



Developing your congregation's use of social media

Some basic guidance on using social media for your congregation.



Find us on



SOME SIMPLE DIRECTIONS

DO'S AND DON'TS

Clarifying your vision: knowing what you are trying to do

DO'S

Do think about your core message. It needs to be consistent with the vision of your congregation.

Do consider your target audience. Are you primarily using social media to engage with your members or those outside the church? Who particularly in your local community are you trying to engage with?

Do actively engage with your local community by sharing events on Facebook groups, using appropriate hashtags on Twitter, Instagram, etc.

DON'TS

Don't share stories or link to websites unless they are consistent with your congregation's vision.

Don't get caught up in debating controversial topics.

Getting started: how to get going

DO'S

Do appoint someone to act as your congregation's social media coordinator – the person who will take responsibility for coordinating these forms of communication. Decide who they need to report to, how that happens and how often. Clarify the process of gaining permission to upload content and who offers a second opinion on anything they have doubts about.

Do use the various gifts and talents of your congregation's members. For example, find out who can take good photographs or film video content of appropriate quality. Consider getting someone to do a regular blog.

Do be aware of the 'Taking Care' (Child Protection) guidelines, particularly Section 8 on 'Technology', and the 'new guidelines on the taking and use of photographs and/or video footage' (see Appendix below).

Do encourage the congregation to get on board. Talk about your new social media accounts on a Sunday morning. Your accounts will grow organically if members of your congregation engage with your posts and share them.

DON'TS

Don't just copy other congregations' style or content. Understand your unique context.

Don't post for the sake of posting. Always have a purpose when sharing online, especially when sharing verses of Scripture.

Don't annoy people by bombarding them with posts. For example, five posts a day is probably not the best way to go about things! (But do post regularly, find the balance that is right for the life in your congregation).

Don't post content that demands an immediate response. Allow your followers to take in information at their own pace.

KEEP THE PAGE ACTIVE
If you're struggling to generate original content on a regular basis – share something relevant from one of your church charity partners or PCI.

Posting online: communicating with craft and care

DO'S

- Do** make sure your 'voice' (tone and language) is consistent.
- Do** be careful about what you share ("take care what you share").
- Do** adhere to 'Taking Care' (Child Protection) guidelines.
- Do** talk about God! Share verses of Scripture, encouraging messages, etc.
- Do** plan your online activity. Think about times of the year eg Christmas events, back to school message.
- Do** share relevant information from the main PCI social media accounts.
- Do** respond to direct enquires to your accounts in good time.

DON'TS

- Don't** express personal views or opinions. Remember, your purpose online is to represent the church and your congregation, not yourself.
- Don't** share personal pastoral information about yourself, the congregation, or church organisations.
- Don't** use the church's social media platforms to promote personal agendas, such as personal fundraising efforts, promoting a business you work for, etc.
- Don't** direct/private message people on your church accounts, unless in response to a church-related inquiry.

LEARN TO EDIT
Just because you took
100 photographs,
doesn't mean they
all need to go online.
Sometimes less
is more.

Appendix

NEW Guidelines on the taking and use of photographs and/or video footage



Leaders should not post photographs/video of young people from the organisation in which they are leaders, on any social networking site or elsewhere on the internet, **unless they have written parental/guardian consent.**

Parental/guardian consent should specify what the photographs/video will be used for, for example, as part of a PowerPoint display in advance of a church service.

Furthermore, if the photographs/video are to be posted on the internet, the consent form should specify which websites and/or social media that will be used for, for example, the church website and/or the church Facebook page.

If a leader is posting photographs/video of children on the internet, particular care should be taken and the following guidelines adhered to:

- children and young people should not be identified by name or other personal details. These details include email, phone or postal addresses
- group photographs are preferable
- location and pose should be considered
- a child should never be forced to have their photograph/video taken.

If a parent or guardian has not given written consent, then leaders need to be aware of this and ensure that those children are not in any photographs/video that are taken by, and posted on behalf of, the organisation.

CONGREGATIONAL CASE STUDIES

Starting small within to grow an effective voice without

Craigavon Presbyterian Church, County Armagh | www.craigavonpresbyterian.com

Craigavon Presbyterian Church is a friendly and informal community of followers of Jesus striving to be a light in the community. They have slowly built their social media platform to communicate with their own members and found it useful in reaching out to the community beyond the church.

