Social Media Policy

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Guidelines

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1. Purpose and Scope

Social media is public, instant, interactive and visual, and material shared online may be copied or retained beyond its original audience. It provides opportunities for United Church Ferndown (UCF) to communicate, encourage people, share the life of the church and demonstrate Christlike love. These guidelines help everyone connected with UCF communicate online with the same respect, wisdom and care expected in face-to-face relationships.

This policy applies to UCF's official social-media accounts and to trustees, staff, ministers, volunteers and others who administer or contribute to those accounts. It also provides guidance for personal accounts where a person's connection with UCF is apparent or where activity could reasonably be understood as speaking on behalf of UCF.

2. Christian Values and Principles

Our social-media use should reflect our Christian faith. The following principles from the existing UCF guidelines remain central:

- **Love:** Matthew 22:39 – seek the good of others.
- **Respect:** 1 Peter 2:17 – treat others with dignity.
- **Humility:** Ephesians 4:2a – communicate with gentleness and humility.
- **Patience:** Ephesians 4:2b – allow time for understanding and response.
- **Wisdom:** Proverbs 3:21 – use sound judgement.
- **Forgiveness:** Colossians 3:13 – respond to mistakes and disagreements with grace.

Before posting, ask: Would this communicate in a way that reflects Christ and that I would be comfortable seeing publicly associated with UCF?

3. What Counts as Social Media

For this policy, social media includes Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, X, WhatsApp and other messaging or community platforms, blogs, websites, online groups, livestreaming services, video-sharing platforms and any future service used by UCF. The same principles apply to posts, stories, livestreams, comments, private messages, photographs, videos and audio.

4. Official UCF Social-Media Accounts

Only people authorised by UCF leadership may create, administer or publish content through an official UCF social-media account.

- Maintain a current list of approved administrators.
- Use church-controlled contact and recovery details wherever practical.
- Official posts should represent UCF rather than an administrator's personal views.

- Sensitive or significant announcements should be agreed with the Minister or another authorised leader.
- Remove access promptly when an administrator leaves the role.
- Keep administrator and recovery information securely.

5. Account Security

- Use strong, unique passwords and two-factor authentication where available.
- Do not share passwords informally.
- Keep recovery email addresses and telephone numbers under appropriate church control.
- Do not leave official accounts logged in on shared or public devices.
- Report hacking, phishing, lost access or unauthorised posting promptly.
- Review administrator permissions periodically.

6. Personal Social-Media Accounts

UCF recognises that people have personal lives and opinions online. This policy does not seek to control lawful personal expression. However:

- Do not claim or imply that you speak for UCF unless authorised.
- Do not disclose confidential, safeguarding or personal information obtained through your UCF role.
- Do not use UCF branding in a way that implies church endorsement when none exists.
- If your UCF role is identified, remember that your conduct may affect how others perceive the church.
- Use particular care when representing UCF at events or activities.

7. Content and Communication Standards

Be safe

Give particular attention to children, young people and adults who may be vulnerable. Do not post images or personal information without appropriate permission. Follow the UCF Safeguarding Policy.

Be loving

Do not post disrespectful, undermining, offensive, sexually explicit, inflammatory, hateful, abusive or threatening material. Do not bully, harass or humiliate.

Be kind

Communicate compassionately, consider tone carefully and, where possible, assume the best of others.

Be honest

Do not mislead or misrepresent the truth. Check information before sharing and acknowledge the work of others.

Be responsible

Remember that online material can be public and permanent. If unsure, pause and seek advice.

Be a good ambassador

Communicate consistently with UCF's Christian values and do not present personal views as official UCF positions.

Be gentle

Disagreement can be robust but should remain respectful and avoid personal attacks.

Be confidential

Do not share personal or sensitive information without appropriate authority, including private correspondence, screenshots, pastoral or safeguarding information.

Be law-abiding

Respect copyright, data protection, privacy and applicable law. Follow platform terms and do not forward explicit or indecent images.

Be wise

Check sources and accuracy. Be alert to misleading or manipulated material. Do not use disappearing communications to bypass safeguarding, data protection, record-keeping or accountability.

8. Safeguarding

Social-media activity involving children, young people and adults who may be vulnerable must follow the UCF Safeguarding Policy. Social media must never be used to bypass normal safeguarding arrangements.

- Do not initiate inappropriate private or secret communications with children or young people.
- Use only communication channels approved by UCF for ministry or youth work.
- Do not request, store or share unnecessary personal information.
- Never promise confidentiality if abuse, neglect or a safeguarding concern is disclosed.
- Report safeguarding concerns promptly in accordance with the UCF Safeguarding Policy; do not investigate yourself.

- Do not arrange private meetings with a child or young person through social media.
- Take care with tagging, location information and identifying details.

9. Photography, Video and Livestreaming

Photographs, videos and livestreams create particular privacy and safeguarding risks. Before publishing or broadcasting:

- Obtain appropriate consent, particularly for children and young people.
- Respect requests not to be photographed or recorded.
- Avoid unnecessary names, locations, contact details or identifying information.
- Do not publish images where doing so could put someone at risk or cause distress.
- Check that background conversations, prayer, pastoral ministry or private information are not inadvertently recorded.
- Limit who can start, stop, edit or publish livestreams and recordings.
- Follow UCF arrangements for retaining, reviewing or removing recordings.
- Provide a route for concerns or removal requests.

