Audio/Video Meetings, Social Media and E-Communications Guidelines

For use in local Churches

The Methodist Church In Ireland

<u>Introduction</u>

Audio/Video Meetings

Throughout the world today, many are now working, learning, and connecting with colleagues, friends, and family through the power of online audio and video conferencing applications. These applications have also now become a big and vital part of our daily Church life and work across the Connexion.

The recommended platform of MCI for online audio and video conferencing is Microsoft Teams.

Microsoft Teams is recommended because it forms an integral part of the wider Microsoft 365 platform the Church has invested in, and because we can be confident that in using this application virtual conversations and meetings are private and secure.

Microsoft Teams has a variety of privacy and security controls which allows users to manage participation in meetings, and control over access to meeting information. Furthermore, Microsoft commits to be transparent over the collection, use, and distribution of data. The company undertakes:

- Never to use Microsoft Teams data to serve you advertisements
- Not to track participants' attention or multi-tasking in Microsoft Teams meetings
- To delete data after the termination or expiration of your subscription; and
- To take strong measures to ensure access to your data is restricted, and carefully define requirements for responding to government requests for data.

We must remain compliant with GDPR when conducting online meetings.

What is Social Media?
Social media consists of various 'platforms' whereby people and businesses connect and share information digitally. The list of platforms is inexhaustive, the most prominent being Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Each platform offers its own way of connecting and communicating. Social media has become a primary avenue for businesses, brands, public figures and individuals to communicate, connect and promote.

Social media therefore offers an opportunity for the Church to not only communicate its events/news/updates but to also communicate the gospel, its vision and its values. The potential to reach the 'unreached' has grown thanks to social media. Often those considering attending Church will check out the Facebook/Twitter/Instagram/WhatsApp page(s) to get a taster of what the Church's community is like and what it stands for. *(For example, a young family may check a Church's Facebook page to see what they have to offer kids on a Sunday morning, or indeed if they are a Church that welcomes kids.)*

Advances of Social Media:
Social media is forever updating. The different platforms compete against each other meaning the rate of updates and developments have increased.

Relevant developments to the Church include:
- Facebook Pages and business Instagram/Twitter profiles - these are different to an average 'personal' profile as they offer functions specific to business' brands, public figures, organisations/charities and churches. They allow users to add a website URL, contact information, create events, advertise etc. For more information, please see <u>MCI Social Media Resources</u>.

- Insights/Analytics allow you to track different variables relating to the performance of your content/page, e.g. how far your posts are reaching and how many engaged or the optimal time to post in order to reach as many followers as possible. Insights/Analytics will also show the demographics of your following. This is available in Facebook Pages, business profiles on Instagram and ads.twitter.com (for Twitter). More information on this is available here: MCI Social Media Resources.

E.g. how far-reaching a post becomes, engagement levels with a post, and optimal times for posting in order to achieve greatest impact

Below are some key verses to consider as you read through the MCI Guidelines for Social Media and E-Communications.

Colossians 4:6
Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer to everyone.

Exodus 20:16
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour

Galatians 5:22-26
But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

The Purpose of the Guidelines:
The reason for approaching this topic and creating this document is to bring forward some key considerations as Churches take to Social Media. We do not wish to 'police' the issue, and these guidelines are based on a foundation of trusting that users will exercise good judgement and common sense, as well as taking responsibility for their actions. These guidelines should not limit or prevent engagement and we make a special note that people are free to engage in discussions with and beyond the Church but should bear in mind their duties and responsibilities to the local Church/department they are a part of.

1) Legal Considerations
Anything you share online is in public domain and is subject to laws around libel, slander, copyright, freedom of information and data protection.

2) Honesty & Transparency
When posting, commenting and sharing on social media, stay honest and transparent. Are you making claims that you are not 100% sure are true? If there is any reason to doubt the validity of your claims, don't take the risk in sharing it online. Check your facts thoroughly.

Use your real name, do not hide behind alias or pseudonym. For personal accounts, if your username or profile does not include your real name, provide brief details in the 'About'/Bio section. When a profile page is created for a congregation/department, identify the person(s) who are responsible for the content posted within it and provide contact details.

3) Permanence

Treat anything said online as being permanent. Once information is published online, it is difficult to remove. Whilst there is an option to delete, edit or hide content, bear in mind that others may have already seen what has been published and may have passed this onto others. As well as social media, this is true for e-mail - once sent there is no guarantee the recipient will delete your message or keep it private.

4) Responsibility, Courtesy, Respect & Tone

Exercising good judgement online is crucial. According to the research of Professor Albert Mehrabian in 1971, communication is **93% non-verbal** *(55% body language and 38% tone of voice);* both body language and tone of voice is widely limited on social media.

With Instagram's recent development of 'Instagram Stories' - video content is often used to communicate, meaning you don't have these same limitations. On Facebook and Twitter, as most content is still in written format, it is important to be diligent with communication. Consider the following when posting:

"Would I be happy for God to read/see this?"
"Is there potential for this to harm or offend someone?"
"Am I attempting humour which could be misconstrued without the usual visual cues?"
"Would I be happy with this appearing on the front page of a newspaper?"

Tone is also important - communication should be respectful and courteous to others.

5) What is public and what is private?

The lines between what is public and what is private are increasingly more blurred over time and this is exaggerated in the realm of social media. If you are a Minister, you should behave in the same manner online as you would when in public and at events/meetings etc. Anything said online will be interpreted by the public as being representative of the Church.

6) Who do you represent?

Whether you are a Minister, an employee or a volunteer at The Methodist Church in Ireland, you will be widely regarded as a representative of the Church. Therefore, when you approach your interactions online, please be aware of your personal/professional boundaries and take all necessary actions to define these boundaries. If you are posting a comment/opinion that is of a personal nature, please be clear in outlining that this is personal and not the views of the Church.

6a) Practical steps to define personal/professional boundaries:

1. Are you posting from your personal profile? This is the appropriate space to post as an individual, not as a representative of the Church.
2. Are you posting via a public page? Is it your local Church's Facebook Page? Or is it the Church Twitter/Instagram profile? These are spaces for posting and engaging on behalf of the Church/organisation, not for posting personal opinions or comments.
3. Review the privacy settings of your personal social media pages in order to ensure that only those you wish to see your profile and posts can. Please see MCI Social Media Resources for instructions on how to adjust these settings on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

7) Confidentiality

The rules of confidentiality stay the same online as in anywhere else. When sharing a story of a situation which involves someone else, ask yourself *'Is this my story to tell?'/ 'Would sharing this story online cause upset, distress or embarrassment to someone?'*. If in doubt, don't take the risk.

This applies equally to email. Are you copying someone in on your email? Is there information within the email that should not be shared with this person? Is there an email thread that goes before this email, and will this person you have cc'd see the whole thread? These are key considerations before sending.

8) Safeguarding

All online content - whether in writing or an image/video - has the potential to be harmful in a safeguarding sense. When communicating online with children, young people or vulnerable adults we should seek to do so with care and sensitivity, and in accordance with the following guidelines: '*Guidance for Faith-based Groups on the Use of Social Media and other E-based Communication*' published by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland in 2017 - available at www.safeguardingni.org

Note: If you come across anything online which is a cause for concern in relation to any of the above, or If you are in doubt about anything you are planning to post/share on Social Media, please also seek guidance from your Minister or a Member of the Connexional Communications Task Group.

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