

Paper C2

Digital Charter and Social Media guidelines

Communications Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Peter Stevenson (Convenor) revdpete@btinternet.com Andy Jackson (Head of Communications) andy.jackson@urc.org.uk
Action required	N/A
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 14 General Assembly commends the new Digital Charter and updated Social Media Guidelines to all who engage with the Church digitally.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To agree best practice for all who produce and manage websites and social media channels for the life and work of the URC.
Main points	To be an example of a denomination that can be safe, respectful and dignified at all times, even when there are differences of opinion.
Previous relevant documents	Papers C1 and C2, Mission Council, March 2020; Communications Committee report, General Assembly 2020; Papers C1, C2 and C3, Mission Council, March 2021.
Consultation has taken place with...	Consultation has taken place with Safeguarding, URC Youth, the Communications Committee and teams at United Reformed Church House.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Safer engagement inside and outside the URC through the website and social media channels.

Digital Charter

This is a voluntary pledge to encourage everyone engaging with the United Reformed Church digitally, on all channels and at all levels, that the digital environment is a positive place for conversations to happen, and that those conversations should be positive, safe, respectful and dignified.

The conversations we have on our social media accounts can positively help change someone's newsfeed (what they see on social media).

Whether you're a member of clergy or a churchgoer, we all have different views and areas of interests that affect what we find interesting and engage with online. Comments made and posts shared online have the potential to go viral in this country and around the world very quickly.

We want people to enjoy online conversations and be safe and respectful. There are a number of ways the digital world can be as fruitful as when we speak in person.

- **Safeguarding** – social media and the internet needs to be a safe place for all. If you have any concerns about the wellbeing of children, young people or vulnerable adults, please contact your local safeguarding coordinator, or your Synod Safeguarding Officer.
- **Honesty and truth** – check what you post is fair and factual.
- **Considerate** – the world and its diversity can be both interesting and challenging. We are not going to agree with everyone, nor will everyone agree us. But let's be constructive in how we engage online.
- **Welcome** – let's be welcoming in the language we use, and not use words that exclude others or use those that people outside the Church might not relate to.
- **Inspiration** – use social media in way that engages and attracts others to our faith. After all, we represent Christ.
- **Community** – as one Church, we have many brothers and sisters. Let's treat those around us as such.
- **Agree** to the United Reformed Church's social media guidelines.

Social media guidelines

These guidelines for social media have been updated and written to provide encouragement and guidance for the appropriate use of social media. Its aim is to encourage online conversations that reflect the values of the United Reformed Church (URC).

When used well, social media is an effective tool in communicating the Gospel, our work as Christians, and the life of the URC. It is interactive, immediate and offers the opportunity for forming and deepening relationships locally and globally.

The URC has national social media accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

These guidelines are written specifically for all users who engage with the URC's national social media channels, those run by its 13 synods (Northern, North Western, Mersey, Yorkshire, East Midlands, West Midlands, Eastern, South Western, Wessex, Thames North, Southern, the National Synods of Wales and Scotland), those managed by our local congregations, those that use the URC name, logo and brand, and those that purport to portray, represent or advance the purposes of the URC.

By engaging with URC national social media accounts, you agree to:

- **Be safe.** The safety of children, young people and adults at risk must be maintained. The URC has an online safety policy. If you have any concerns, ask your local church safeguarding coordinator, or your Synod Safeguarding Officer
- **Be respectful.** Never make any comments, create or share posts that could be considered discriminatory in any way, defamatory or amount to harassment
- **Be kind.** As said in Mark 12:31, treat people how you would wish to be treated. If making a criticism or critique, consider your words, tone, and how you would speak in person. If receiving criticism or critique, make a judgement call between an expressed view and an abusive comment
- **Be honest.** Be credible, fair and honest
- **Take responsibility.** You are accountable for the things you say, do and write. If you're not sure, don't post it
- **Be a good ambassador.** Personal and professional life can easily become blurred online. You are a representative of the URC, and for Christ. Think before you post. If managing an account that includes the URC name or logo, eg a church, think about appointing at least two people to monitor and manage your social media account
- **Credit others.** Acknowledge the work of others by giving credit where it is due. Many things, like pictures, are subject to copyright, and permission to use needs to be sought. The Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) website is an excellent source of information on copyright law. Take care in what you publish, and question the source of any content you are considering posting
- **Follow the rules.** Social media platforms have their own terms and conditions. Abide by them and report anything you believe breaks the policies of the respective company by using the method it has outlined.

How will we respond to people who breach our social media community guidelines?

In relation to the national social media accounts, the URC communications team may take action towards any post deemed unsuitable, offensive or inflammatory. This may include deleting comments, blocking users, or reporting comments as inappropriate.

Who do I speak to for further advice?

If you have a safeguarding concern, please follow these policies and procedures, or use the contacts above.