



## **Social Media Policy**

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**Bethesda Chapel, Dinas Powys**  
**UK Registered Charity Number 1146153**  
**Bethesda Chapel, Fairoaks, Dinas Powys, Vale of**  
**Glamorgan, CF64 4QU**

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## SECTION 1: Introduction

“Social Media” is the broad term used for the set of online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other in various ways. Social media is used regularly to communicate about Bethesda’s activities , but staff and volunteers may also use social media for personal purposes. The separation between personal and Church use and views can be blurred on social media, and so while we recognise the value of the use of social media, we must establish certain standards, outlined in this policy, which we require everyone to observe.

## Definitions

Social Media, in this policy, refers to all online communication in a public space, from Blogging, Zoom, Twitter, Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, e-mail and other social media platforms that may become available

Exclusion from acceptance as part of Bethesda ‘s acceptable on line communication includes Snapchat

## SECTION 2: Aims of this Policy

This Policy is to help Bethesda Chapel (also referred to the Church/Church's) to utilise the benefits of social media, whilst sensibly managing the risks. It covers the use of all forms of social media, including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, WhatsApp, X, and all other social networking sites, internet postings and blogs. It applies to the use of social media for work and or church purposes as well as personal use, where that may affect what the church does or its reputation.

Our overriding biblical principle in all our communications, including via social media, is to seek to speak biblical truth in love .

The aims of the Policy therefore, are to:

- Provide anyone engaging in any social media related to Bethesda with the overarching principles that guides its use.
- Protect those who interact with the Church's activities and who make use of social media and or information technology as part of their involvement with us.
- Ensure Church information remains secure and is not compromised.
- Ensure the Church's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected.

As a church it is right that we engage in using these platforms as appropriate. However, we have a responsibility to ensure that we safeguard against risks which may include:

- Forming inappropriate relationships.
- Making offensive, sexual or suggestive comments.
- Blurring the boundaries between public work/ministry and private life
- Grooming and impersonation.
- Bullying and harassment.

Engagement through a computer or smartphone screen should not change our understanding and respect of confidentiality, responsibility, good manners and Christian witness. Safeguarding and compliance with GDPR and data protection standards remains paramount.

Software applications such as Snapchat that routinely delete information and files/ attachments shared after they are seen **are not permitted** for use in representing or promoting Bethesda/church activities.

## Design and Intent

Bethesda's Social Media Policy is designed and intended to ensure that we communicate within the law and in a way consistent with our Christian character. Where legal matters are concerned, the Trustees of Bethesda Chapel will take a lead. In matters relating to Christian character, the Elders take responsibility. This Policy recognises that the Christian faith has communication (the word – written or spoken), at its heart and that electronic communications are now a central part of everyday life. In this sense it has a vital role in updating, co-ordinating and improving the experiences of Christian groups (such as youth groups, community care groups, Small groups and prayer ministry). It is also recognised that

with this comes risk, and the following guidance and responsibilities section defines how risks are minimised and mitigated.

## SECTION 3: Guiding Principles and Responsibilities

### Public Domain

The law views anything shared online as being in the public domain. Sharing thoughts and reflections with friends using social media or email might feel personal and private; but if more than one person can access what we have written, it is highly likely that the law would class it as "published". It is subject to the law touching libel, copyright, freedom of information and data protection.

If we wouldn't say something in the local newspapers, we shouldn't say it online. There must be no swearing or offensive language.

### Permanence

Anything said on the Web can be assumed to be permanent. Even if we delete a comment made on a website, it could still have already been seen by other people, re-published, or had a screenshot picture taken. It is easy to say something in the heat of the moment that we regret later, but it could remain permanently online for all to see.

### Security

It is absolutely not safe to assume anything electronic is secure. Privacy settings on social media tools might mean comments going only to accepted "friends" or "followers" but there is no guarantee that they will not pass (repost) them outside trusted circles.

### Gossip

Social media can pose a risk to confidentiality and be intrusive. Social media does not change our fundamental understanding about confidentiality in the life of the Church. When telling a story about a situation which involves someone else, it is always useful to pose the question: ***"Is this my story to tell?"***

Furthermore, we should ask if the story is likely to cause distress, inconvenience, upset or embarrassment to others if they discovered it had been shared in this way. If in any doubt at all, it should not be shared online. Bethesda's Membership Covenant reminds us of the importance of protecting the unity of Bethesda Chapel - online gossip can easily lead to fracture within the body.

### As Christians and Representatives of Bethesda Chapel

If we are church members, volunteers or church employees, anything we do or say in the public domain will be interpreted by the public as representative of attitudes and behaviour in the Church. Controversial, hasty or insensitive comments can quickly attract the attention of the media. In the web environment, the person pressing the keys is ultimately responsible for their own online activities, but they can tar a lot of others with their own brush in the eyes of the media. In our Membership Covenant we ask members to support the testimony of Bethesda Chapel.

## Separation

Keep a clear separation between personal and Church social media accounts. If you tweet/message as yourself, mark the account clearly as “**my own views**” so there is no suggestion your opinions represent the wider church. If you tweet/message from an account representing the church, then make sure you avoid expressing personal opinions. Any account which carries the logo, address or website of the church should be seen as a Bethesda account and only speak for the church.

## Recommendations

Take care with external links. When you link to material, check out the website you are linking to – is its overall focus one you are happy to publicise and promote?

## Real-time relationships

Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent. Healthy boundaries and practices must be adhered to just as they should be in the physical world. In the virtual world, “friend” or “follower” can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate through that medium. In the physical world, friend can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self-disclosure, mutuality and expectations for relationship.

