



The
United
Reformed
Church



Taking great photos in Church

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Introduction

Visual storytelling is incredibly important, especially on social media, as people process images 60,000 times faster than words. Therefore it's crucial that you take the best photos you can and make the most out of what you have. Here are a few things to think about when taking photos:

Invest in a tripod

- To keep photos sharp in lower light, use a tripod to keep the camera steady.
- A tripod can also give access to new angles such as over an edge and up in the air. There's a little bit of trial and error involved but it can create some interesting results.



Add depth

- Think carefully about what's in the foreground and background to add depth and interest to the composition of your photos.
- Taking photos beside candles, fairy lights, Christmas decorations or the altar can add an extra dimension to your images.
- You could also use the congregation by photographing people celebrating in the foreground with more people in the back.
- Make the most of external sources of light.
- Wherever possible, take photos outside during the day, to make the most of the natural light.
- If photos must be taken inside, use any natural light coming in through the windows.
- Make use of well-lit areas inside – avoid using the flash as it can make things look stark, with harsh shadows.
- A close-up photo will always look better than a zoomed-in photo.

Plan your photos

- It's important to think about what will look best in the frame to get the best photos possible.
- You might need to move decorations around for a better backdrop or ask people to stand in a different formation.
- Pick some good spots in the church before a service starts to take your photos, including one at the front.
- If you have a lot of people in your church, can you take your photo from a high up place, to show how packed your church is?
- If you have a smaller congregation, encourage them to sit together in the front pews of the church to give the impression of a busy church.



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This image with the Communion table in the foreground adds interest, and offers a more unusual perspective. The organ and pulpit in the background also help to create a balanced image.



The high angle and inclusion of the recording equipment adds interest to this image.



Encouraging your congregation to sit together and pose for a photograph before the service starts.

Try different angles

- Taking photos straight on is easy and foolproof but try and be adventurous. For example, stand on a chair/pew to get a high angle shot looking down, or lie down on the floor and shoot upwards.
- Shoot through items, use doors and windows as frames, come up with unusual views that catch the eye and make the photo stand out from the crowd.

Share the emotion and bring the wow factor

- People will connect more deeply with images when there is real emotion in them. Show joyful people celebrating.
- It's always amazing to see a church decorated with lights and decorations with people filling the pews. Photos of jam-packed churches and buildings lit up by candlelight will always have an impact. Think about how you can create the wow factor when taking photos.

Pick your background carefully

- Be intentional about what appears in the background of your photos.
- Avoid backdrops that look unattractive or distracting (bins, radiators, fire extinguishers, for example).
- Make the most of the architectural features your church has to offer.
- Don't be afraid to get in closer. Taking photos from the back of church is easy and unobtrusive, but you're too far away from what's happening at the front of church to capture detail. Be part of the action and get in as close as possible.
- If you have a digital SLR camera, invest in a longer lens that will let you zoom in even closer.
- Communicate with your minister and leadership team about what points in the service they're happy for you to get closer and where is best for you to be without distracting them (this can be an ongoing conversation depending on the type of service, who will be there etc.)



©Mark Howard

Don't be afraid to get closer. Small details can help to tell the story of your church service.



©Mark Howard

A spontaneous moment has been captured to create a warm, joyful encounter. It is particularly effective because it is unposed and looks natural.

Candid versus posed

- Some of the best photos are candid (ie unposed) as they look more natural.
- Be ready to take candid photos at events. Keep your camera switched on and your finger on the button.
- Think about how you are posing people when photographing them. Try arranging them in something other than a line or a huddle. For example, have them sit together on some steps or in a group in a few rows of pews.
- Remember, you're taking the photo, so you are in charge. You tell people how you want them to be posed.



©Kevin Snyman

This posed photo is enhanced with the use of a prop, which helps to tell the story.

Posting to social media

- Edit the collection of photos down to a small selection of the best before posting on social media. People won't have the time to look through lots of photos. Cut photos that look similar, are blurry or don't help tell the story. Photos of people will always be more engaging.
- Try and give all the photos you post to Facebook a description to help tell the story.
- Make the most out of Twitter's multiple image feature – you can post up to four photos at a time in a tweet.
- Play around with Instagram's filters – they can make you look like a professional photographer with little effort.

Safeguarding

- It is vital to always check you have permission to publish pictures of children. This may be done through the church or affiliated group or direct with parents.
- Never publish a picture if there is any doubt about obtaining permission.

Using other people's photos

- If someone has given you photos to use on your website or on social media, check if they would like credit for the photos.
- Don't take images from Google, or places where you don't know where the image has come from or what restrictions are on the photo. The person who owns the photo would have the right to sue you if you are using their photo incorrectly, or without permission.



©Pat Ruddock

Take time to arrange and organise your photograph to communicate your story.

Image attributions

There are different types of permissions granted by owners of photos. Here are some of the permissions you need to look out for when using images that aren't your own.

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Here is a selection of high-quality public domain images sites you can use:

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A higher angle brings a sense of movement and purpose to this Church parade. Think about the different activities your church is involved in outside its traditional building and how you can capture them.

©Chris Andrews



The detail of the cross in the foreground with the choir in the background create layers of interest.

This is one in a series of booklets designed to give information to those working and volunteering within the United Reformed Church.

The booklets can be read and downloaded at www.urc.org.uk/information-guides



© United Reformed Church 2020
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