



Guidelines for the Use of Social Media by Baptist Ministers

These guidelines aim to support ministers in their wise but creative use of social media, considering their personal and public use, legal requirements and good practice

This version December 2023.



Guidelines for the Use of Social Media by Baptist Ministers

Introduction

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

This guideline leaflet relates to the use of social media by Baptist ministers. It has been written with a particular concern for Baptist ministers who are Accredited Ministers, Nationally Recognised Pastors, or Recognised Local Ministers, regardless of their ministry setting. However, pastors of Baptist churches who are not accredited or recognized by the Union will also find it useful.

The leaflet aims to provide encouragement and guidance in the appropriate use of social media so your ministry may be enhanced. Using different forms of social media offers us new ways to communicate the Gospel and our faith journeys in a public space. These guidelines remind us it is a public space and rules and etiquette apply here as much as anywhere.

In September 2023, the Charity Commission produced some [guidance for charities](#) about using social media. Most of our ministers are ministers of a church and therefore also charity trustees, because all BUGB member churches are charities in their own right. So it is important that as a charity trustee, you use social media in a way which furthers your church's charitable objectives, ensuring that your posts are in the best interests of your church as a charity. It may be that you are not a charity trustee, because as a minister you are a chaplain, or children's, youth and families' worker, or are seconded to a different organization. Even so, you should be mindful in your social media interaction of the objectives and reputation of the organisation that has appointed or employed you.

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

We invite and encourage ministers to explore, adopt and utilise these exciting platforms for communicating and sharing the Gospel. When used well social media applications are effective communications tools, providing online spaces for conversations, wider exploration, learning and discussion on issues of faith, church, and society. They also offer 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 the words of Colossians 4:6 serve us well. Our words must always be full of grace so 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 NIV

We offer this guideline leaflet to encourage ministers to engage with social media – and use it effectively, safely, understanding both the benefits and the potential dangers. Baptists Together have several social media channels which can be used as useful resources for your own social media pages:

Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/baptistuniongb
'X' (formally Twitter)	https://twitter.com/baptistuniongb and https://twitter.com/BaptistTimes
Youtube	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrsEH8yVjLkIst8QtjSfdgg
Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/baptistsstogether/
LinkedIn	https://www.linkedin.com/company/81851598
TikTok	@baptistsstogether
Threads	baptistsstogether
Flickr	https://www.flickr.com/photos/bugb/albums
Pinterest	https://uk.pinterest.com/baptistunionGB/boards/

Basic principles

1. The golden rule: remember you are a representative of Baptists Together, your church or other ministry setting, meaning you are to be a responsible ambassador for Christ, the wider Church, and your part in it. This applies to all your social media interaction, on both public and private groups.
2. If you are a minister in a church, you are a charity trustee in your church and have a legal duty to act in the best interests of your church as a charity. Social media is a powerful communication tool for charities, but it introduces risks to the reputation of your church as a charity.

3. If you have any known public role, then whenever you post, you are posting as a representative of your professional context. This applies whether you're posting in an official capacity on a church or work account or on your personal account – you are representing your professional context and cannot hide behind statements made on personal social media accounts. What you say will reflect on you, your context and Baptists Together.
4. Although it may appear the internet has little or no regulation, all content is subject to the same laws. You are completely responsible for the things you post and so could fall foul of the laws relating to data protection, copyright and defamation. If you are accredited or recognized by the Baptist Union, remember also your online activity must reflect the aspirations for ministerial conduct set out in the Ministerial Recognition Rules.
5. 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 which are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or any material could be seen to create a hostile environment.
6. It is important to remember 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, then please feel free to contact the Baptist Union's press and media line for advice. Contact 01235 517709 or email <mailto:media@baptist.org.uk>
7. 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 ministry. For more about this please see our '[First Friday](#)' videos from May, June and July of 2023.
8. It is important you separate your personal social media account(s) from church or workplace account(s). Where possible use a separate device for personal use as this reduces issues around security or posting accidentally.
9. Double check your privacy settings on social media platforms. 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.
10. Take a breath! If you are in a conversation which may be causing distress, then take a few minutes away and reflect. If you are a Facebook Administrator, you can enforce a 5-minute delay on all posting.

