



The Church of Scotland

# Social Media Guidelines

## Guidance for churches using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram

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[www.churchofscotland.org.uk](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk)

In the same way, let your light shine  
before others, so that they may see  
your good works and give glory to  
your Father in heaven

Matthew 5:16

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## 1. Introduction

Social media is an excellent tool for churches to reach their current members and attract new ones. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram provide an easy way for churches to:

- Communicate with their members and keep them informed about current news and events
- Get involved with the local community by posting about local issues and events
- Develop relationships with others and build trust and understanding that otherwise may not exist.

In these guidelines we will give you the basic rules of social media and some tips on how to make the most your online engagements. We will focus on three social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. However not all of these platforms will be suitable for every church, and we recommend that you think carefully about who you are trying to reach and what you hope to achieve before choosing a platform.

The communications team has been running, moderating and growing the Church of Scotland social media accounts for more than seven years. Not everything we have learned may apply to you and your church, but our hope is that it will give you a good head start.

We invite you to follow our accounts ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)) to explore how we use each platform and what works best. We produce a lot of content intended for churches and congregations and we encourage you to share and comment on our content. At the same time we are more than delighted to engage with your tweets and posts. Engaging with each other's content will help us all tell the story of our Church and its people.

### Two pitfalls to avoid

Once you have taken a look at how other people are using social media and you have made a decision on which platform you want to use, you can begin making your church account. Always ensure that there are two or more people who hold the login details and passwords for your social media accounts. Many churches have experienced the panic of realising they no longer had access to their Facebook or Twitter pages because the one person with those details was no longer with them. Unfortunately, their only recourse was to start again from scratch.

When using social media always think about the impact you can have and who might see your content. Never post when you are hungry, angry, tired or under the influence of medication or alcohol. Social media moves quickly but it is far better to wait than to post something you might later regret.

## 2. Facebook

Facebook is the internet's most widely used social network, with over 2.3 billion active monthly users worldwide and over 30 million daily users in the UK.

More than 750 Church of Scotland congregations are already using Facebook to connect with their members and their local communities. Whether you are one of these churches and wish to improve your online presence, or you are just beginning your Facebook journey, we hope these hints and tips will help you make the most of this useful platform.

### Getting started

What kind of account does your Church need?

Facebook offers [three options](#); a profile, a page, or a group. A profile represents a single individual and is for non-commercial use. A page is a timeline for organisations and businesses. Groups are effective in connecting family, peers, colleagues or people with a shared interest.

We recommend you create a Facebook page. A page will enable people to find you and explore the life of your church. This page can be used to advertise events and to share prayers, images, videos, thoughts and quotes.

Note: You must already have a personal Facebook account that you can use to create a page. You will then become the admin of the page. You should then assign other people as admins and editors (find out how to do so [here](#)). You can remove yourself as an admin for the page later if you no longer wish your profile to be attached to the church page.

## The details

Here are some tips for creating an effective Facebook page:

### Remember the basics

Fill in the required information in the **About** section, this includes the church's address, phone number, website, email address, social media accounts, a short biography, office opening hours, a contact person and any other important information.

### Images tell a story

Your **cover photo** is the large image at the top of your profile. This lets you feature a unique image that represents who you are. You want to use a good quality photo. An image of your church outside or inside is always good. Make sure to follow current image size guidelines (820 by 310 pixels) to get the best results. Anything less and the photo will be stretched or distorted.

Your **profile** photo is the smaller image on the left side of your profile. Use a good quality profile photo. We recommend using an image which represents your church or the Church of Scotland logo (which can be found on our [visual identity](#) webpage). This photo will appear whenever you interact with other people on Facebook and when people search for your church. The current image size for a profile photo is 180 by 180 pixels.

### Choose a username

Facebook allows you to choose a unique **username** (i.e. Church of Scotland) and URL (i.e. [www.facebook.com/churchofscotland](http://www.facebook.com/churchofscotland)). Make sure you choose something that will make sense to your congregation and the general public. Take a look at the usernames and URLs of other congregations to get some ideas.

