



Social Media Conduct Policy

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GARSTANG FREE METHODIST CHURCH

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Introduction

1. Social media is a very useful tool to spread the Love of Jesus to all concerned, it can also be used as a very destructive tool to bring down all concerned. In accordance with UK Government Legislation and Guidance, Garstang Free Methodist Church (GFMC) is required to have a Social Media Conduct policy. This policy document meets those requirements.

Policy Statement

2. Social media is key to the success of communicating the Vision, Mission and Values of GFMC and the wider Free Methodist Church. It allows us to build connections, communities and to share content wider and quicker than we have ever been able to before. GFMC fully encourages the use of social media to further the mission of the Church.
3. In all our social media activities, both on behalf of the Church and in our personal lives, it is expected that all staff and volunteers who represent our Church reflect the values of our Christian faith and those of our community.

Definition of Social Media

4. Social media is the term given to internet-based tools and applications. These tools enable their users to create and share content, words, images and video, and to collaborate and interact socially with each other through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of the most popular social media include YouTube, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, X, WhatsApp, TikTok and LinkedIn. Social media is a constantly changing arena with new apps and websites launching on a regular basis and therefore this list is not exhaustive.
5. At present GFMC has the following accounts and/or channels:
 - GFMC Website;
 - GFMC Facebook Page;
 - YouTube Services;
 - WhatsApp Pray Group;
 - WhatsApp small groups.
 - Youth Instagram

Who Does This Policy Cover?

6. This policy applies to staff & volunteers, disciplinary action may be taken if appropriate against these members if they neglect to follow this policy. All volunteers who represent our Church are expected to present themselves with integrity and uphold the values of our Christian faith, this includes their use of social media.

7. The intention of this policy is to clarify to the Church the guidelines and behaviours expected when social media is used, to ensure that every person at GFMC, who uses social media, does so in a way that represents our Vision, Mission and Values well and protects themselves from accusations and questions of integrity. This policy is designed to help you use these platforms and services responsibly, when your use of social media relates to the Church and your work or service at Church, whether this be professional or personal.

Context and Legal Framework

8. This policy has been developed within the context of UK Government legislation and guidance. Summaries of the key legislation and guidance are available on:
 - Data protection Act 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/data-protection>
 - Protection from Harassment Act 1997
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/40/section/1>
 - Human Rights Act 1998, Schedule 1, Part 1, Article 8, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/schedule/1>
 - Online abuse learning, nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/online-abuse
 - Bullying learning, nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/bullying
 - Child protection learning, nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system
9. The policies below are all complementing policies:
 - Equal Opportunities Policy;
 - Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy;
 - Confidentiality Policy;
 - Safeguarding Policy.

Guidelines for Social Media Use

10. At GFMC we encourage our staff, leadership, volunteers and congregation to engage and communicate about the Church and its mission using their own social media accounts. We encourage our congregation to comment on and share anything produced by the Church accounts to spread awareness of our Vision, Mission and Values.
11. We have high standards of expectation and a greater sense of responsibility on Staff & Volunteers for their behaviour when using social media. These groups have an important role to play in shaping the public perception of GFMC, the Christian Church and our mission through the way they conduct themselves on social media, both personally and in representing the Church online.
12. When content is created or exchanged using social media, that content is considered public. It is not private and can be forwarded to third parties without your consent. Please be aware that views and opinions about the Church or the people who are part of our Church, particularly its Staff and Members may impact on our reputation and ability to achieve our Vision.

13. This policy does not seek to regulate how staff, leaders and volunteers use social media privately, provided that such use has no bearing on the Church or its activities. However, if views are expressed that contradict any policy or publicly expressed position of GFMC, it must be made clear that those views are given in a personal capacity. The expression of such views may impact the Church's reputation and may constitute a breach of this policy.
14. Likewise, if Staff & Volunteers conduct themselves or present behaviours in such a manner that reflects badly on the Church or call the reputation of the Church into question, this will be considered breach of this policy and disciplinary action may be taken depending on the level of misconduct. Staff and Members are expected to behave with integrity in all areas of their public and personal lives.
15. The Communications Team are responsible for setting up and managing GFMC social media channels and accounts. Only those authorised to do so will have access to these accounts. No one should set up other groups, pages, accounts or any other social media channels on behalf of GFMC without proper permission. This could confuse messaging and brand awareness. By having official social media accounts in place, the Communications Team can ensure consistency of the brand and focus on building a strong following.
16. The social media guidelines below may be helpful to all, they are divided into 'Dos' and 'Don'ts'. All members of the Staff Team must read these, and they would be useful guidelines for all Church Volunteers and members of the congregation.

Dos:

- Be honest and open, whilst being mindful of the potential effect of what you're sharing on people's perception of the Church.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Ensure third party quotes are accurate, referenced and shared with permission. Be mindful of the principles of copyright, particularly if your use involves the creation of content, either written or visual.
- Share posts that promote what our Church is doing and encourage others to be involved.
- Use social media to share your views in a loving, non-judgmental way.
- Be security conscious, create secure passwords, carefully check direct messages with links on or requests from people claiming to be a contact or friend, including other partners of the Church.
- Be an ambassador for our brand. Staff & Volunteers should ensure they reflect our Church values in what they post and use our tone of voice when posting on the Church accounts. Our Vision, Mission and Values, set out our tone of voice, that all staff & Volunteers should refer to when posting content on the Church's social media channels.
- Bring value to our audience. Answer their questions, help and engage with them.
- Take care with the presentation of content. Make sure that there are no typos, misspellings or grammatical errors. Also check the quality of images. If you need to have content proof read first before posting, make sure this is done.
- Always pause and think before posting. That said, reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.
- Be honest. Say what you know to be true or for which you have a good source. If you've made a mistake, don't be afraid to admit it.

