted, in 2016, to produce the following guidelines for those who consider themselves to be part of Christchurch.

If you wish to discuss this further, please get in contact with Barbara Griffiths (Designated Person for Safeguarding) or Simon Cragg (Minister). This can be done via the church office.

Guidance on the safe use of Social Media¹ and texting between Adults and Young People

These guidelines are for those who consider themselves part of Christchurch. We have a separate agreement that youth workers and volunteers sign up to and training on appropriate conduct through texts and social media.

Young people benefit enormously from conversations with adults in the wider church and enquiries about their welfare and progress. Church activities provide an ideal environment in which to have these 1:1 conversations in the safety of a public setting. The young person retains the ability to choose whether to engage in conversation and adults are likely to be mindful of the personal information they share and consider the implications of doing so for the individual young person.

Social Media remove a number of safeguards, so our expected code of conduct for adults at Christchurch is:

- not to have under-18's in the church as 'friends'² on social media apart from in exceptional circumstances (e.g. family members);
- 'Unfriend' any existing under-18 that any adult is currently linked to via social media. We also suggest the adult lets the under-18 know why they have done so, so as to avoid any awkwardness;
- not to have direct interaction with under-18's via social media or text except in an emergency.

In order to empower young people to make safe choices, they will be:

- reminded annually that they have the right to decline any 'friend' requests, or block text messages and that it is not appropriate to seek 'friendships' with adults in the church;
- encouraged to pass on any details of unwanted contact from adults or other young people to youth leaders.

Notes

¹ Social Media: websites and apps as defined by Google that "allow users to create and participate in social networking" examples include Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, Google Plus.

² On other social networking sites the term “friend” may be replaced by, for example, follower or subscriber.

Change Record

Change:	Changed By:	Comments:
06/11/2023	New	Policy approved by the Trustees