## Build your Facebook community

- Post daily (or at least frequently)

**All content from the Church of Scotland website and Facebook is ready-made for local churches to share**

- Share photos of your church events (remember to get permission if you are using other people's images)
- Highlight examples of the good work your church is doing
- Use shareable/engaging content – inspiring quotes, meaningful scripture and compelling thought-pieces

For example, the Church of Scotland posts a daily prayer on Facebook that is available for all to share. One of our most popular prayers reached more than 55,700 people, was shared by 783 people and liked by 515 people.

- Create a Facebook 'event' for each of your church's events

Facebook asks you for the basic information for your event; the name of the event, location, time, details of the event, and keywords. Don't forget to add an event photo - the image size should be 1920 by 1080 pixels. Be sure to give plenty of notice ahead of time. Learn how to create a [Facebook event](#).

- Use Facebook live to share short videos of events or an uplifting thought for the day
- Post your weekly Sunday sermon
- Perhaps you have something to say on an issue that's topical in the news? It could be how you are helping to tackle loneliness, child poverty or supporting refugees
- Ask questions – spur a conversation about a topic with an open-ended question
- Interact with the people who comment on your posts
- Share relevant posts from other pages. It could be a news story from Church of Scotland or the Moderator, or a Lent reflection from Christian Aid. Follow other organisations and share any relevant posts of theirs.
- Facebook will only show your posts to a small percentage of your page followers. However the more people like and share your post, the more people will see it in their news feeds.

## Addressing mistakes

If you post something and find you have made a mistake such as a spelling error you can select the three small dots at the top right of your post and then click edit. You will then be able to correct the text.

You can also delete posts using the three small dots. Do not delete a post if it has been seen and shared as it will cause confusion when people wonder what happened to the post.

## Evaluating your results

Once your page is underway you can begin to evaluate your results. Select the **Insights** tab on the top of your Facebook page to find out how many people are viewing your posts (reach) and which posts are attracting likes shares and comments. Learn more about [Facebook Insights](#).

Likes and shares are the best indicators of how relevant your content is to your audience. You will also be able to see what time of day your Facebook fans are online in the posts section of **Insights**. Use this to your advantage and post at peak times to get the greatest amount of engagement.

We have found that posting in the morning and around 7:30pm in the evening secures the most engagement for Church of Scotland posts, but you can experiment to find out what works best for your church community.

Remember to think about key church dates, such as Lent, Easter, and Christmas, and plan in advance for content you can share around these important times.

You will want to understand what your audience loves about your church. Photos and videos usually get 10 times more engagements than a post containing only text. If you choose to create a post with only text, make sure to keep your message short and concise.



## **Avoid oversharing**

Lastly, try to avoid posting and sharing content all at the same time. Use the Facebook post scheduling system to space out your posts. Choosing specific times of day can give your audience a much higher chance of seeing and engaging with your content.

Scheduling a post is relatively straightforward. Post like you normally would, but instead of selecting publish, you select the downward arrow next to it and set the time and date for when you wish to schedule your post. Learn more about [Facebook post scheduling](#).

## **Facebook church page examples**

[Colston Milton Parish Church](#)

[Inverkip Parish Church](#)

[Dalziel St Andrew's Parish Church](#)

[St George's Tron Church of Scotland](#)

[St David's Broomhouse Parish Church](#)

[Greyfriar's Kirk](#)

[East & Old Parish Church Forfar](#)

### 3. Twitter

Twitter is the third most popular social media platform and it is often the first place news stories appear online. People also use Twitter to hold global conversations, make friends and build support for campaigns. Yet Twitter is one of the most difficult social platforms for churches to maintain. Tweets fly so fast and furiously, that on average they have a lifespan of around 10 minutes. So how do churches use Twitter effectively?

If you want to keep up a Twitter profile, you will need to sustain a steady flow of tweets. This may seem overwhelming, but your congregation is potentially already producing enough content to be used.

#### Choosing a username

When choosing your twitter username (also known as your **handle**), you are limited to 15 characters. It should be something relevant, unique and easy to remember. Usernames are preceded by the @ symbol (@ChurchScotland). If you are planning on setting up an Instagram account as well, you will want to check that the username is available on both platforms.

Your display name (note: **different from username**) can be up to 50 characters and therefore you should be able to include your church's full name.

