

Last updated: Nov 22



Hamilton Baptist Church

# Social Media Policy



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# 1. Introduction

*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:6*

Social media is a very public way of enabling us as Christians to live out our calling to share the good news of Jesus Christ. One of its many joys is that it is immediate, interactive, conversational, and open-ended. This opportunity comes with a number of downsides if users do not apply the same common sense, kindness, and sound judgment that we would use in a face-to-face encounter.

Hamilton Baptist Church encourages the *responsible* use of social media. The purpose of this policy is to set out what we expect from our volunteers and paid members of staff when using social media. It is important to remember that we are all ambassadors for the church and that social media is never private.

This policy aims to:

- give clear guidelines on what staff members and volunteers can say about the organisation
- comply with relevant legislation and protect staff members and volunteers
- help volunteers draw a line between their private lives and their volunteering duties
- protect Hamilton Baptist Church against liability for the actions of volunteers
- be clear about sensitive issues such as monitoring and explain how problems with inappropriate use will be addressed.

## 2. Policy statement

Hamilton Baptist Church recognises that the internet provides unique opportunities to participate in interactive discussions and share information on particular topics relevant to our work using a wide variety of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter,

Instagram and blogs etc. This policy aims to protect individuals working/volunteering with us in any role, or involved with the church in any way, and to encourage you to take responsibility for what you write, exercising good judgment and common sense.

### 3. Who is covered by this policy?

It is important that we all take accountability for our online perception. The following guidance is organised by obligation (though not importance):

- Guidelines for Church Members
- Guidelines for Church Leaders
- Guidelines for Church Staff

### 4. Scope and purpose of this policy

- This policy deals with the use of all forms of social media, including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and all other social networking sites, and all other internet postings, including blogs
- It applies to the use of social media both for working/volunteering and personal purposes, whether while volunteering or otherwise
- It applies to all forms of social media accounts operated by those working or volunteering at Hamilton Baptist Church, whether under the name of the individual or otherwise
- The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using our IT facilities and equipment or equipment belonging to individuals
- If a paid member of staff or volunteer is found to be in breach of this policy, the leadership team will address this using this guidance laid out in '10. Responding to breaches'
- Workers/Volunteers may be required to remove internet postings that are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy.

- This policy links to all other policies therefore social media should never be used in a way that breaches any of our other policies such as safeguarding, data protection etc.

## 5. Responsibility for implementing the Policy

All church and organisation leaders have a specific responsibility for operating within the boundaries of this policy, ensuring that all workers/volunteers understand the standards of behaviour expected of them and taking action when behaviour falls below this.

All workers/volunteers are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any misuse of social media or questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be raised with the Elders of Hamilton Baptist Church.

Any content which raises a safeguarding concern must be reported to our Safeguarding Officer in line with the reporting procedures outlined in Hamilton Baptist Church's [Safeguarding Policy](#).

## 6. Social Media guidelines for all members

These guidelines have been created to encourage conversations that reflect our values. They apply to all content posted on our church social media accounts, and private accounts of those in leadership or paid positions within the church and are recommended for the wider church fellowship.

**Be safe.** The safety of children, young people, and vulnerable adults must be maintained. Permission must be sought before sharing images of the aforementioned. If you have any concerns, please refer to our safeguarding policy or ask our safeguarding officer.

**Be respectful.** Don't post or share content that you are not permitted to, or 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, professional, and voluntary activities can easily become blurred online so think before you post. Make sure that the content you post, or engage with, does not oppose the views or beliefs of Hamilton Baptist Church.

**Disagree well.** Some conversations can be places of robust disagreement and it's important we apply our values in the way we express them.

**Follow the rules.** Abide by the terms and conditions of the various social media platforms themselves.

## 7. Social Media Guidelines for Church Leaders: The Expectations Are Higher

Everything said above applies to church members, church leaders, and church staff. Likewise, everything said here to church leaders equally applies to all church members.

The difference is that expectations are higher for church leaders.