Some dos and don'ts

- Do be respectful of theological viewpoints you do not agree with. Public arguments between Christians are to be avoided. They can be hurtful as well as damaging to reputation of your church or workplace.

- Do be credible, fair and honest.
- Do respect the privacy of your congregation or workplace. Discussion of pastoral care in relation to individuals may contravene data protection law and could become a disciplinary matter.
- Do make sure you have the written permission of parents or guardians when posting photographs of children. See section on 'Using images of children' later in the guidelines for more information.
- Do use social media to share the good news stories that emerge from your church, its congregation, or other ministry setting. But first checking the people involved are happy for their news 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 appropriate stories, reflections, or prayers marking key events in the Christian calendar or life of Baptists Together. All posts on the Baptists Together social media accounts can be freely shared.
- Do monitor your church or organisation's 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 and charitable framework. Make yourself aware of safeguarding issues, and respect copyright, libel, 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 writing, so be careful how you phrase things.
- Do check out what others are posting to learn from them what works, and then try similar things yourself.
- Don't censor every remark just because you do not like it. Make a judgement call between someone who is expressing a view you don't hold and someone who is writing abusive comments.
- Don't make any comments which could be considered racist, sexist, or homophobic, or engage in any other conduct that would be considered unacceptable in a Christian environment.
- Don't engage with people who post if they are being deliberately hateful. Remove the post. It is advisable to keep a copy of the post prior to deletion.
- Don't gossip or engage in conversations about personal/pastoral matters which 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 there are data protection and safeguarding considerations, and anything published online is subject to defamation laws.

- Don't engage in verbal aggression via social media. 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.

Safeguarding

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. Your online content and use of social media should align with your church's safeguarding policy and guidance around setting appropriate pastoral boundaries.

Safeguarding and Photography

Under the Data Protection Act 2018, organisations must take care how they take and use photographs or film footage of people. This does not mean pictures should not be taken or filming 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 you ask the permission of the parent or carer before taking pictures or videos of children and ensure the parent or carer signs consent forms. Depending on the age of the child, the parent or carer must be informed of how the photos or videos will be used. Data protection law does not specify an age at which a child is considered capable to exercise their own rights, although 12 years old is typically given as a guideline. This should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Even with permission, it is advisable to use group photographs of children rather than individuals. When captioning photos or videos of children, never include any personal details about them such as their names.

Using images of adults: Always remember to ask the person's permission before you take and use their photo or image in video footage, and explain how you plan to use it. Be aware, issues such as domestic abuse or online abuse might mean individuals do not want to have their pictures published in the public domain. Further information is available through <http://www.baptist.org.uk/safeguarding>

Code of Conduct

Your church or organization may use a code of conduct for their social media pages that sets out what is considered to be appropriate behaviour. An example which can be adapted for use can be found on our [guideline leaflet for churches](#).

It is important to remember that the misuse of social media can be harmful to individuals and to the reputation of your church or organisation. A breach of the code of conduct or social media

policy may give rise to a complaint to your church charity trustees or your employer under their complaints policy, and action taken under their HR policies and procedures.

Copyright

It is important you do not use content which is subject to copyright. Please take great care in all you publish and never publish items you don't have permission to publish, for example, poems, prose extracts, song and hymn lyrics and pictures. If you do want to publish something which is protected by copyright, please seek written or emailed permission from the copyright holder before you post it on your own website, social media, or print it in a newsletter.

Do not download images from the web and assume it will be okay. It almost certainly will not be.

Do acknowledge the photographer or artist, even when the image is copyright free. And, of course, you can always take your own photos.

Useful sites with images which can be used copyright free are:

<https://unsplash.com>

<http://www.gratisography.com>

<https://pixabay.com>

www.flickr.com (search under 'Creative Commons')

The [Christian Copyright Licensing International](http://www.ccli.com) (CCLI) website is an excellent source of information on copyright law. And more information can be found in our [Licensing for Entertainment and Copyright](#) guideline leaflet, L14.



Ministries Team
December 2023