#### Following people

Twitter will invite you to follow people by asking which topics you are interested in. Choose suitable topics such as religion and faith. We also recommend you follow the Church of Scotland's account [@churchscotland](#) and the Moderator's account [@churchmoderator](#). Learn more about [finding and following people on Twitter](#).

## Choosing a profile picture

Your Twitter profile picture is your main identity marker and it will be visible to everyone. Since it represents your church, the image must be of the highest quality, and should measure 400 by 400 pixels.

## Choosing a header photo

Set a warm and welcoming header picture. Try uploading a photo of a group of people from your church. If you have a small church, the photo could be a posed picture of the entire community or, if your church is larger, you could post a picture of one of your weekly worship services. Your header photo should be 1500 x 500 pixels.

## Writing a biography

Your Twitter bio is your best opportunity to tell people why they should follow you. It's what people are looking at when they decide if they want to follow you or not. You have 160 characters to let everyone know a little bit about your church, so make them count.

Twitter also provides spaces for your location and website – don't forget to fill those out as well. Find out more about [customising your Twitter profile](#).

## Posting content

A tweet can include up to 280 characters and a maximum of four pictures or a video of up to 2 minutes 20 seconds. You can send as many as you want, as often as you want, and anyone else on Twitter who chooses to follow may see these tweets appear in their timeline.

## Key features of Twitter

### Retweeting (RT)

A retweet (RT) is a way to share another Twitter user's tweet with your followers. By sharing other people's content it encourages them to share yours. It will essentially look the same as a normal tweet with the author's name and username next to it, but it will also contain the retweet icon and the name of the user who reposted it.

Select the **retweet** option under a tweet and you will be given the option whether to add a 280 character message above it. The latter option is referred to as a **quote retweet** and will have your message above the tweet you are retweeting in a box.

If you feel a tweet of yours did not get the proper attention it deserved, you can also retweet your own tweet via the same option. Learn more about [retweeting](#).

### Liking content

Liking a tweet is a way to let the original poster know that you agree or approve of their message. However, liking a tweet also saves it to your profile so you can refer to it later. Simply select the heart icon in order to like a tweet.

### Mentions (@)

A mention is a way to reference another user in a tweet (e.g. @churchscotland). Users are notified when they are mentioned. This is a way to conduct discussions with other users in a public realm.

## Direct messaging (DM)

You can send a direct message to people who follow you by selecting the envelope icon at the top of your screen. Unlike tweets, direct messages are private and can only be seen by the recipient of the messages. However, it is worth noting people who have private accounts (shown by the padlock symbol beside their username) can only see messages from accounts they follow.

Read this guide for more information on [direct messaging on Twitter](#).

## Trends

You can keep up with Twitter trends by viewing the right side of your Twitter profile. Here, Twitter presents you with the nine most popular topics based on your location. You can adjust the location Twitter uses to find trends for you by selecting the blue **change** button next to Trends For You. From there you can either type any location in the world or choose from a number of nearby locations.

## Understanding the # symbol

Twitter (like Instagram) organises conversation topics with the hashtag (#) symbol.

The hashtag is an important addition to the realm of social media because it allows us to categorise and easily search for subjects across certain platforms. Hashtags can be used to start Twitter campaigns, show support or opposition to an issue and make your tweets more visible to the general public.

Use a hashtag (eg #YOYP2018 is the official hashtag for the Year of Young People) to start or join a conversation, but avoid overloading your posts with hashtags or using them simply for the sake of it. Keep your hashtags simple, short and clear. People look to hashtags for trends, not instructions. Don't use symbols, punctuation or any other special characters in your hashtags as this stops them from working.

## Creating a Moment

Moments are a way to tell stories on Twitter through a collection of tweets.

You can create a Twitter Moment by developing collections of notable tweet conversations or weaving together tweets that tell a powerful or interesting message. Once you have learned how to create a moment, it is an easy way to curate content on a topic, conversation, or event relevant to your congregations.

Keep your titles short but descriptive. Use the description to give people a taste of what they will find in your moment. Your cover photo is like the cover of a book – pick an image that people will feel drawn to. Your moment can include anyone’s tweets – yours, your friends or the Church of Scotland’s. Keep your moments to around 10 tweets. You may use photos and videos to bring your moment to life. Learn more about creating a [Twitter moment](#).