This is particularly relevant when it comes to communicating with children, youth and vulnerable adults. The boundaries between friendship and Church relationships are often blurred in the Bethesda setting, but we would encourage everyone to consider how the online communications would be viewed if others saw them. Communications should be public and in the view of whole groups, not individual and never use cameras unless another adult is present with the young person/vulnerable adult.

Note: We should always be in alignment with the rules governing the various social media platforms.

## Age Guidelines (UK)

At the time of writing, age guidelines for some of the more popular social media platforms are:

- Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok, You Tube, X - all 13
- WhatsApp - 16
- Snapchat - **as noted earlier, this is deemed inappropriate for communication for Church purposes**

## SECTION 4: Personal or Church business Emails

In the matter of the written or spoken word, face to face communication is always preferred to avoid misinterpretation or misunderstanding. When email is used, carefully check that you are representing what you trying to say in the best manner, keeping within the above guidelines. Make sure you are sending it to the correct recipient and for the right reason. Only write what you are comfortable to say face to face. Only copy other recipients into an email when it is expedient to do so.

**When sending an email to multiple recipients, always consider using BCC, known as Blind Carbon Copy.** This is to avoid disclosing other people's e-mail addresses. Only use CC (Carbon Copy) if you purposefully want recipients to see all other copied recipients e-mail

addresses. Be particularly careful if the recipient is not known to you or others included in your email.

Never copy recipients (especially where they change) into a thread of previous emails. This is a quick way to lose confidentiality and cause damage. Emails are to be precise and easy to read.

## Personal Social Media accounts

Personal social media accounts should be kept distinct from accounts relating to church roles and responsibilities and should be clearly labelled so that the views expressed cannot be taken to represent those of Bethesda Chapel.

## SECTION 5: Code of Conduct

Church members administering online duties for the church should ensure that their personal social media use is conducted in a manner consistent with their Christian character and this policy as follows:

- **Be safe.** The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained.
- **Be respectful.** Do not post or share content that is sexually explicit, inflammatory, hateful, abusive, threatening or otherwise disrespectful.
- **Be kind.** Treat others how you would wish to be treated and assume the best in people. If you have a criticism or critique to make, consider not just whether you would say it in person, but the tone you would use.
- **Be honest.** Don't mislead people about who you are.
- **Take responsibility.** You are accountable for the things you do, say and write. Text and images shared can be public and permanent, even with privacy settings in place. If you're not sure, don't post it.
- **Be a good ambassador.** Personal and Church life can easily become blurred on-line, so think before you post. If in any doubt, leave time to reflect before sending.
- **Disagree well.** Some conversations can be places of robust disagreement and it's important we apply our values in the way we express them.
- **Credit others.** Acknowledge the work of others. Respect copyright and always credit where it is due. Be careful not to release sensitive or confidential information and always question the source of any content you are considering amplifying.
- **Follow the rules.** Abide by the terms and conditions of the various social media platforms themselves. If you see a comment that you believe breaks their policies, then please report it to the respective company.
- **Be Salt and Light.** Use Social Media to show the world what it could be like if Jesus ruled everywhere.

## SECTION 6: Guidelines for Bethesda WhatsApp groups

WhatsApp is a particularly useful tool for building relationships and keeping people informed of what is going on in the life of Bethesda. It can be used to share information,

coordinate tasks, and to share prayer requests and messages of encouragement among ministry teams, Small Groups, men's (Bethesda Bro's) and women's (Connect) groups, and more.

Any group set up in connection to Bethesda Chapel should follow the following guidelines:

- The aims of the group should be defined and clearly communicated before inviting people to join the group.
- The above Code of Conduct should be shared with anyone joining the group.
- You are wholly responsible for any content you post including content that you choose to share
- Admins will act as moderators and will remove, in whole or in part, posts that we feel are inappropriate, or discriminatory against any individual or group. These may include posts/ comments that are:
  - - Abusive, sexual or suggestive
  - - Deceptive or misleading
  - - In violation of any intellectual property rights, including copyright
  - - In violation of any law or regulation
  - - Spam and off-topic content, including persistent negative and/or abusive posts in which the aim is to provoke a response
  - - Promotional material, including links to external websites and promotions that are not relevant to the original post
  - - Posts might be deemed inappropriate because they don't meet the aims of the group;
  - are not in keeping with our Church statement of faith;
    - Admins are given the right to remove individuals from WhatsApp groups if they repeatedly engage with using content or language which falls into the above categories. We will not tolerate or respond to abusive messages.
    - Please be aware that if you join one or more WhatsApp groups your mobile phone number will be visible to other users. You can remove yourself from any group at any time.
    - Please do not privately contact other members in a given WhatsApp group unless you have established an initial in-person point of contact with them
    - Admins/moderators will regularly monitor members of the group to ensure they are still actively involved in Bethesda Chapel. As people move on, they will be removed from the various groups. This is in compliance with GDPR guidelines and to ensure members feel confident that they are sharing with individuals who are in agreement with the Church Member's Covenant.
  - Anyone continuing to use the various Social Media groups for the duration of this policy are agreeing to abide by the terms of this document.

## **SECTION 7 Adoption of Bethesda Chapel Social Media Policy**

Signed by:

Position: TRUSTEE

NAME Date

Signed by: Position TRUSTEE

NAME Date

Signed by: Position:TRUSTEE

NAME Date

Signed by: Position TRUSTEE

NAME Date

A copy of this policy will also be lodged on our web site [www.bethesdachapel.com](http://www.bethesdachapel.com)

<b>Circulation for info to :</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Elders</b>	
<b>Deacons</b>	
<b>Instagram Admins</b>	
<b>Bethesda Whatsapp Admins</b>	
<b>Twitter (X) Admin</b>	

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