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Loving, Reaching, Building Jesus: God's Answer for our Community

Media Policy

Aldwick Baptist Church have adopted the Baptist Union Policy – October 2018

BAPTISTS TOGETHER

Guidelines for the use of Social Media for churches belonging to the Baptist Union of Great Britain[1]

Introduction

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:6 New International Version

Welcome to these guidelines for the use of social media within churches that belong to the Baptist Union. They have been written to provide encouragement and guidance in the wise and appropriate use of social media so that it can enhance the community and outreach of your Church. These tools offer us new ways to communicate the Gospel, and our faith journeys, in a public space – but they also remind us that it is a public space and that rules and etiquette apply here as much as anywhere.

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, 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.

We invite and encourage churches and members to explore, adopt and utilise these exciting 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.

Social media is interactive, conversational and open-ended. It happens in a public, not private, space and though it feels different to traditional forms of written communication comments are permanent and we are personally liable for them. Used well, social media is a means of engaging in an interactive conversation with people of all faiths and none. Due to the swift, conversational style of social media, writing comments we may later regret is a common pitfall. It is here that the words of Colossians 4.6 serve us well. Our words must always be full of grace so that even in difficult situations we will know how to answer well.

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 New International Version

[1] Baptists Together are extremely grateful to the United Reformed Church in allowing us to use their Social Media Policy as a direct source for the material used in this document. This document has also referenced with permission the Social Media Policy of The Methodist Church.

We offer this guidance paper to encourage more people within Baptists Together to engage with social media – and to use it effectively and safely, understanding both the benefits and the potential dangers. Please note that Baptists Together have several social media channels and can be used as useful resources for your own social media pages, for sharing all the latest news and information from Baptists Together.

Facebook - https://www.facebook.com/baptistuniongb/?fref=nf
Twitter – https://Twitter.com/baptistuniongb
Flickr - https://www.flickr.com/photos/bugb/albums
Youtube - https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrsEH8yVjLklst8QtjSfdgg
Instagram - https://www.instagram.com/baptiststogether/
Pinterest - https://uk.pinterest.com/baptistunionGB/boards/

To summarise: These guidelines for the use of social media are intended both to encourage the use of social media and to offer good practice guidance for churches and individuals associated with our churches.

Basic principles

1. The golden rule: Remember 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 a very big badge saying: 'I'm a member of a Baptist Church' then don't say it online.
2. If you have *any* known public role within your church, for example Deacon, Member, Elder, then, when you post, you are posting as a representative of your church. This applies whether you're posting in an official capacity on a church account or on your personal account – you are representing your church and cannot hide behind statements made on personal social media accounts. What you say privately (and social media is far from being a private forum!) will reflect on you, your church 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. Call 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 your church. 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. If you really want to make a splash with social media and find your church has a lot to say, then you might want to explore applications such as Hootsuite https://hootsuite.com/ that allow you to set up social media content (on both Facebook and Twitter) in advance. Hootsuite is a particularly useful tool if you don't have the time to do daily updates but do want to stay engaged; it allows you to plan ahead – sending out prayers, news and reflections to go out at set times. It is a particularly useful tool for planning social media activity if your church is having a mini campaign on a specific topic, or wanting to post prayers every day of Advent or Lent etc.
7. It is important that you separate your personal social media account(s) from the 'official' church 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:

- Do appoint at least two people to monitor and manage your church's social media accounts. We recommend that, where possible, these 'account managers' include the minister and an elder. If you have a communications officer, they would be a natural choice. Remember that anyone with access to the account(s) becomes the 'public voice' of your church – so take great care to choose trustworthy individuals who understand the power of social media, who can post with authority and who are able to respond quickly and appropriately to any comments. (See the 'Don't' section for more information).
- Do use a code of conduct on your Facebook page; setting out what you feel is appropriate Facebook behaviour. Here is an example which can be adapted:

Code of conduct
Thank you for visiting us on Facebook!
The following is a list of guidelines for commenting on our posts – we're basically asking you to show respect for all users, stay positive and generate good conversations. So:
– Please stay on-topic
– No offensive language
– No personal attacks (hostile, derogatory or deliberately insulting comments toward a specific individual or group)
– Don't say things to people in a way that you wouldn't want them said to you
– No bullying, intimidation or hate speech
– No flaming (posting comments intended to induce an angry response)
– No spamming

- Do use an organisation Facebook page (as opposed to a personal one) as this will make it very clear that you are an organisation and it will also allow you to better manage your output and interaction.
- Do be respectful of theological viewpoints you do not agree with. Public slanging matches between Christians are never a good thing.
- Do respond to queries quickly – you might find that newcomers to your area are looking for a place to worship. Be welcoming.
- Do be credible, fair and honest.
- Do respect the privacy of your 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.
- Do make sure you have the child's agreement and the written permission of parents/guardians when posting photographs of children on to church social media sites. See section on 'Using images of children' later in the guidelines for more information.
- Do 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?' And if it's not, then ask permission first.
- Do 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/Twitter account can be freely shared and retweeted.
- Do monitor church community group pages on sites such as Facebook – take care to quickly remove posts by others that are visibly offensive, threatening or indicative of bullying.
- Do stay within the legal framework and make yourself aware of safeguarding issues; respect copyright, libel and defamation and data protection laws.
- Do 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.
- Do be patient. Rome was not built in a day – it takes time to build a following on social media.
- Do 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:

- 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 your church 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 posters who are being deliberately hateful. Remove the post. (It's helpful to have the code of conduct on your Facebook page, which spells out the type of posts that will be removed.) It is also advisable to keep a copy of the post prior to deletion.
- Don't neglect the wider community who may be genuinely interested in your church or new to the area and looking for their next place of worship.
- Don't 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.
- Don't 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 either. You can correct misinformation but do it with grace. Remember, people are entitled to their opinions – but they are not entitled to share abusive or derogatory opinions and comments on your church's Facebook page.
- Don't expect overnight success – social media is all about building relationships. And that takes time.