Be sure to check out [Twitter’s glossary](#) for Twitter etiquette and specifics.

## Ways to engage your followers

Here are few ways to engage your audience on Twitter:

- Thought-provoking or inspirational quotes from your daily reading, from current ministry leaders, or from great figures in the history of the Church (with a picture of whoever said the quote)
- Teasers for Sunday's sermon, Bible passages that will be covered in Sunday's service
- New content from your church website or blog can be signposted in a tweet
- Event announcements (charity fundraising, toddler groups, Messy Church, etc.)
- Include worship service times, information about visiting ministers and special services
- Photos from recent events or from the daily activities at the church
- Prayers, prayer requests, and answered prayers
- Links to useful resources or interesting content from around the web
- Encouraging lyrics from popular Christian artists
- News from the church and surrounding community (complete with pictures). This is also an opportunity to share Church of Scotland tweets.
- Funny, personal posts from the minister or staff members (especially pictures, but please remember to get permission from those featured for images you want to post online)
- Mission updates (with pictures)
- Short videos
- Jobs and volunteering opportunities

Pictures or other visual content are always a good idea. Aiming for one or two tweets every day will get you off to a good start. Do not forget to follow people back who engage with your tweets.

## Unwanted Tweets

Unfortunately social media like any other setting includes people who may criticise or berate others online. Twitter has been criticised for not doing enough to stop abusive behaviour on the platform, but there are certain tools in place to help you on these occasions.

If you do not wish to see tweets from a certain account, you can [unfollow](#), [mute](#) or [block](#) them. If you wish to quietly turn down the volume, you can mute the account and those tweets will then disappear from your feed. The account owner will not be notified and they will still be able to direct message you.

If you unfollow an account they will no longer be able to direct message you but they will still be able to tweet about you. If you block an account they will no longer be able to follow you or direct message you and you will not see their tweets.

## Get inspired

Check out other churches on Twitter for inspiration and to make connections – if you follow a church on Twitter, they may follow you back! Here are a few church Twitter accounts to get you started:

### Twitter account examples:

Crown Court Church [@CrownCourtChrch](#)

St Giles Cathedral [@StGilesHighKirk](#)

Dalziel St Andrew's [@DLStAndrews](#)

Inverurie West [@InverurieWest](#)

Palmerston Place Church [@ppc\\_edinburgh](#)

St Mark's Stirling [@stmarkslion2](#)

Canongate Kirk [@CanongateKirk](#)

Springburn Parish Church [@SPCSpringburn](#)



## 4. Instagram

On Instagram, users can connect with a global community which shares millions of photos and videos every day. This social platform works best on your mobile phone, and it is a wonderful place to explore the world and find like-minded individuals.

Instagram has become an indispensable social media outlet, particularly for engaging with young people. The current estimate of Instagram users in the UK is over 20 million users, with 55% of them being female and 69% of the users being 34 years or younger.

### Choosing a username

You can use up to 30 characters for your username. Try to make your Twitter and Instagram usernames the same – this will make it easier to let people know about your social media accounts.

### Writing a bio

Create a short and simple description of your church, where it is and your purpose and values. You may copy your Twitter biography for the blurb.

### Choose a profile picture

Your profile photo should either be a photo of your church building, something that clearly identifies your church, or the Church of Scotland logo (which can be found on our [visual identity](#) webpage). The image size must be 110 x 110 pixels.

### Adding a link

If you have a church website then you can add a link to it on your Instagram profile. If you do not have a website then include a link to your Facebook page instead.

Find out more about [setting up your Instagram profile](#).

## Key features of Instagram

### Hashtags

A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by the hash symbol #, used on social media to identify messages on a specific topic.

Even more than Twitter, Instagram is driven by hashtags. Hashtags are how your photos will be found and how you can brand your congregation. Make an effort to assign relevant and original hashtags when promoting a church event. Use hashtags on all your image captions. This groups the photo with other photos of similar themes so that when people search, your photos can be found.