10. Data Protection and Confidentiality

UCF should handle personal information through social media in accordance with applicable data-protection requirements and the church's privacy/data-protection arrangements.

- Only collect or publish information necessary for a legitimate church purpose.
- Obtain appropriate permission where required, especially for photographs, names and personal stories.
- Do not post personal contact details, private correspondence or sensitive information without authority.
- Do not move confidential pastoral or safeguarding conversations into public or inappropriate channels.
- Report accidental disclosure promptly through UCF's data-protection arrangements.
- Keep appropriate records of permissions and significant data incidents.

11. Copyright and Intellectual Property

Before using content created by someone else, check that UCF has permission or a lawful basis to use it. This includes photographs, artwork, music, videos, articles, graphics, logos and other online material.

- Give credit where required or appropriate.
- Do not assume content found online is free to copy.
- Check licences or permissions for music and other material used in livestreams and recordings.
- Do not reproduce substantial copyrighted material simply because it is available online.

12. Comments, Moderation and Complaints

UCF may moderate comments and contributions on official channels. Moderation should be proportionate and consistent with these guidelines.

Content may be removed or restricted where it includes threats, harassment, bullying, hateful or discriminatory material, sexually explicit or inappropriate material, personal/confidential/safeguarding information, spam or malicious links, breaches of platform rules or law, or a safeguarding or immediate safety risk.

Disagreement or criticism alone is not necessarily a reason to remove a contribution. Complaints about UCF may be acknowledged and moved to a private or formal complaints process.

Serious complaints, threats, safeguarding concerns or legal issues should be referred promptly to the appropriate UCF leader rather than debated publicly.

13. Serious Incidents and Crisis Communications

During a serious incident, safeguarding matter, emergency or other sensitive situation, only authorised UCF representatives should issue official statements.

- Do not speculate about causes, responsibility, injuries or unverified details.
- Do not publish names or personal information without appropriate confirmation and authority.
- Do not respond publicly on behalf of UCF unless authorised.
- Direct significant enquiries to the person designated by UCF leadership.
- Preserve relevant online information where needed for safeguarding, legal, data-protection or incident-management purposes.

14. Accuracy, Sources and Misinformation

- Check information before sharing, especially claims about people, organisations, events or emergencies.
- Consider whether sources are reliable and current.
- Be cautious with edited images, AI-generated material, decontextualised headlines and screenshots.
- Correct significant errors promptly and transparently.
- Do not knowingly share false or unsubstantiated allegations.

15. Training and Support

People responsible for official UCF accounts should receive appropriate guidance on social media, safeguarding, data protection, account security and the platforms they administer. Volunteers should ask for advice before posting if unsure about consent, safeguarding, confidentiality, copyright, complaints or whether content represents UCF.

16. Reporting Concerns

Concerns should be reported promptly to the Ministers, the Designated Person for Safeguarding, the appropriate UCF leader, or another person identified in the relevant UCF policy.

- Safeguarding: follow the UCF Safeguarding Policy immediately.
- Data protection: follow UCF privacy/data-protection arrangements.
- Account security: notify the account lead and UCF leadership.
- Serious threats or suspected criminal activity: seek appropriate advice and, where necessary, contact the police or relevant authority.

17. Breaches and Appropriate Action

Failure to follow these guidelines may result in proportionate action, including removal of content, restriction or removal of account access, asking an individual to remove material, referral to an appropriate church process, safeguarding procedures, or referral to external authorities.

Where appropriate, UCF may also take account of the procedures of the Southern Counties Baptist Association, Wessex URC Synod, the Baptist Union of Great Britain or the United Reformed Church. Any formal church discipline will follow UCF's constitution and applicable procedures.

18. Record Keeping and Review

- Keep an up-to-date record of authorised administrators.
- Keep appropriate records of significant moderation decisions, complaints, safeguarding referrals, data breaches and account-security incidents.
- Review this policy at least annually and after significant changes in law, safeguarding guidance, platform practice or UCF's use of social media.
- Platform age requirements and terms change; check current platform requirements rather than relying on a static age list.

As of October 2026 the current age requirements are as follows:

13+ Whats App, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, X, TikTok, Youtube, BeReal, YouNow

18+ MeetMe, Houseparty Live Moments, LiveMe, Kik, Yubo, Monkey, YOLO

19. Related Policies and Documents

- UCF Safeguarding Policy
- UCF Privacy / Data Protection Policy and related procedures
- UCF Complaints Procedure
- UCF Constitution and church governance procedures

Appendix A – Social Media Administrator Quick Checklist

- Am I authorised to post this?
- Is it accurate and appropriately sourced?
- Do I have permission to use this photograph, video, music or other material?
- Could this identify or put a child, young person or vulnerable person at risk?
- Am I revealing personal, confidential or safeguarding information?
- Could this be misunderstood as an official UCF statement?
- Would I be comfortable with this being copied or seen outside the intended audience?
- Is this the right channel, or should it be dealt with privately?
- If unsure, have I paused and asked for advice?

Appendix B – Photography, Video and Livestreaming Quick Guidance

- Identify whether photography, filming or livestreaming will take place and ensure appropriate consent and safeguarding arrangements.
- Respect people who do not wish to appear.
- Take particular care with children and young people.
- Avoid unnecessary identifying information.
- Check the background and audio before publishing.
- Do not broadcast private pastoral conversations or sensitive information.
- Know who is responsible for controlling the livestream and recording.
- Respond promptly to concerns or removal requests and refer to safeguarding matters appropriately.