



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY AND GUIDELINES

POLICY STATEMENT

This policy sets out the standards for Gungahlin Uniting Church, its Ministers, staff, and volunteers when communicating through public facing social media platforms. Gungahlin Uniting Church (GUC) is committed to ensuring that all external communications — including those made on social media — are responsible, respectful, and lawful.

SCOPE

All official social media accounts of GUC are overseen by the Church Council. This policy applies to the use of social media in the following circumstances:

- Establishing or managing a social media presence as an official representative of GUC.
- Posting or contributing content to GUC's official, public-facing social media channels.
- Referring to GUC, its ministries, services, or people when using social media in a private capacity.
- This policy does **not** apply to the personal social media use of members or adherents where no reference is made to GUC, its activities, or its community.
- This policy should be read in conjunction with the **Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT Social Media Information for Churches**¹ and **Media Guidelines**² publications.

DEFINITIONS

Social media

Digital platforms or online services that enable users to create, share, or interact with content and with one another. This includes, but is not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn, blogs, forums, and messaging platforms with public facing features.

- For simplicity, this policy focuses primarily on platforms used for information sharing, such as Facebook and Instagram.

Official Social Media Account

- Any social media profile, page, channel, or group established, approved, or managed on behalf of GUC or its ministries.

¹ https://www.nswact.uca.org.au/media/vjwbb545/social-media-strategy-for-churches_2024.pdf

² <https://www.nswact.uca.org.au/media/nispkej1/uca-synod-media-guidelines.pdf>

Administrator

- A Minister, staff member, or volunteer authorised to create, manage, or moderate an official GUC social media account.

Content

- Any text, image, video, audio, link, comment, or other material posted or shared on social media.

Content Publisher

- A Minister, staff member, or volunteer authorised by the Church Council to prepare and publish content on official GUC platforms.

Personal Capacity

- Use of social media by an individual in their private life, not as an authorised representative of GUC.

Public Facing

- Any online space or content visible to the public or beyond a closed, invitation only group.

Church Council

- The governing body responsible for oversight, approval, and governance of official GUC communications.

Minister

- A Minister of the Word, deacon, or deaconess set apart by ordination to supervise and empower the ministry of the Church.

Staff

- All persons employed by GUC, whether lay or ordained.

Volunteers

- Individuals recognised and appointed to a role contributing to the work of the Church without remuneration.

PRINCIPLES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- Ministers, staff, and volunteers must adopt a risk minimisation approach when engaging with social media. Individuals are responsible for ensuring that their online activity upholds the values, reputation, and legal obligations of GUC.

Principles

- **Assume all content is public.**
Treat all posts as publicly accessible, regardless of privacy settings.

- **Recognise potential external use.**
Content may be used by journalists, community members, or other parties.
- **Understand legal implications.**
Social media posts may be referenced in legal proceedings or investigations.
- **Protect privacy and confidentiality.**
Do not share personal, pastoral, or sensitive information without consent.
- **Uphold the reputation of GUC.**
Online conduct must reflect the values of the Uniting Church in Australia.
- **Exercise sound judgement.**
Consider the impact, audience, and permanence of online content.

OFFICIAL SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Purpose

To ensure that any official GUC social media presence is established and maintained responsibly, consistently, and in alignment with the Church's mission, values, and legal obligations.

Establishing an Official Presence

An official GUC social media account must:

- Be approved by the Church Council.
- Demonstrate a clear need supporting GUC's ministries or communication objectives.
- Comply with the Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT Media Guidelines.
- Comply with the GUC Privacy Policy and all obligations regarding personal information.

Official Use of Social Media

Ministers, staff, and volunteers contributing to GUC's official social media platforms must:

- Obtain prior approval from the Church Council to act as an authorised content publisher.
- Use only official GUC accounts when communicating on behalf of the Church.
- Always keep personal and official commentary separate, ensuring that official communication is not mixed with personal opinions or activity.
- Exercise sound judgement and comply with all relevant GUC policies and procedures.