Safeguarding

Unfortunately, social media can be used to bully, harass, intimidate or groom children, young people and adults at risk. Make sure your online connections and friendships do not give easy access to children and adults at risk in your church. For example, we strongly recommend that, wherever possible, links between young people and church workers are only 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 should be followed in order to comply with the legislation, and in order to safeguard children, young people and adults at risk.

Using images of children: Ensure that you 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, it is advisable to use group photographs of children rather than individuals. When captioning photos/videos of children, never include any personal details about them, including their names.

Using images of adults: Always remember to ask the person's permission before you take and use their photo, and explain how you plan to use it. 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.

Further information is available through 'Safe to Grow' and 'Safe to Belong', the Baptist Union's safeguarding polices. These are available from
http://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220754/Safeguarding_Policies.aspx

Copyright

It is important that you do not use content that is subject to copyright. Please take great care in all that you publish – and never publish items that you don't have permission to publish (e.g. poems, prose extracts, song/hymn lyrics). If you do want to publish something that's protected by copyright, please seek written (or emailed) permission from the copyright holder before you post it on your church website or print it in your 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.

Ideas to get you started

- If you don't have a church website, or are looking for an easy-to-use alternative, an organisational Facebook page could be the answer. Such a page could be used to promote your church, give information on service times, events etc and is really easy to update. (And, if you do have a website, remember that Facebook and Twitter can also be in conjunction with it. You can set up social media feeds to automatically feed your social media posts to your site – and you can also direct people to your website via your social media posts.
- Get on Facebook and Twitter and report on your community and outreach projects.

- Post videos of your services to YouTube for everyone to see. If these videos include any images of children/young people please 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.
- Use a photo-sharing application like Flickr to post a selection of good quality photos of church life (ensuring that you have written parental/carer permission for publishing photos with children in them).
- Share any good news on Facebook and Twitter – and you will start to build a following/develop relationships.
- Use Facebook or Twitter to start a discussion about a particular topic or issue at the church or your activities. Remember, social media offers two-way communication (but be prepared for positive and negative feedback – and respond to comments and queries quickly).

Glossary of terms

General terms

Applications/platforms: Websites and mobile-phone-operated programs.
Post: This term is both a verb and a noun; it is both the process and the product of sharing/publishing content using online platforms.
Profile: The public-facing page of a social media website.
Sharing: The process of sharing a status, image or article from a social media account that is not your own; this is usually done by clicking a 'share' button/icon. Shared content will be displayed to all of your friends.

Facebook specific terms

Friending: The process of adding an individual as a friend on Facebook. Depending on your settings, and the other person's settings, being a friend allows both parties to see each other's posts, write on each other's Facebook timelines and share links, videos and images.
Liking: The process of giving a virtual 'thumbs up' by clicking the 'like' button (indicated by a 'thumbs up' icon), showing that you approve of someone's Facebook status, image or comment. In 2016 Facebook added new options to its like button: instead of just being able to like posts, users can now express several different feelings including love, surprise and sadness.
Organisation page: This is a Facebook-specific term describing one of the types of page that Facebook allows its user to create. A page that is labelled as an organisation page has useful features including easy ways for more than one person to monitor/manage/edit the page activity.

Tag: You can 'tag' a Facebook friend in your post. Tagging indicates that the post/image is connected in some way with them – perhaps because you and they are in a photo together, or were at an event together. The friend will be notified of the tag.

Twitter specific terms:

Hashtags (#XYZ): Hashtags are a way of signposting topics and themes on Twitter. For example, you can search for hashtags to see if any Twitter users are talking about the same topic, as well as use them yourself to contribute to a discussion or about an event. #BAP16 was used for the Baptist Assembly, and enabled all who were interested to monitor the tweets about our Assembly.

Liking: Similar to Facebook liking, a process showing that you approve of someone's tweet. The Twitter 'like' button is indicated by a heart icon.

Mention (@): You can 'mention' someone in a tweet by placing their handle after the @. The person or organisation mentioned will be notified of the tweet. You can use this feature to draw someone's attention to a tweet, or simply to say you were with him or her at the time of the tweet (e.g. "Just at the cinema with @jo_bloggs).

Retweet (RT): This word is used both as a verb and a noun; it is both the process and the product of sharing someone else's Twitter post to your followers/Twitter feed by pressing the 'retweet' button. The retweeted post will be published on your own Twitter feed.

Tweet: Similar to a Facebook status, you have 140 characters to convey your message. Images and videos can be added to tweets.

Twitter handle: Similar to your name on Facebook, you choose your 'handle' when you create your account and it is always preceded by an @ – and allows people to communicate directly with you.