

## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

*“All new forms of communication provide opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world. They come, however, with new values. Whereas the printed word has a certain finality of declaration about it, social media is interactive, conversational and open-ended. Moreover, it happens in a public, not private, space. The Methodist Church therefore encourages the user to use social tools as a means of engaging in an interactive conversation with people of all faiths and none. As Gospel people, our conversation should be 'seasoned with salt' ([Colossians 4:6](#)), and these guidelines aim to help us to do so.”*

Social Media Guidelines of the Methodist Church in Britain.

This Policy is based on the principles set out in the Social Media Guidelines issued by the Methodist Church for employees of the Methodist Council. The Upper Thames Circuit accepts that the following principles form good practice for Methodist Ministers, lay employees and other office holder or those holding a representative role in the Methodist Church:

- **Be credible.** Be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent.
- **Be consistent.** Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation.
- **Be cordial, honest and professional** at all times. Be responsive. When you gain insight, share it where appropriate.
- **Be integrated.** Wherever possible, align online participation with other communications.
- **Be a good representative of the Methodist Church.** Remember that you are an ambassador for Christ, the Church and your part of it. Disclose your position as a member or officer of the Church, making it clear when speaking personally. Let [Galatians 5:22-26](#) guide your behaviour.
- **Be respectful:** respect confidentiality. Respect the views of others even where you disagree

## **1. Participation via Social Media**

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.

Never share personal details like home address and phone numbers except with someone you know and trust, and if you decide to do so then use a private message. Be aware an address can be disclosed in many ways for example via photos or a GPS position as well as in written form.

Always remember that participating online results in your comments being permanently available and open to being republished in other media. Once something is posted to a blog or other internet site, it should be assumed to be still available even if it is later deleted from the original site.

Stay within the legal framework and be aware that safeguarding, libel, slander, copyright and data protection laws apply, as well as the Constitutional Practice and Discipline (CPD) of the Methodist Church.

**Confidentiality:** Treat email and text messages with the same level of care and security as written correspondence.

Be aware that self-disclosure via social media can inadvertently reach a wider audience than intended and so become common knowledge. Always be circumspect if there is a risk that information presented may be misinterpreted or misunderstood.

Be aware that your participation 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.

Always be aware that your membership of the Church means that you are regarded as a representative of the faith we share.

## **2. Use of Official Name and Logo**

Any use of the “Upper Thames Circuit” name or logo for branding or titling pages, blogs or similar elements of social media must be approved in writing prior to use. Requests should be made to the Circuit Administrator [circuitadmin@upperthamescircuit.org.uk](mailto:circuitadmin@upperthamescircuit.org.uk). [A similar principle applies to the use of the names of individual churches within our Circuit]

## **3. Individual Judgment.**

Even when engaging in social media for personal use, the comments of a member of the Upper Thames Circuit or of one of its churches may be viewed as a reflection on the Circuit. Users should use their best judgment when engaging in social media activities and should be on guard against actions and discussions that could harm the interests of our church community.

## **4. Transparency.**

Users’ social media communications are made in their personal capacity and not on behalf of the Upper Thames Circuit and its churches. Statements made by members of the church community should not be taken as expressing the formal position of the Upper Thames Circuit or of the Methodist Church unless the writer is specifically authorized to do so by the Superintendent Minister.

## **5. Copyright Laws.**

Users must comply fully with copyright law when posting and uploading materials. Any posting of materials to official Upper Thames social media must be limited to materials in which the copyright is owned by the party seeking to post the information, or in which the owner has consented to the sharing of the materials. Images and other materials from the Upper Thames website shall not be copied and uploaded to other forums without the prior written consent of the Superintendent Minister.

## 6. **Privacy.**

Users of social media must comply with the Upper Thames Privacy Policy i.e. All users of social media within the Upper Thames community should take care to safeguard the privacy interests of other community members. In particular, personal information (that is, information that can reasonably identify a particular person, including name, phone number, address or email address) should not be disclosed without the prior written consent of the person identified. In cases where a user has consented to the publication of such information, appropriate privacy settings and levels should still be utilized.

## 7. **Mindfulness** for those deployed and employed in our Churches.

Those working for the church should reflect on when to use social networks during working hours.

It is recognised that this is a powerful and effective medium to keep in touch with friends, co-workers and volunteers, but mindfulness of how much time is spent in online activities set against other work priorities is vital.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with:

- The Methodist Safeguarding Policy
- The 2001 Methodist Conference Report “Speaking for the Methodist Church” <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-speaking-for-the-methodist-church-2001.pdf>
- The Methodist Church Social Media Guidance for Workers which particularly sets boundaries for the use of Internet, email and texting communication particularly for those working with young people. <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1465950/Social-Media-Guidelines-for-workers.pdf>

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