ONGOING RESPONSIBILITIES FOR OFFICIAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

Once established, official GUC social media accounts must be managed in accordance with the following responsibilities:

- **Maintain active oversight.**
Monitor accounts regularly to ensure content is current, accurate, and appropriate.
- **Ensure content quality and consistency.**
Posts must reflect GUC's values, tone, and messaging.
- **Protect privacy and confidentiality.**
Do not publish personal information without consent.
- **Monitor engagement and interactions.**
Review and moderate comments and interactions to maintain a respectful environment.
- **Manage access responsibly.**
Maintain secure passwords and update access when roles change.
- **Respond appropriately to issues.**
Escalate concerns or incidents to the Church Council or ministry leaders.
- **Review and update content practices.**
Periodically assess the account's purpose, audience, and effectiveness.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Church Council

Responsible for governance and strategic oversight of GUC's social media presence, including:

- Developing and maintaining GUC's social media strategy, procedures, templates, and disclaimers.
- Maintaining a register of official accounts.
- Providing content frameworks and guidance.
- Identifying suitable content types for engagement.
- Ensuring internal processes support quality, accuracy, and currency.
- Monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of the strategy.

Administrators

Responsible for operational management of official accounts:

- Managing access, passwords, and permissions.
- Ensuring only authorised individuals can post or moderate content.
- Monitoring interactions to maintain a safe environment.
- Escalating issues to the Church Council.
- Maintaining account security practices.

Content Publishers

Responsible for:

- Preparing content in accordance with GUC policies and guidelines.
- Publishing content within their delegated authority.
- Ensuring posts align with GUC's values and communication objectives.

POSTING GUIDELINES FOR CONTENT PUBLISHERS

Purpose

To support responsible, thoughtful, and values aligned use of social media by Content Publishers.

Guidelines for Posting

1. Consider the visibility and permanence of your post

- Social media content should always be treated as public, regardless of privacy settings.
- Once published, posts can be copied, shared, or archived by others without your knowledge.
- Even deleted posts may remain accessible through screenshots, third-party archives, or platform backups.
- If you would not be comfortable with the wider community, the media, or the Church Council viewing the content, it should not be posted.

2. Ensure the accuracy of information

- Before posting, verify that all information is correct and appropriate to share.
- Avoid sharing incomplete, unverified, or speculative information about Gungahlin Uniting Church (GUC), its ministries, or its people.
- If an error is made, correct it promptly and transparently.
- When in doubt, seek clarification from the appropriate ministry leader or the Church Council before posting.

3. Consider whether you are the right person to respond

- Not every post or comment requires your involvement.
- Negative or critical posts about GUC, its ministries, or related matters should not be addressed by individuals unless they are authorised to do so.
- Avoid reacting emotionally or defensively to criticism or misinformation.
- Instead, forward the content or concern to the Church Council, who will determine the appropriate response and spokesperson.

4. Maintain clear boundaries between personal and official communication

- Do not mix personal opinions with official GUC communication.
- When using personal accounts, avoid giving the impression that you are speaking on behalf of the Church unless explicitly authorised.
- If referencing GUC in a personal capacity, ensure your comments remain respectful, accurate, and aligned with Church values.

USE OF DISCLAIMERS

- Disclaimers help clarify when individuals are expressing personal views rather than speaking on behalf of GUC.

Use a disclaimer when:

- Sharing personal reflections on social, political, or theological matters.
- Posting content that could be interpreted as representing GUC.
- You are publicly identifiable as part of GUC.
- Sharing content indirectly related to faith or community issues.

Approved Disclaimer Statement

- “Shared for personal interest; this content is not affiliated with or endorsed by Gungahlin Uniting Church.”

When disclaimers are not sufficient

A disclaimer does not override policy expectations. Individuals must still:

- Avoid content inconsistent with the ethos, values, or teachings of the Uniting Church in Australia.
- Comply with privacy and safeguarding obligations.
- Ensure personal posts referencing GUC remain respectful and accurate.

QUICK REFERENCE TABLE

Do	Don't
Treat all posts as public and permanent.	Assume privacy settings protect your content.
Verify information before posting.	Share unverified, speculative, or sensitive information.
Use respectful, accurate language when referring to GUC.	Mix personal opinions with official communication.
Escalate negative or concerning posts to the Church Council.	Respond emotionally or defensively.
Correct mistakes promptly.	Leave misinformation unaddressed.
Keep personal and official accounts separate.	Imply you speak for GUC if you are not authorised to do so.

Include a disclaimer when appropriate.

Share content inconsistent with the ethos or values of the Uniting Church.