**We expect our church leaders to embody our church's values and measures while online.**

- **Think like Jesus.** Our posts should be consistent with biblical truth. We must be clear that Jesus is the only path to salvation. We don't tear down others even when we disagree with them. We are honest about the world around us.
- **Be like Jesus.** These character traits should be evident in our every post: patience, joy, peace, love, gentleness, self-control, faithfulness, humility, and kindness. And yes, it's more work to translate those qualities to social media.
- **Act like Jesus.** Our online identity should include our priorities as Christians: worship, Bible study, prayer, service and evangelism. The biggest challenge is to make them real and natural, not contrived or off-putting. However, our online identity should absolutely not contradict the aforementioned items.

**We expect our church leaders to support our church's decisions and programs.**

- **Don't continue a private debate in public.** No church gets 100% agreement on every decision. But once that decision has been made, we expect our leaders to get in step with it in public.
- **Support the members who are doing the work.** Every church changes over time. While it is fun to remember the past, make sure your posts don't take away from the present. Every public post should be positive and supportive of current work at the church.

- **Constructive criticism should be made privately and to the right person.** Just as every parent eventually has a complaint about a teacher or coach, where social media is the wrong place to air it. These things should be dealt with privately. The same applies in our Church family.

### **We expect our leaders' behaviour to be above reproach.**

- **If you're doing something that looks questionable, don't post it!** On social media, perception is reality; it matters how your post will be perceived.
- **Be modest.** If you are intending your post to 'show off' something – your body, your wealth, your company, your location, your toy – you are probably better off not making the post. Celebrate your blessings modestly.
- **Be wise with your influence.** God has placed you in a position of leadership because you have gifts and talents that make a difference. The world is aware of that and is watching you. Always consider how every post will be received.

## **8. Social Media Guidelines for Church Staff: You Have a Signed Contract**

The primary difference between leaders and paid staff is the employment contract; expectations are otherwise the same. In addition to statements about harassment, child protection, security, and confidentiality, we ask that all paid employees abide by the following:

- Be responsible with online communication.
- Let official church accounts be operated by the proper church members.
- Respect intellectual property rights.
- Be proactive with the church's online reputation.
- Respect the church's mission, beliefs, and values.
- Do not promote your personal beliefs as the church's beliefs.
- Pay close attention to confidentiality.



Just as with a secular company, violating the church's personnel policies can result in termination of employment. We take social media very seriously.

## 9. Biblical Passages about Communication

- **Proverbs 12:18** - There is one who speaks rashly, like a piercing sword; but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
- **Proverbs 15:4** - The tongue that heals is a tree of life, but a devious tongue breaks the spirit.
- **Proverbs 20:3** - Honour belongs to the person who ends a dispute, but any fool can get himself into a quarrel.
- **Ecclesiastes 7:21-22** - Don't pay attention to everything people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you, for in your heart you know that many times you yourself have cursed others.
- **Matthew 5:13-14** - You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.
- **Matthew 12:36** - I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak.
- **Matthew 28:19-20** - Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember. I am with you always, to the end of the age.
- **Romans 12:2** - Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.
- **Romans 14:19** - So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.
- **1 Corinthians 8:13** - Therefore, if food causes my brother or sister to fall, I will never again eat meat, so that I won't cause my brother or sister to fall.

- **Ephesians 4:25-32** - Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbour, because we are members of one another. . . . No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.
- **James 1:19** - My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.
- **1 Peter 3:14-16** - But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear them or be intimidated, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame.

## 10. Responding to breaches

Action may be taken if complaints are received or inappropriate, unsuitable, or offensive material is flagged. This may include deleting comments, blocking users, or reporting comments as appropriate. If this does not resolve the issue, further church discipline could be taken as laid out in Matthew 18, whereby we would seek to resolve the matter with the individual concerned, bring the matter to the Elders or the wider leadership team, or ultimately bring the issue to a church members' meeting.

## 11. Individual agreement

**This policy was agreed by the leadership and will be reviewed annually on:**

**Signed by:**

**Position:**

**Date:**