Unlike Twitter, you can use many hashtags on your posts. In order not to overload your posts with hashtags, you can add your hashtags as a comment below your photo. We have found 8 to 11 hashtags work best. Learn more about [how to use hashtags](#).

### Filters

When posting an image to Instagram you are given the option of choosing from over 20 different filters to apply to your image. A simple tint could turn amateur looking photos into professional pieces with the tap of a finger. Learn more about [how to apply filters](#).

### Stories

Instagram Stories is a feature that allows users to post photos and videos that vanish after 24 hours. This feature is a little more advanced and we do not recommend that you focus on this while you are just getting started. Learn more about [how to create an Instagram story](#).

## Ways to engage your followers

Here are few ways to engage with your audience on Instagram:

- Post every day, or at least frequently
- Share short sermon clips that share positive powerful messages
- Share one or two meaningful pictures of your events – always pick your best
- Post inspiring graphics, quotes, and meaningful scripture
- Share graphic event reminders or announcements for upcoming events
- Use relevant hashtags
- Tag your volunteers in your photos – people love social media praise (you will need their Instagram usernames to tag them)
- Use Instagram stories to share some favourite moments of your day and to highlight your church's events, services, and people
- Showcase the projects you are working on, charities you are working with and milestones within your congregation
- Share other people's photos of your church, services or community (just make sure to ask for permission first)
- Go behind the scenes in your church

## Get inspired

Instagram accounts of churches in the Church of Scotland:

St George's Tron Church of Scotland [@sgt.church](#)

Blantyre Old Parish Church [@blantyreoldparish](#)

Banchory West Church [@banchorywestgram](#)

Lochside Mission and Outreach [@lochsidemission](#)

Belhaven Parish Church [@belhavenparish](#)

Greyfriar's Kirk [@greyfriarskirk\\_official](#)

## 5. Moderating

Creating content and engaging with your followers are important aspects of running a social media account but arguably the most important thing you will need to do is moderate.

Moderating interactions on your social media accounts is important because there are people online who leave spam or hateful comments on Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and Instagram photos. There are several ways you can manage unwanted interactions.

On Facebook you can include a [profanity filter](#), which allows you to block certain words, or [ban someone](#) from interacting with your page. If you don't want to block someone completely you can also hide unhelpful comments from others by clicking on the three small dots at the top right of the comment. Only the person's Facebook friends will then see their comment.

On Twitter you can mute, unfollow or block Twitter users (see the Twitter section for further information).

On Instagram you can [unfollow](#) or [block](#) people, or [mute](#) their story.

## 6. Safeguarding

Remember to stay aware of safeguarding rules and regulations. You can find safeguarding information on the [Church of Scotland website](#), along with templates for photograph consent forms etc.

Here are some basic rules for your engagement online:

- Adults should think twice and consider speaking to a parent before adding/following children under 16 from the congregation on social media.
- Always obtain consent from parents before using images of children on social media

Churches address this in different ways. Some churches have a blanket consent form which parents sign before their children take part in activities. Other churches choose not to include photographs of children on their social media accounts at all. Consult our [safeguarding resources](#) for further guidance.

We recommend having a conversation with your Kirk Session and agreeing on your church's safeguarding approach.

## 7. Summary

We hope that these tips have come in handy if you're thinking of launching social media accounts for your church or you're looking to refresh your existing accounts. Below is a round-up of what we've covered.

- Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram offer a good way for churches to communicate with their members and keep them informed about current news and events
- However, not all social platforms will be suitable for every church, and we recommend that you think carefully about your church's needs and who you are trying to communicate with before choosing a platform
- Always ensure there is always more than one person who has the login details and passwords for your social media accounts
- Ensure you use high quality images which fit the optimum size for each social media platform – good images are incredibly important
- Keep an eye on moderating the comments on your pages and make use of the moderation techniques discussed (e.g. blocking, unfollowing or muting) if required
- Be creative and show the character and personality of your church
- Don't post on your pages in the heat of the moment (for example, when you're angry, tired or under the influence) – always think carefully about what you are writing and how it may come across to others
- Above all, keep posting and interacting with your audience.

For more information, please get in touch with the [Church of Scotland Communications Team](#).



The Church of Scotland  

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Communications Department

[www.churchofscotland.org.uk](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk)

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