Currently the congregation has committed to focusing on only two social media applications - Facebook and WhatsApp. They consider that by focusing on only a couple of forums, rather than spread themselves too thin, they are more likely to maximise their effectiveness.

The congregation started to use social media initially with the aim of improving communication within the church family. At this time Facebook was used by the majority of people across the generations which indicated it was the best form of social media with which to begin. Groups were established to inform members on events happening within the church and to encourage them to come along. Focusing on use internally within the church family built confidence and experience in getting familiar with the applications before considering how they could work to communicate and extend into the wider community.

Using social media for publicity has allowed the congregation to inform people who would not normally attend church about organisations and events. Members' stories of faith have also been shared. This has encouraged the building up of one another in the church family and sparked interest and conversations with others.

One particular organisation that has benefited greatly is the church's parents and tots group where new members came directly because of social media posts.

The congregation has also found the use of the local marketing facility on Facebook a way of maximising communication in the local area. Spending a few extra pounds to use this tool has extended the congregation's reach and proved a lot more effective than printing posters for display or distributing leaflets. Where they would have had 30 likes on posts previously shared, they now number in the region of 800. Simply encouraging the congregation to like and

share an up and coming event or post has increased interest exponentially. Using this targeted marketing also allows the congregation to see the demographic of those who like and share their posts and has replaced the need to use expensive group texting apps and systems.

More recently, Facebook has been integrated into the congregational website. A key verse from Sunday's service is set up on a graphic app and acts as a reminder and encouragement to the church family. Posts are scheduled for release at specific times allowing them to be prepared in advance and the scattering of communication throughout the week.

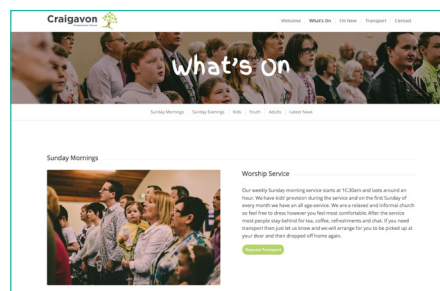
One concern around Facebook and social media was security but by using the controls offered within security settings and options for moderation, these

fears were allayed. Nothing can be posted on the page without approval, cutting out the possibilities of anything inappropriate being put on the page either accidentally or deliberately.

The other application the congregation use is WhatsApp. This has proved effective in the areas

of prayer and evangelism. Prayer requests are shared within a closed group. An administrator can only post, preventing a bombardment of messages and conversations. This retains the focus of its use. It also allows people the choice of remaining anonymous because they have to ask one of the administrators to share their request. The simple act of offering to share a prayer request for challenging situations has seen people come to faith and join the church family.

Currently, the minister, Rev Lachlan Webster, is responsible for the majority of the congregation's social media and emphasises that, "you don't have to be a professional to use social media well". He hopes to move towards someone else taking on some of the responsibilities, but he encourages congregations to start small, pick one forum and do it to the best of their ability and resources. By crafting quality posts, learn to dial down on Christian jargon and writing for the average viewer, social media can become an effective voice into the local community for outreach and evangelism.



CONGREGATIONAL CASE STUDIES

Vlogging to let the light shine in our virtual worlds

Trinity Presbyterian Church, Greyabbey (Ards peninsula) | www.trinitygreyabbey.org

Like most congregations, Greyabbey has a considerable number of people of all ages using a variety of social media platforms to share their lives with others online.

A recent sermon series on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount set the congregation reflecting on what it means to be "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). Usually, application of this passage focuses on how we shine our light in the worlds of work, school, home, and social life. All of these are important, but the congregation were also challenged as to how they let their light shine on social media platforms.

For example, the congregation considered how their posts would be interpreted by those who view them. Often the brevity of social media posts leave them open to a range of misinterpretations. So, followers of Jesus need to post with care. Also, immediate responses to the posts of others can often fuel the fires of misunderstanding and conflict rather than seek clarity and showing grace in engaging more considered ways with whoever published the post.

