Social Media Policy
Whittle le Woods Methodist church

A comprehensive guide for social media use for Whittle le Woods Methodist Church channels and for individuals using social media in a personal capacity as a representative of the church.

This policy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, at least once a year. The Leadership Team of Whittle le Woods Methodist church will amend this policy, following consultations with Church council.

This policy is intended for all staff and volunteers of the church. Before engaging in social media activity, you must read this policy, which contains guidance that will help you adhere to our standards.

This policy should be read in line with the social media team guidance document.

Date of last review: October 2026

Date of next review: October 2027

Introduction

What is social media?

Social media is the collective term given to web-based tools and applications which enable users to create, share and interact with content (words, images, graphics and video content), as well as network with each other through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of social media platforms include Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, Twitch and TikTok. Within this policy we also include all aspects of digital media including the church website and digital announcements used in our services.

Why do we use social media and what can we use it for?

Social media is essential to the success of communicating the important work of Whittle le Woods Methodist Church (WLWMC). It is important for designated staff and volunteers to participate in social media to engage with our audiences, contribute to relevant conversations, and raise the profile of our churches work. Some staff and volunteers may also support the churches work using their personal accounts, and many will have social media accounts for personal use.

Social media helps us to:

- Promote what is happening in our church to encourage increased engagement
- Encourage our members, invite new people, and share God's love in a simple and friendly way.
- Share learning and encourage faith
- Reach those who cannot attend church physically
- Build an online supportive faith community
- Form and deepen relationships locally and globally

Why do we need a social media policy?

Social media is a fast-moving online world, where nuance and context can be easily lost. While social media brings the church to a wide audience, it can also present risks. It brings with it a clear duty to uphold our values and mission as churches and people of faith. We all have a responsibility to ensure our presence on social media reflects Our Calling and becomes one of the many tools we have to live out our Methodist way of life. While few of us will become influencers in the typical sense, we must all be aware of the influence our words and actions have online and be prepared to limit the risks these platforms present.
We want to ensure that all staff and volunteers using social media represent and reflect WLWMC in the best way possible. It is also important to mitigate risks (such as reputational or legal issues) associated with the use of social media to protect our supporters, staff and volunteers, work and reputation.

While we encourage the use of social media to support our communications strategy or plans, we have important standards, outlined in this policy, which we require everyone to observe and adhere to. The difference between a personal and professional opinion can also be blurred on social media, particularly if you're discussing issues relating to the work of our church. Publication and commentary on social media carry similar obligations and is subject to the same laws as other kinds of publication or commentary in the public domain.

Failure to comply with this policy could expose WLWMC to reputational damage as well as putting staff, volunteers and members at risk.

Responsibilities and breach of policy

Everyone is responsible for their compliance with this policy.
Participation in social media on behalf of WLWMC is not a right but an opportunity, so it must be treated seriously and with respect.
Breaches of policy or inappropriate behaviour may incur disciplinary action, depending on the severity of the issue. Staff and volunteers who are unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach policies should seek advice from the minister

Setting out the social media policy

Application

This policy applies to all social media platforms used by staff and volunteers.
This policy also applies to online blogs, wikis, podcasts, forums, and messaging based apps, such as WhatsApp. Social media can be accessed in various ways, including from a desktop or laptop computer, tablet or smartphone. This policy applies to the use of all such devices.

Point of contact for social media and authority to post on Whittle le Woods Methodist church's social media accounts

Our Leadership Team is responsible for the day-to-day publishing, monitoring and management of our social media channels. No other staff member or volunteer is permitted to post content on our social media channels

Which social media channels do we use?

Currently we have a website and use Facebook and Whatsapp as our forms of communication.

Policy ownership

The Leadership Team is responsible for authoring and updating this document. The policy must be approved by Church council and reviewed every year, unless a significant change requires the organisation to check the policy before the next review date. All staff and volunteers will be notified of updates.

