The
United
Reformed
Church

Yorkshire Synod

So, you want to start using social media?

Here's how...

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Why use social media?

Social media has a huge amount of benefits and, when used sensibly and effectively, can have reach far greater than any face-to-face gatherings (unless you plan on hosting a stadium full of people each week!). Be reassured, using social media is technically straightforward. Facebook is very well designed, and most functions are intuitive. This guide takes you step-by-step through the basics.

This guide also contains some helpful tips and hints in how to use social media better if you're already using it as a church, from an administrative point of view, right through to the practical work.

The hope of this guide is just to be a starting point. The synod is available to deliver training either online or in person to individuals in churches, a whole church, or a group of churches on social media and indeed other areas (see the other booklets/flyers). Please do get in touch.

If you're really not sure **if** social media is right for your church, please do get in touch.

The URC Communications Team has also published guides on various media topics, visit www.urc.org.uk/information-guides to see them. This booklet is designed to supplement these, rather than replace.

Social media platforms

I'm sure there are many social media platforms you've heard of, maybe some you've not heard of. Here's a, by no means exhaustive, list:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- WhatsApp
- Snapchat
- Tumblr
- YouTube (yes, this has evolved to become more than 'just' playing videos!)
- TikTok
- LinkedIn
- Pinterest

The URC has helpfully published guides on using Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and using Facebook **Groups**, all of which your church should consider using in some way. Follow the link in the previous section.

This guide will focus on setting up and using, or enhancing, a Facebook **page**. A more outward-looking, far-reaching medium. Compared to a **group** which is great for building online community and grassroots interaction. Groups are especially useful for a more personal set of interactions, so your church should definitely consider this.

# I want to **start** using social media…

To begin creating your page, visit www.facebook.com/pages/create, you want to then click 'Business or Brand', I know this is not entirely what we should be calling a church, but it's just the way Facebook categorise things, this selection helps give you the best experience for what you want to do. You may be prompted to log in at this point if you're not already logged in.

You will need to create a personal Facebook account if you don't already have one. Don't worry – nobody will see your name as being responsible for the page. Your privacy settings on your personal account can also be altered. Visit www.facebook.com/help to see how to do this, or get in touch!

Enter the details of the church, the name of the page should be simple, just the church's. Consider the length of this name, you don't want it to be unwieldy! If you have a short church name before the URC, consider expanding it to say United Reformed Church. If it's a long one, you might want to put URC!

You will then be given the options to add some photos. A profile picture (this is the one everyone will see straight away, usually an icon). Maybe you could make this a picture of your church? Or a logo if you have one, or a variant on the URC logo (ensure you are using the logo correctly, guidance on how to do this is at www.urc.org.uk/urc-logo). A cover photo is a wider, banner-like photo. Have a play about with what picture works best, you can always change it! You can also skip these sections and come back to them later.

And there you have it, you've got a page! Well done! It should look something like this:
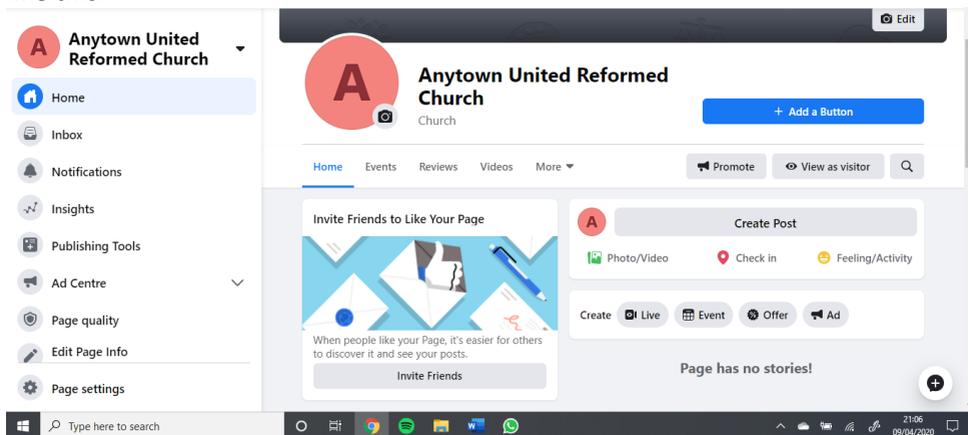
There are lots of features to managing a page. Lots which you probably won't need or come across. Remember, these same pages are used by multi-national businesses and celebrities too! So we're just going to keep things simple…

Let's put some information in, the basics, your website (if you have one, if you don't, there's another booklet for that!), phone number, a description amongst other things. This can be changed in the 'Edit Page info' section on the left-hand menu. Have a look at your 'username', change this to something short and simple. In our case, we've made it 'anytownurc'. This means if I typed in www.facebook.com/anytownurc I'd get straight to the page. On church notices,

noticeboards, or flyers, you could put this link, or simply the Facebook 'f' logo with /anytownurc next to it.

