



Berkshire & Hampshire Borders Methodist Circuit

Digital Usage Policy

Emails

Good use of email and online communications is essential for a cohesive work environment. Recognising different levels of computer literacy is important whilst also acknowledging that email is the primary communication tool in workplaces across the UK. How we phrase, format and use email is important in making sure that we are not misinterpreted or seek to use email in a way which may cause unnecessary conflict.

This section seeks to give practical ways to ensure good use of staff emails to create a healthy church and work environment across the Circuit.

Email Essentials

1. Staff email addresses will be provided for all staff and will be the primary email used by the Circuit and other staff for email communications.
2. Emails sent to a specific person are for that person only and unless otherwise stated should not be forwarded on to others without the permission of the sender.
3. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) covers emails, and all emails must be treated in line with the GDPR Policy of the Circuit.
4. In line with good GDPR practice, emails sent to more than one recipient should be sent using the BCC field for those recipients.
5. Safeguarding should be a top priority when communicating with a staff email address. All communication with young people, and adults at risk, should be carefully considered and in line with the Circuit Safeguarding Policy.

Good Practice

1. Take time in composing the email. If needed, save it in the drafts folder and reread it after a few minutes, or overnight. This stops rash emails being sent.
Always re-read the message from the point of view of the recipient.
2. Do not use e-mail as a way of avoiding talking to people (or a specific person).
Do not write EVERYTHING IN CAPITAL LETTERS. This always comes across as shouting and will seem rude to the recipient.
3. Be careful when you "Reply to all". Consider whether all the recipients need to see your response, or just the original sender. (If you as a sender wish to limit the recipients' ability to reply to all, you should include them in the BCC field.)
4. Be extremely careful about providing negative feedback in an email. However carefully a message is written, it will most likely be taken in a harmful and upsetting light by the recipient. It is far less ambiguous to provide negative feedback or criticism either face-to-face or on the phone.
5. Remember, email is considered company property and can be retrieved, examined and used in a court of law or church disciplinary panels.

Email Signature

Staff are encouraged to adopt the following email signature:

“Name

Job role

(If in pastorate) Pastoral charge of XYZ Methodist Church in the Berkshire and Hampshire Borders Methodist Circuit.

Address of Primary place of work (e.g. Circuit office, Church or Manse)

Circuit Website

Church Website

Phone Number

(If in Pastoral Ministry or on a flexible contract, please include this): Pastoral work means that I work flexibly and due to my flexible contract, I may send emails at times outside of normal working hours. I do not expect a reply outside of normal working hours.

This email, and any attachments, are only intended to be read by those to whom it is sent. Without the express permission of the sender or recipients this could be a breach of GDPR. Please seek permission to share this email or attachments from the sender if you intend to share the information held within it.”

Digital Devices and Work

Staff are discouraged from using personal digital devices for work, particularly, but not limited to, personal mobile phones. This is to protect people’s privacy and time off work.

Lay staff who wish to have a separate mobile phone for work will have the opportunity to find a suitable phone and contract. The costs will be refunded by the Circuit. Ministers may claim the expenses of one mobile phone from the Circuit through the regular claims process.

All lay staff who require a computer for work will be provided with one. It will include Microsoft Office and an online storage system where all work-related documents must be kept. For ministers, this is covered by the Connexional ‘Computers for Work Scheme’.

Social Media Guidelines

Consider the safety of yourself and others

It is important that the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults especially, must be maintained.

Conversation on social media can sometimes develop into heated and pointless argument. Be aware of the effect on yourself, and don't feel you always need to engage. You can always 'sign off' from a heated conversation calmly, with something like 'I think we'll have to agree to disagree. Peace.'

Respect

Do not post or share content that is sexually explicit, inflammatory, hateful, abusive, threatening or otherwise disrespectful. Try to think of the effect on others who may see what you post.

Be transparent

Don't mislead people about who you are or use pseudonyms.

Be relevant

Don't add comments to a social media post that are irrelevant to the topic. Engage in the conversation rather than broadcasting opinions.

Disagree, in love

If you have a criticism you need to make, consider carefully the tone of what you write. If you are personally attacked, do not respond in kind. Being a Christian means that sometimes we must speak out and challenge injustice. But remember when you need to point out something you think is wrong, that there is a real, and possibly vulnerable, person at the receiving end of what you say.

Be careful when sharing content

Don't share in haste. Read linked content thoroughly or watch a video to the end so you know exactly what you are sharing, before you judge whether it is suitable to share.

It's also important to not share material that belongs to someone else and isn't available for you to use due to copyright. Make sure you always seek the copyright holder's permission before sharing or using content, if it hasn't already been given.

Maintain confidentiality

If telling a story about someone else, ask yourself first '**Is this my story to tell?**' Don't reveal personal details about others without their explicit permission.

Responsibility

You are wholly responsible for any content you post including content that you choose to share.

In addition to the content types not to post detailed in the Respect section above, do not post any content which is:

- 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

Copyright Strike

A copyright strike is defined as a copyright owner submitting a legal copyright removal request for using their copyright-protected content. There are often significant financial implications.

To avoid these situations, it is advisable to be aware of the following:

1. Using a search engine to look for 'creative commons' images does not guarantee you will not inadvertently use an unauthorised image. In fact, some agencies are known for not listing their rights in the hope of creating copyright strikes. Not exactly illegal, but certainly unethical.
2. Always attribute the image, even when it has been taken by someone in the church. Simply insert 'By Joe Bloggs' or if it came from online, something like 'By Joe Bloggs' from Website.com'
3. There are safe places to get images. Your best options are:
 - www.pexels.com
 - www.unsplash.com
 - www.pixabay.com

These websites have thousands of free images which you only need to attribute to use. Be aware they all show adverts for agencies that sell images, so if an image opens another website, don't use the image.