Rules for use: headlines

Code of conduct headlines

• I will not insult, harass, bully or intimidate individuals or organisations
• I will respond to others' opinions respectfully and professionally
• I will not do anything that breaches my terms of employment/voluntary role
• I will acknowledge and correct mistakes promptly using provided guidance
• I will disclose conflicts of interest where I am able
• I will not knowingly post inaccurate information
• I will link to online references and original source materials directly
• I will be considerate, kind and fair
• I will always ensure my activity does no harm to the organisation or to others
• I will champion Whittle le Woods Methodist Church

Rules for use: full list

Using Whittle le Woods Methodist Church's social media channels — appropriate conduct

1. Know our social media guardians

The Leadership Team is responsible for setting up and managing WLWMC's social media channels. This team has overall ownership of these accounts and only those authorised to do so by the Leadership Team will have access to these accounts.

The social media team will uphold best practices for channel security with secure passwords that regularly change. Never give out the passwords for our channels without express permission from the Leadership Team.

2. Be an ambassador for our brand

Staff and volunteers must ensure they reflect WLWMC*'s* values in what they post and use our tone of voice. All communications should be in line with the values of a Methodist Church. Please note only the social media team is permitted to respond to comments on our social media posts on behalf of the organisation. All posts and comments should be attributed to the church and not an individual. In special cases it may be appropriate for a staff member or volunteer to make an individual comment as themselves, but this should be with the approval of the minister of the church

3. Always pause and think before posting

When posting from WLWMC's social media accounts, you must respond to comments in the voice of our church and not allow your own personal opinions to influence responses. Staff and volunteers must not reveal their personal opinions via our accounts by 'liking', 'sharing' or 'reposting' as WLWMC. If you are in doubt about WLWMC's position on a particular issue, please speak to the minister.

4. Ensure brand consistency

Staff or volunteers must not create or manage any other social media channels, groups or pages on behalf of WLWMC without express permission from the Leadership Team. This is to ensure brand consistency for users and the appropriate safeguarding and monitoring processes are in place.

5. Remember the bigger picture and focus on the benefit

Staff and volunteers must make sure that all social media content has a purpose and a benefit for WLWMC. All content must accurately reflect WLWMC's mission statement.

6. Bring value to our audience(s)

Those responsible for the management of our social media accounts should answer questions as swiftly as possible to help and engage with our service users and supporters.

7. Seek permission to share

If staff or volunteers outside of the social media team wish to contribute content for social media, whether non-paid for or paid for advertising, they should obtain guidance and permission from the Leadership Team

8. Obtain consent

Staff and volunteers must not post content about groups or individuals without their, or their guardian's, express permission. Any content should be clearly labelled so our audiences know it has not come directly from WLWMC. If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, staff and volunteers must ensure they have the consent of a parent or guardian before using them on social media.

9. Put safety first

It can be challenging working on social media and there may be times where staff or volunteers could be subject to unpleasant or abusive comments directed at the church, our work or people. We encourage everyone who is on social media on behalf of the church to be aware of our safeguarding practices to deal with online abuse and consult with the safeguarding lead where necessary.

It is also vital that WLWMC does not encourage others to risk their personal safety or that of others, to gather materials in pursuit of social media engagement. For example, a video of a stunt or visiting an unsafe location.

10. Stick to the law

Staff and volunteers must not encourage people to break the law to supply material for social media, such as using unauthorised video footage. All relevant rights for usage must be obtained before publishing material.

11. Remain politically neutral

WLWMC is not associated with any political organisation or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. We can express views where appropriate on policies that impact our work and service users, but it is essential that WLWMC remains, and is seen to be, politically neutral.

We cannot endorse a political party or candidate. We must carefully manage the risk that we are perceived to have any party-political bias and should carefully consider any posts which might be perceived as such, for example, posts which talk about individual politicians or parties rather than policies

12. Check facts and be honest

Staff and volunteers should not automatically assume that material that is shared or included in any post is accurate and should take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification – for example, by checking data/statistics and being wary of photo manipulation. If you have made a mistake, do not be afraid to admit it. But think first about how to manage any risk to the church and its brand in doing so by consulting with the leadership team to craft the response.