Then have a click on 'Page settings'. This opens a wealth of settings. Most of the default ones will be the ones you should keep, as they're all beneficial to getting your page shared out. But do have a look around them. The 'profanity filter' helps filter out any profanity, you should change this to be 'medium' or 'strong'.

Have a look at 'Page roles' which is on the left hand menu now (this is now a page settings menu). This section lets you add other people to the page to manage it. There are varying levels of management. The main two for a church, really, are Admin and Editor. The Admin role gives this person free-range on the editing of the page (the same privileges you have), an editor is one step down from this. There are descriptions in this section of what each one does. We're going to discuss page administration and operation later in this section.

Great, now all the details are set up that we need. Best get posting…!

What's a post?
A post is the main way of getting new/live information out there. We've gone through the 'static' information of your page, now we need to show that your church is alive!

A post might be about an event coming up soon, or some news from the church or local community (please bear in mind data protection guidelines), anything really!
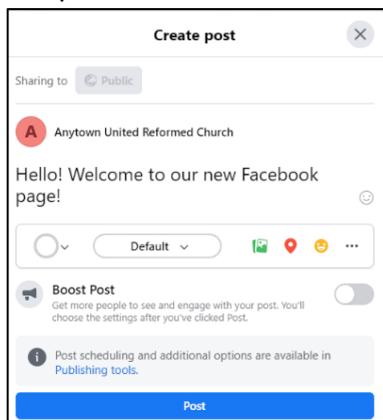
To make a post, go to your page, and click 'Create Post'. You can create artwork, add in photos or videos, or check-in to somewhere (you could check-in to your own church, or perhaps your church is on a day out, check in to that place), hover over the small icons below the main body of the post to have a look. Hit 'Post' and it's up! If you made a mistake, you can edit the post or delete it by clicking on the three dots to the right of the post (circled below).

As more posts and activities appears on your page, older posts will get pushed further down. If you want to keep a post at the top.

Perhaps it concerns an event coming up soon, or some important information. You can click the three dots and select 'Pin to top of page', which will keep it at the top. Bear this fact in mind as you may want to consider making reminder posts about events or information, but talking of events…

What's an event?

This is another feature where you can invite guests to a one-off or regular event. This is usually more effective for one-off events, particularly if your average church week just includes a Sunday morning service. Unless it's perhaps a celebratory service, it's advisable not to make an event for every other Sunday, as people will soon turn off to the idea. (Remember, social media is all about making fresh, dynamic content!). Perhaps you're having a church BBQ, another social event, a concert? Events on Facebook are perfect for this!

To create one, from the homepage of your page, click the 'Events' tab near your profile picture, then 'Create Event'. Similar to the page itself, you can add a photo, descriptions, times, and other details. You can change its frequency too.

You can then invite people to it (note this will be an invitation from 'you', not from the page). You can click 'Going' to show that you're going. You can post in the event too, to keep attendees updated, by clicking the 'Discussion' tab below the event name. The event area looks like this:

You can invite people to your whole page too, simply click the 'Invite' button. This invitation will come from you personally. Like a personal invitation to church, it's very special! Other people can do this too, so get everybody to invite people. The more 'likes' you have, the more promotion your page will receive from Facebook!

How should I be running the page?

Remember, it doesn't have to be just you! You saw in the 'Page Roles' section you can add many people. One thing is important, though, is that you have **one person with overall responsibility and accountability for the page.** A 'Communications Officer' of sorts. So any issues can go through them. It's important this person has contact with your church leadership for this accountability. Others can contribute to the page though, perhaps make your Children + Families Worker an Editor, so they can make posts about what they're up to? Ease the burden, get others involved. But keep this team small and manageable. But make sure you don't all think another will do the work, otherwise nothing will get done!

Aim to try and get up at least one post a week. Church Facebook pages lying dormant for weeks can have a negative effect on your image. Even just a post checking on how everybody is doing, it is a community after all!

This concludes the section on setting up your page and the basics. Now, have a look at the next section on improving your social media, and particularly the 'Top Tips' to keep your audience interested!

I want to use social media better…

So, maybe you've already got a social media presence? Or maybe, you've just completed the previous section, and are feeling ambitious! Either way, we should all be striving to make ourselves known better online, just as we should be doing in person!

Is it proving too much work for you to manage on a regular basis? Have a look at 'Scheduling'. You can make posts and events, and schedule them to be released at a later time or date. Perfect for when you've got some spare time.

Have a think about when people will most likely be on Facebook. The way Facebook works with 'Timelines' and 'News Feeds' (i.e. The page you see with other people's and pages' posts) suits pages posting at times when people will be online. Think about after work, in the evening, lunchtimes etc., that is when people are most likely to have a browse, make sure you're at the top of their browsing! It's a draining task scrolling down, most people don't make it past the first 5 posts, make yours one of those 5! Use scheduling to help with this.

