



SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Purpose

This guide is for ministers, lay leaders, district and congregational officers, and staff of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, as well as any person who may represent the movement in a third party organisation or in the wider community.

Social media use is governed by a number of laws, both in the UK and abroad, which we must ensure not to break.

Equally, Unitarians must seek to preserve and enhance our positive reputation. This is important in terms of representing our members and delivering on our goals and ideals.

These guidelines will help you understand how to avoid problems for yourselves, and our movement, when using social media.

The Law

Use of social media is covered by a number of UK criminal and civil laws and, as social media has no national boundaries, laws in other countries too.

As a very simple guide, you may be breaking the law, if you post (or potentially repost) anything that may fall into any of the following categories:

- Harassment – not leaving someone alone.
- Menacing behaviour – writing something that may scare someone.
- Threatening behaviour – making someone believe that you were going to hurt them.
- Grossly offensive comments – making deeply unpleasant comments about a sensitive issue.
- Libel - a post is potentially libellous if it is a false statement and may damage someone's reputation.
- Defamation – a post is potentially defamatory if it contains an unsubstantiated rumour about someone.
- Data protection/GDPR – breaching an individual's right to privacy or giving out their contact details without permission.

- Copyright – posting material, especially photographs, without permission when it is owned by another person or organisation.

Our Spokespeople

The Unitarian and Free Christian Churches have spokespeople to represent us. The two main spokespeople are the Chief Officer and President. At a local level, district presidents, congregational chairpersons and ministers often act as our spokespeople.

From time to time, especially on topics where certain expertise/experience is required, we may appoint a spokesperson from outside of this group.

However, even if you do not speak officially or directly on behalf of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, or of your district or congregation, you will likely be seen as doing so by members of the public if you are somebody who holds a leadership role within our movement. This is especially true if you are posting on issues relating to religion.

Please always bear in mind that even if you do not think you are speaking on behalf of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches on a specific issue, others may think that you are simply because of the position you hold (often listed in your social media biography).

Guidelines

- Clearly state that your opinions are your own. If you are not a spokesperson, make clear that your comments, opinions or tweets are your own, so these won't be interpreted as our position. A statement should appear on your profile to make this clear. On Twitter, the statement "All views are my own" should be included in your profile, which can be edited under 'Settings'.
- If you are posting on a particularly sensitive topic then please speak to the General Assembly communications team first. We would never seek to prevent you posting something in a personal capacity, but if it has the potential to cause damage or controversy we would appreciate knowing in advance – both to protect the movement and to help you with any backlash.
- While we are all passionate about promoting and protecting the aims and ideals of Unitarianism, please always remember to be professional, courteous, positive and respect the right of others to hold opinions that are different to ours.
- You will most likely come across abusive posts. People who are abusive are usually trying to provoke a reaction from you, so don't give them what they want. Besides, you are unlikely to convince them they are wrong. Silence is often the best response. Use the relevant abuse reporting system instead, because having their account shut down will help stop them from offending others.

- If you disagree with something and feel you should respond, always be courteous and do not personalise your response. Focus on the issue, not the person who wrote the post. If you simply 'poke someone in the chest', you won't get a positive response. And no issue was ever solved without a solution, so offer one.
- Occasionally the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches or one of your colleagues/peers will do something that upsets you. This may be taking a religious or political position that you don't personally agree with or even something as simple as forgetting to invite you to an event. We would always encourage you to sort out any issue directly rather than posting about it on social media.
- Do not breach privacy or security. Do not post personal information, such as someone's home address, and never post about individuals without their consent, unless there is little if any doubt it would be given.
- Respect copyright, fair use and other laws. If you are using images make sure you acknowledge the source and observe copyright laws. Images of crowds at events don't require the approval of each individual, but an image where a limited number of individuals are the subject matter of the image do. It is particularly important that you obtain permission, if you wish to use images of children or vulnerable adults.
- It goes without saying that extremist views, sexism, pornography/distressing or otherwise offensive imagery, racial/ethnic or religious discrimination, homophobia or disparaging comments against any minority group, such as the disabled or mentally ill are not acceptable, under any circumstances, ever.
- Finally, don't be offensive to anyone, for any reason, even if they are someone who is an opponent of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches or our values. Two good tests to use are:
 - If you wouldn't say it to their face, don't say it at all.
 - If you wouldn't want your parents to read it, don't write it.

Meaning and Tone

Remember that the majority of our communication is through body language and voice tone / volume and the amount of text in social media can be limited, so meaning can easily be lost. What may appear light hearted and funny to you, may potentially come across very differently on social media. Two methods of checking are:

- Say your post out loud to see how it sounds. Does it sound different depending on your tone? This may affect how your post is read by others.

- Re-read your post a few times before posting it to ensure it says what you intend to say, and everything is spelt correctly!

Remember to take into account potential social and/or cultural differences in your audience who may be more sensitive to particular issues or subjects than the wider population.

The Unitarian and Free Christian Churches communications team have tried to cultivate their own 'tone of voice' on social media. If you want more advice on this, our team are happy to help.

The Golden Rule

The golden rule when wanting to post something you know will be controversial, especially in a moment of anger or frustration, is 'think first, post later'.

If something gets online, it stays there for a long time. Tweets now appear in Google search results. The media loves to cover 'social media stats'. Even a post on a private Facebook page is easily copied and pasted by one of the many people in your friends list.

Please never be afraid to ask for a second opinion.

Not sure if and how you should tweet or comment on something? Then please always contact the communications team for advice.

Unitarian and Free Christian Churches Communications Team Contact Details

Communications Officer - Rory Castle Jones rcastlejones@unitarian.org.uk 07932 544 290

Chief Officer – Liz Slade eslade@unitarian.org.uk

Or contact the headquarters of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches at Essex Hall on (020) 7240 2384.

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