Transforming Connections:
Best Practices in Harnessing the Power of Social Media for the Church

Define your "Why":

Do you want to start or add to your social media ministry? Before jumping in, take a moment to clarify your mission.

- **What are your objectives?** Objectives may include: keeping members updated and connected, reaching out to the community, increasing viewership on live streaming - define WHY you want to be on social media!
- **Who is your audience?** Who are you trying to reach with this platform, and do you have the voices in your church that can make relevant content to reach your target audience?

Develop a Strategy

- Develop a content plan: consider when will you share, if you will use a regular calendar, and what type of message and content you will be sharing.
- Clarify who will be posting and who will be curating content (taking photos and other media). If various people will be taking content, have guidelines and suggestions for camera settings/orientation in order to maintain consistency.
- Decide who will have administrator/moderator rights and who will have access to the password. You don't want the platform to become inaccessible if the Pastor or any one staff member/volunteer leaves or is locked out of the platform!
- Be consistent in colors, font, and style. Create your church's social media brand!

What Platforms Should I Use?

Facebook Page (Meta)	Facebook is still the most-used social media platform and is the best place to start. It has a wide range of functionality - in addition to posts, the platform has disappearing stories, short video reels, live streaming capability (with captions), events, and more. Meta

	also has a free Business Suite that allows for post
Instagram (Meta)	Instagram is for video and photo sharing and is a rapidly-growing platform. As another Meta product, it's easy to cross-post content between Facebook and Instagram, but make sure your content is *relevant* to each platform! Business Suite also handles planning and sharing to Instagram.
Twitter	Twitter may have limited functionality for church use. It moves quickly and posts become buried easily. It will require more energy and a strong voice to be consistently seen on Twitter.
TikTok	TikTok is a short-form video platform that is popular among a young demographic. This is undoubtedly the most resource-heavy platform - consider if the time it will take to create quality video content will be appropriate, authentic, and appreciated by your audience.

What Do I Post?

Services	Share your service! If you aren't live streaming, you can still share clips!
Scripture/Inspiration	For someone viewing your page, what value are you adding to their lives? Share scriptures, inspiration, and meaning - how does your church and its ministries bring the love and grace of God to your social media following?
Prompts	Prompt posts are great for engagement. Examples: "What is your favorite Christmas hymn or song?", "Share a photo of your pet for National Pet Month!", "What food do you most want to see at the church picnic?"
Sermon/Quotes	Share your church's voices - clips from the Pastor's sermons, a quote from a ministry leader and what they love about their work, a prayer from the Lay Leader, a statement from a parishioner about why they love their favorite church

	event...the sky is the limit!
Events	This is last for a reason! Don't let your social media become just a billboard advertising your church's upcoming events.

Quick-Start Do's and Don'ts

Do:	Don't:
Encourage engagement: Post thought-provoking polls, fun questions, prayer requests, and more. Share photos of your church events - especially your church at work in the community.	**Use exclusionary language**: If you are hoping to reach the community, they may not know what a "District Superintendent", "acolyte", "Charge Conference", or "UMM" are. If you choose to use this language, a brief explanation in the caption is very inclusive!
Respond: "Like" comments, reply to comments and direct messages, and engage your followers!	**Take your page too seriously**: Top-performing posts may be a church twist on a popular meme or a post about a national "holiday" (National Ice Cream Day, for example) - be creative!
Incorporate real life: Post inspiration for the first day of school, share prayers for difficult moments in the world, etc. Consider how your page is adding value to your viewers that aren't already plugged into the congregation.	**Move too fast**: Is your current platform doing well? Wonderful! Before you considering adding another platform, start over and clarify your WHY. Who is your audience on the new platform?
Tell your followers what to do: Ask them to share and repost! Their audiences may become your new followers. Followers are more likely to share if they see widespread value in your content that would apply to their friends and family.	**Portray yourself as something you're not**: If you're sharing stock images, ensure that those images portray the same vibe and experience that viewers will have if they come to your church in-person. Be authentic to who you are!
Experiment:	**Forget to set policies**:

Don't be afraid to try new things! Your audience may respond to Lives (where a person streams to the platform in real time), still photos, video content, or disappearing Stories. Time will tell!	Can you post photos of children? Can adults overseeing social media direct message with youth? Taking time to think through policies will protect everyone!

Resources for Content Creation:

Canva

- Canva is an online graphic design program. It is free to use, but a majority of the software is premium and comes with a monthly fee. Thankfully, Canva offers a FREE membership for a non-profit team! There is a simple application to get your free account.

Resource UMC/MyCom

- ResourceUMC offers many articles and further information on social media topics. United Methodist Communications (under "Free Sharable Social Graphics") offers a large library of free downloadable photos for social media use - liturgical holidays, civil observations, special Sundays, seasonal content, and general inspiration are included. This is a great place to find quick and easy content!

Need More Help?

Reach out to the conference Communications Office:

 Email: communications@vaumc.org

or Board of Communications:

 https://novadistricts.wufoo.com/forms/

communications-help-request/