Make your photos good quality! No blurry ones please! As said in the previous section, a photo is way more likely to catch someone's attention, they will then read the accompanying text.

Don't forget to keep sharing events, even if you've made them for months down the line. Perhaps once a week, to keep people's attention, with a little teaser each time as to what's going to happen there. Always include the contact details so people know where to book!

Don't be too repetitive with posts. People need fresh content each time!

Facebook offers an option for 'Live' videos. Perhaps you could look into streaming sections of the service (please check copyright before doing so, see the URC's information guides), or just a live video with you, or someone, sharing information about what's going on this week.

There are plenty of resources, webinars etc. out there to help you improve your social media. Have a google around. Keep watching them and reading, it's all useful. But the main thing that will help is practice, and not being afraid to have a play about!

Take a look at how other churches do it too. At time of writing, these URC churches do social media really well:

https://www.facebook.com/stninianschurchstonehouse
https://www.facebook.com/Petersfieldandlissurc/
https://www.facebook.com/WokingURC

Speak to other churches around your area, see what they're up to!

Reviews
How did you know which TV to buy when you last bought one? How did you find out about the restaurant you went to last week? Reviews are everything. Whether they're from family, friends or online, reviews make play a huge part in our decision-making. It's no different for churches either.

Remember that your church's online presence is not just for worshippers on a Sunday either, it's for potential building hirers, and the whole community.

Your current congregation and building users can help build up a good review base of your church. It's still a valid review! Get everyone to give your church a (good!) review on both Facebook and Google Maps, with a concise review to go with it, for example:

"Very welcoming church. Great for children's parties. Catered to all over our needs. Highly recommended!
"I went to this church on Sunday and it was a very inclusive service, the minister was really friendly and I wouldn't hesitate in going back"

Giving your church a 5* review will help boost it towards the top of search lists. So when someone visiting the area, temporarily or permanently, searches for "churches near me", then your church will be towards the top.

Make it your mission to get everyone in your congregation to review the church!

Don't forget to get in touch with synod if you need any training or support.

Top Tips

- Facebook isn't always good at behaving when you want to go 'back'. If in doubt, click the 'f' in the top left hand corner. NOTE: This will send you back to YOUR profile, not the page, so make sure you navigate back to the page (either from the menu on the left, or by searching in the search bar along the top) before making a post or doing anything.
- Everything looks better with a photo! Or even just jazz up your post. You can choose from a variety of design options when you click 'Create a Post'.
- Don't be afraid to make it personal, it doesn't have to be formal. Everyone knows there's a person behind the page, so make yourself known! Casual language can help break down barriers, particularly given many people's impression of a church is usually formal and not fun!

Guidelines and Code of Conduct

These guidelines, adapted from the United Reformed Church's, will provide a good basis off which to conduct your work on your church's social media accounts:

- The golden rule: Remember you are a representative of the United Reformed Church – therefore it is important that you are a responsible

ambassador for Christ, the Church and your part in it. In essence, if you wouldn't say it, in a loud voice, in your local pub on a Saturday night, wearing your dog collar or a very big badge saying: 'I'm a member of the United Reformed Church' then don't say it online. Please.

- If you have any known public role within the United Reformed Church (elder, member, minister of Word and sacraments ...) then, when you post, you are posting as a representative of the United Reformed Church. This applies whether you're posting in an official capacity on a church account or on your personal account – you are representing the denomination and cannot hide behind statements made on personal social media accounts. What you say privately (and social media is far from being a private forum!) will reflect on you and the denomination.

- Although it may appear that the internet has little or no regulation, all content is subject to the same laws that apply in the 'real' world. You are completely responsible for the things you post and so could fall foul of the laws relating to libel and defamation.

- There is an internet code of conduct. Although not an exclusive list, some specific examples of legally prohibited social media conduct include: Posting commentary, content or images that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libellous, or any material that could be seen to create a hostile environment.

- It is important to remember that any content you post to social media could attract wider media interest – so be prepared for additional publicity, both positive and negative. If you do receive media interest (hopefully positive interest because you have posted some good news about local church life on a social media platform) then do feel free to contact the URC's central press and media office for advice, if you feel you need it. If you have posted something that attracts negative media interest, you should contact the URC's central press and media office for advice. Call the switchboard on 020 7916 2020 and ask for the press and media office.

- It is important that you separate your personal social media account(s) from the 'official' church account(s).

- Double check your privacy settings on social media platforms. Be aware that Facebook is particularly prone (especially during updates) for resetting or creating new options for privacy. There are privacy policies and settings on each platform, including explanations of the different levels of privacy. When you post, bear in mind what effect your levels of privacy will have on who will – or could – see your pos

Getting in touch

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Version 1
21st April 2020

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