13. Seek advice for complaints

If a complaint is made on WLWMC's social media channels, staff and volunteers should seek advice from the Leadership Team before responding.

14. Know what to do in a crisis

Sometimes issues can arise on social media which can escalate into a crisis situation because they are sensitive or risk serious damage to the church's reputation.

The nature of social media means that complaints are visible and can escalate quickly. Not acting can be detrimental to the church or our people. The social media team regularly monitors our social media spaces for mentions of WLWMC so we can catch any issues or problems early.
If any staff or volunteers outside of the social media team becomes aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on WLWMC's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the minister immediately. It is the responsibility of all staff and volunteers to report complaints or comments that could escalate into a crisis or have serious implications for the church. Only the social media team named is permitted to amend or delete content in a crisis, after consultation with the Leadership Team.

15. Timings, schedules and rotas

- Posts will be regular
- Posts will be shared into community groups where appropriate
- Posts will mostly feature people not building as this connects more with our audience.
- Language used will be clear, friendly and not contain jargon.

Use of personal social media accounts — appropriate conduct

Personal social media use by staff and volunteers can sometimes be attributed to the church or bring other risks for the church, individual staff or volunteers. This policy does not intend to inhibit personal use of social media, but instead flags up those areas in which risks or conflicts might arise. WLWMC staff and volunteers are expected to behave appropriately, and in ways that are considerate of WLWMC's values and policies, both online and in real life.

1. Separate your personal views

Be aware that any information you make public could affect how people perceive WLWMC. You must make it clear when you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of WLWMC. If you are using your personal social media accounts to promote and talk about WLWMC's work, you must use a disclaimer such as: “Views are my own” or "The views expressed on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent WLWMC’s positions, policies or opinions."

2. Protect your personal reputation

Think about your personal reputation as well as the church's. Express your opinions and deal with differences of opinion respectfully. Don't insult people or treat them badly. Passionate discussions and debates are fine, but you should always be respectful of others and their opinions. Be the first to correct your own mistakes.

Remember that if you have a public profile with the church, your personal social media accounts could be looked at by critics of the charity, and bear this in mind when posting.

3. Use your common sense and good judgement

Be aware of your association with WLWMC and ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself.

4. Refer press enquiries

If a staff member or volunteer is contacted by the press about their social media posts that relate to WLWMC they should talk to the minister immediately and under no circumstances respond directly.

5. Keep your political activity separate from the charity

When representing WLWMC, staff and volunteers are expected to uphold WLWMC's. Staff and volunteers who are politically active in their spare time need to be clear in separating their personal political identity from WLWMC and understand and avoid potential risks and conflicts of interest.

6. Protect your privacy

Be careful with your privacy online and be cautious when sharing personal information. Remember that a simple ‘like’ can draw attention to your personal accounts. What you publish is widely accessible and could be around for a long time, so do consider the content, and your privacy, carefully.

All staff and volunteers who wish to engage with any of WLWMC's social media platforms are strongly advised to ensure that they set the privacy levels of their personal sites as strictly as they can and to opt out of public listings on social networking sites to protect their own privacy. All staff and volunteers should keep their passwords confidential and change them often.

In their own interests, staff and volunteers should be aware of the dangers of putting personal information onto social networking sites, such as addresses, home and mobile phone numbers.

7. Help us to raise our profile (where appropriate)

We encourage staff and volunteers to share posts that we have issued. When online in a personal capacity, you might also see opportunities to comment on or support the work we do. Where appropriate and using the guidelines within this policy (and taking into consideration the information above), we encourage staff and volunteers to do this as it helps users connect to us and raises our profile.

However, please take care to think about the reputation of the church. If your personal social media account is not professional or otherwise appropriate for our audiences, please do not use it to amplify or promote the church, as to do so brings risks both to you personally and to the church.

