

Social Media Guidelines

A healthy Christian community is a safe place of mutual care, where all people feel valued, loved and respected.

Why use social media?

The Methodist Church encourages the use of social media tools as a means of extending our engagement with people inside and outside the church. This includes

- Sharing our stories
- Engaging in conversations ‘where people are’
- Sharing, learning and encouraging
- Reaching those who cannot physically attend church
- Forming and deepening relationships locally and globally

The safety of ourselves and others

It is important that the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults especially, must be maintained. If you have a safeguarding concern, please contact the **Church Safeguarding officer** whose details are on the Church website.

Conversation on social media can sometimes develop into heated and pointless argument. Be aware of the effect on yourself, and don’t feel you always need to engage. You can always ‘sign off’ from a heated conversation calmly, with something like ‘I think we’ll have to agree to disagree. Peace.’

Respect	Do not post or share content that is sexually explicit, inflammatory, hateful, abusive, threatening or otherwise disrespectful. Try to think of the effect on others who may see what you post.
Be transparent	Don’t mislead people about who you are, or use pseudonyms.
Be relevant	Don't add comments to a social media post that are irrelevant to the topic. Engage in the conversation rather than broadcasting opinions.
Disagree with love	If you have a criticism you need to make, consider carefully the tone of what you write. If you are personally attacked, do not respond in kind. Being a Christian means that sometimes we must speak out and challenge injustice. But remember when you need to point out something you think is wrong, that there is a real, and possibly vulnerable, person at the receiving end of what you say.

Be careful when sharing content	Don't share in haste. Read linked content thoroughly, or watch a video to the end so you know exactly what you are sharing, before you judge whether it is suitable to share.
Maintain confidentiality	If telling a story about someone else, ask yourself first ' Is this my story to tell? ' Don't reveal personal details about others without their explicit permission.

Our responsibilities

If we deem comments (or other content) that are posted to the media accounts or pages of any Circuit churches to be unsuitable or offensive, we will take action that may include hiding, deleting or reporting comments, or blocking users.

You should participate online in the same way as you would with other public forums. You take responsibility for the things you do, say or write.

Be aware that this may attract media interest in you as an individual, so proceed with care whether you are participating in an official or a personal capacity. If you have any doubts, take advice, but remember that you are responsible for your online activities

Circuit and Church websites

Content should only be added or edited by an authorised contributor, and should abide by the guidelines in this policy. The **Skipton and Grassington Circuit** and **Trinity St. Andrew's Church** reserve the right to remove anything from the websites that contravenes these guidelines or is defamatory in any way.

Any photographs can only be uploaded with written consent – this consent should be renewed at least annually, and must be provided to the circuit office if requested.

Any young people or adults who may be vulnerable will not be identified in any uploaded photographs

If events are advertised for young people or adults who may be vulnerable only general details and a contact number will be given.

General Facebook

Whilst Facebook guidelines say that children under the age of 13 should not have an account, many do. We should not encourage this.

You should not have anyone under the age of 18 as a friend on a personal Facebook profile unless you are related to them or can demonstrate that your relationship with their family is not just tied to your role in the Methodist Church.

Do not request to add anyone under the age of 18 as a "friend" on Facebook. As in other areas of safeguarding, they should be the ones to reach out, and if you are in any doubt at all, do not accept the friend request and explain to them that you are not able to accept friend requests from anyone under the age of 18.

Wherever possible use a page or group setup for any official church activity.

Officially Facebook does not allow for people to have second accounts. In the context of good safeguarding practice, however, the necessity of having a personal profile and a “work” profile can be suitably demonstrated and should be considered, although in most instances a page or group, which can be administrated by more than one person, would be a preferable option. A group or page also allows for transparent messaging in that all administrators of the page/group are able to see any direct messages that are sent.

In addition to Facebook there are a number of other social media platforms and apps available. Use of any other social media platform should take into account the general guidelines given above, especially the age limit from the platform developers.

WhatsApp

Special consideration needs to be given when using a platform such as WhatsApp. WhatsApp has become a very popular home for lots of groups and has its advantages, but anyone setting up or joining a WhatsApp group should be mindful that their mobile phone number will be visible to anyone else in the chat. Any WhatsApp group run in the name of the circuit should abide by the following:

- 1) Clear conduct rules should be decided and posted in the Group Description. New members should be directed to look at them on joining.
- 2) If you have anyone under the age of 18 wanting to get involved it should ideally be via a parent/carer’s contact number. If this is not possible then group rules should also clearly indicate that it is unacceptable to message another group member privately unless they have provided you with their phone number for themselves.
- 3) Any group set up should encourage sending out an invite link/QR code to enable people to join for themselves, rather than them just being added by someone else.
- 4) The group admins should be stewards or other office holders in the church/circuit, and should therefore hold a relevant and up to date DBS.
- 5) Any group set up which is aimed at those under 18 should have two DBS-checked admins involved

Remember: You are responsible for what you write on social media. If you wouldn’t say something to someone’s face then you shouldn’t write it on social media.

Any comments which are sexist, racist, homophobic or transphobic, ableist, or otherwise seek to cause division or hatred will not be tolerated and may be removed by an admin or the original poster will be asked to remove the offending post. A repeat offender may find themselves removed from the social media concerned and may be barred from this and other social media platforms.