- If you are posting Images of under 18s, be sure to get permission from their parents first, not everyone is happy for their children to be put online. This is not a legal requirement but it is best practice and an expectation at our Church.

Don'ts:

- Link to anything abusive, obscene, discriminatory, derogatory, defamatory or pornographic.
- Escalate 'heated' discussions, especially when you are angry or upset.
- Use your Church email address to sign up for personal use of social media.
- Disclose any confidential or sensitive information belonging to the Church or any of its Pastoral Team, staff, leaders, volunteers, partners or regular attendees.
- Post content about Pastoral Team, staff, leaders, volunteers, partners or attendees of our Church without their express permission.
- Provide references or recommendations for anyone else on social media, whether employment or business recommendations, in any way that suggests any endorsement or recommendation by the Church. If you wish to provide a reference or recommendation, you should seek advice from the Lead Pastor.
- Staff & Volunteers should refrain from offering personal opinions via Church social media accounts, either directly by commenting or indirectly by 'liking' or 'sharing' content. If you are in doubt about the Church's position on a particular issue, speak to the Lead Pastor and do not offer opinion publicly or via direct messaging until you are given the go ahead.
- GFMC is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. If a complaint is made on a Church social media channel, the Communications Team should seek advice before responding. On the whole we will not comment on or post about current affairs unless expressly agreed between the Lead Pastor and at least one of the Trustees. Such an example would be the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

Staff & Volunteers Working with Children or Young People

17. This section applies to all staff, leaders, volunteers, young people, children and anyone else involved in GFMC activities with young people and children. We also have expectations around the behaviour and conduct of our young people when they are engaging in Church activities on social media.
18. Social media may be used to promote Children and young people's activities. Photographs and short videos are occasionally shared to encourage parents to be involved and see a glimpse of what happens when the children meet. GFMC will always seek to gain permission to share any images of under 18's on social media before posting.
19. Social media can be used to communicate with young people but GFMC will abide by the age restrictions set out by social media sites. All team members working with young people must be familiar with the guidance for communicating via social media set out in the Safeguarding Policy.
20. We are committed to ensuring that the safety and wellbeing of children and young people remains paramount and that leaders, staff and volunteers are aware of the overarching principles that guide our approach to online safety. For more information on the use of social media and children or young people see the Safeguarding Policy.

Photography and Image Sharing Guidance

21. Photographs of any child or young person are only shared with permission from parents. All staff and volunteer team members should be aware that they are not permitted to share identifiable images of children and young people on the Church social media accounts. In line with the GFMC Safeguarding Policy.
22. In the event that an identifiable picture or video is posted of a child or young person who has not granted permission, as soon as the media is identified it will be removed by the person managing that social media account or any Communications Team member, if they become aware that permission has been breached. Whoever has posted must be informed as soon as content is identified and they will then communicate with the parents. If you are posting an image of a child who does not have general permission to be shared but you have been given permission by parents for a single image or post you should let the rest of the Communications Team know so the post is not interfered with unnecessarily.

Monitoring Breaches and Complaints

23. GFMC monitors all activity on all of its social media accounts. We will also investigate specific cases involving external or personal accounts of Staff or Volunteers, where a concern has been raised, and will take reasonable steps to address contraventions to this policy.
24. If an employee is found to be in breach of the policy, they will be disciplined in accordance with the Disciplinary and Grievance Policy. For employees this does not form part of their contract and may be changed at any time, however any grossly indecent behaviour by staff members on social media could amount to gross misconduct and result in a termination of their contact and immediate dismissal.
25. Indecent behaviour will include anything that would be immoral in the Christian faith, including images or videos of yourself in a state of undress or acting in a sexually provocative manner, images or videos of yourself under the influence of excessive amounts of alcohol or any illegal or non-prescription drugs, language that is vulgar or abusive, any language or images or videos that could be perceived as bullying, harassment or discrimination whether they are of yourself or someone else. This is not an exhaustive list.
26. If Trustees, Elders or Volunteers are found to be in breach of this policy, it may invoke the Lead Pastor to take action and terminate their term of office. Indecent behaviour by Leaders or Volunteers on social media may result in them being dismissed from their post and access to Church social media accounts being withdrawn or blocked.
27. Breaches may occur on a personal account with appropriate privacy settings; outside normal working hours; and/or without using Church's computers, systems and networks. If you believe your personal accounts may have been hacked you should take immediate steps to secure the accounts to avoid inappropriate content being shared. If your accounts are hacked and used inappropriately you should bring this to the attention of Communications Team to avoid disciplinary procedures being triggered in the event of inappropriate content being shared on your personal accounts.

29. In certain circumstances, breaches to this policy may constitute a criminal offence and we will be bound by law to report this to the police.

Complaints

30. If a member of Staff or Volunteers sees anything on social media that misrepresents our Church or contravenes the guidelines set out in this policy, please report your concerns directly to Communications Team and not by default, to members of the pastoral team or the Senior Leader. If you are aware that there is a conflict of interest in reporting to the above named person you should speak to the Lead Pastor.

31. Each complaint or concern will be handled confidentially and on a case by case basis.

Monitoring and Reviewing the Policy

32. The Trustees will formally review and reissue this policy every 5 years or when there are any significant changes. This policy will also be periodically reviewed by Trustees to ensure that it is being implemented in all areas of GFMC. Church members are welcome to comment on this policy and suggest ways in which it might be improved by contacting The Trustees.

Approval

33. The Social Media Conduct Policy was approved by the GFMC Trustees at their March 2025 meeting.