The gospel spreads through relationships and conversations in which the light of life is shown and shared. The congregation therefore affirmed social media as a great tool for making and maintaining connections with others as a platform for the good news of Jesus. However, it is not just at the individual level that the congregation are encouraging use of social media to shine the light.

Many of Greyabbey's ministries use closed Facebook and WhatsApp groups to maintain contact between

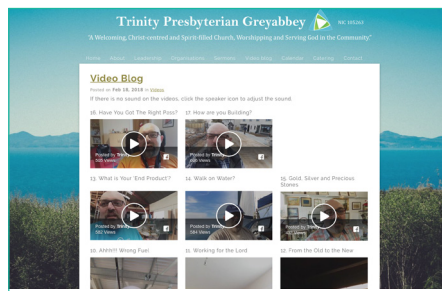
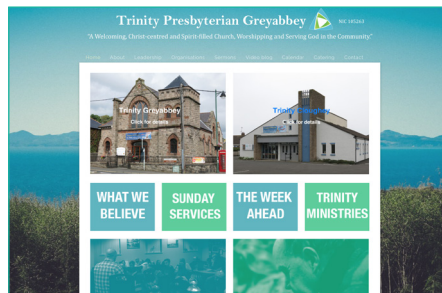
leaders, communicate with parents whose children attend youth organisations, and to post pictures from events and trips away. These groups are managed by one or two administrators in each ministry. Only leaders of the organisations are invited to join the ministry group chats. In the case of closed Facebook pages for children's ministries, only registered parents of children currently attending are invited to 'view only' the page.

A congregational Facebook page and Twitter account are used to publish the weekly announcement sheet, upcoming special events, and to circulate PCI's weekly 'Let's Pray' resource. Sermons are available for those who were unable to attend services and offered for use in preparing for related, follow up,

midweek Bible studies. Posts that promote other local organisations like the Community Association, Friends of the Abbey and the Primary School are also shared by the church.

The latest initiative has been the recording of vlogs for sharing on the congregation's social media outlets. The vlogs aim to shine a light on God through an illustration from everyday life linked to a passage of scripture. The first group of vlogs used local Greyabbey landmarks. A more recent series are exploring a variety of occupations and hobbies. Initially, these vlogs aimed to help local people become more aware of God as they went about their daily life in the village. However, feedback revealed how this ministry was reaching people beyond Greyabbey, even those in other

countries. Stories of non-churched people viewing the vlogs and then having conversations about their content with believing friends and family members are emerging.



CONGREGATIONAL CASE STUDIES

Using Facebook Live to make worship accessible

Garnerville Presbyterian Church, Belfast | www.garnervillepc.com

Garnerville congregation use a wide range of social media to connect with members in their daily lives. These include online Bible studies which people connect with as time allows, reflective prayer podcasts throughout Advent and Lent, a Bible in a year podcast, and regular one minute vlogs with thoughts for the day. However, one of the most effective developments has been using Facebook Live to stream the weekly service of worship.

Like many congregations, Garnerville is blessed to have a worshipping core of committed Christians who attend worship regularly. However, they have also come to acknowledge that there are an increasing number of committed Christians who are unable to attend on a weekly basis for a variety of reasons. In the technological age in which we live, they have harnessed social media to make their gatherings for worship accessible to them as well. A large number of the congregation of all ages are on Facebook and go online regularly. Through initially using Facebook Live to find a cheap way of connecting the church service to those staffing creche, they stumbled upon the wider potential for

streaming their services. Doing this is relatively easy. They use a mobile phone connected to Wi-Fi, then simply press 'live' and the service is automatically broadcast to anyone who wishes to watch.

Since streaming their service live each week, they have been amazed to discover that there are people all over the world who watch in real time or connect to view services later. They have had relatives of members get in contact from Canada, a two-week old baby and her mother watching from the comfort of their own sofa and members watch from various countries while on holiday. They have also seen many who would never attend the church be able to connect with what happens in worship online.

Gathering together Sunday by Sunday with the community of the people of God in the local congregation can never be replaced by an online experience. However, for many for whom that can't happen every week, they can still know something of the power of praise, prayer and the preaching of God's Word in the online space they can inhabit at the touch of a screen.