8. Staying safe online

It can be challenging working on social media and there may be times where staff and volunteers could be subject to unpleasant or abusive comments directed at the church, our work or people. We encourage everyone who is on social media to be aware of our safeguarding practices to deal with online abuse and consult with the safeguarding lead where necessary.

Staff and volunteers should be vigilant regarding suspicious content or links and must not reveal personal, confidential or sensitive information about themselves, other staff members or volunteers]. Staff and volunteers should be wary of fake accounts that may claim to WLWMC and should immediately notify the minister.

Care must also be taken to ensure that any links to external sites from our social media accounts are appropriate and safe

Please consult our relevant policies and procedures for the safeguarding of our staff and volunteers:

Further guidelines: using social media in a professional and personal capacity

Defamation

Defamation is when a false statement that is damaging to a person's reputation is published in print (such as in media publications) or online (such as Instagram Story, Facebook Live, Snapchat post). Whether staff or volunteers are posting content on social media as part of their job or in a personal capacity, they should not bring WLWMC into disrepute by making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups.

Copyright law

It is critical that all staff or volunteers abide by the laws governing copyright, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, when representing the church. Never use or adapt someone else's images or written content without permission. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, is also considered a breach of copyright.

Confidentiality

Any communications that staff and volunteers make must not breach confidentiality. For example, information meant for internal use only or information that WLWMC is not ready to disclose yet.

Discrimination and harassment

Staff and volunteers should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official WLWMC social media channel or a personal account. For example:

- Making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief.
- Using social media to bully another individual.
- Posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content.

Accessibility

In line with WLWMC's equity, diversity and inclusion agenda we endeavour to ensure our social media is as accessible as possible. This includes*:*

- Using plain English, accessible fonts and avoiding small text sizes
- Using contrasting colours
- Using subtitles where appropriate
- Using alt text for videos and images
- Explaining text contained in an image in the copy that accompanies it

Use of social media in the recruitment process

Recruitment should be carried out in accordance with the Methodist Church and associated procedures and guidelines. Any advertising of vacancies should be promoted through approved channels.

There should be no systematic or routine checking of candidates' online social media activities during the recruitment process, as conducting these searches might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics, such as religious beliefs or sexual orientation, played a part in a recruitment decision

Under 18s and vulnerable people

Young and vulnerable people face risks when using social networking sites. They may be at risk of being bullied, publishing sensitive and personal information on their profiles, or from becoming targets for online grooming or radicalisation. Where known, when communicating

with vulnerable or young people under 18-years-old via social media, staff and volunteers should ensure the online relationship with WLWMC follows the same rules as offline.

Staff and volunteers should be aware that children under the age of 13 should not be encouraged to create their own personal social media accounts or engage with others and are not legally allowed to use social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram or X.

Staff and volunteers should ensure that vulnerable and young people have been made aware of the risks of communicating and sharing information online, and given guidance on security and privacy settings as necessary. Staff and volunteers should also ensure that the site itself is suitable for the vulnerable or young person and content is appropriate for them.

All staff members and volunteers have a responsibility to do everything possible to ensure that vulnerable and young people are kept safe from harm. If you come across anything online that could mean someone is at risk, you should follow WLWMC's safeguarding policies.

Please note: While all attempts have been made to cover an extensive range of situations, it is possible that this policy may not cover all eventualities. There may be times when professional judgements are made in situations not covered by this document, or which directly contravene the standards outlined in this document.

It is expected that in these circumstances staff will always consult with the minister where possible or advise the team of the justification for any such action already taken or proposed.

WLW Social Media Policy Agreement

Staff Agreement

I have read and understood the Whittle le Woods Methodist Church social media policy. I agree to abide by the rules set out in this policy and I understand that failing to abide by this policy may result in disciplinary action.

Name: Ellen Monk Winstanley

Role: Minister

Signed: Ellen Monk Winstanley

Date: 22 October 2026