

3 Simple Rules for Social Media

Social media guidelines for NIC United Methodists

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, lived by and taught three simple rules: Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God. Those simple rules can be applied to many facets of life, including our use of social media. The Northern Illinois Conference's Extended Cabinet supports the use of social media and believes it can be a valuable tool for ministry. We affirm these guidelines to help use social media in a manner that positively represents the church, the Gospel, and Jesus Christ and that helps us fulfill our Gospel imperatives to grow in love of God and neighbor, reach new people, and heal a broken world.

No. 1: Do no harm

One of the benefits of social media is that it provides the opportunity to share views, thoughts, joys, and concerns about all areas of life. Our social media contributions can be very effective tools for ministry if we apply caution before we post. We will be careful that our posts are not “doing harm” by insulting or damaging the reputation of others. We will make sure our posts are respectful and in good taste. And we will remember that everything we post—status updates, comments, tweets, blogs—becomes public immediately after we click “send” (even if we’re using a limited-access setting). We can’t take it back once it’s out there, so we will use discernment with everything we post.

No. 2: Do good

Social media can serve as an effective method of church networking and communicating. It has the potential to have an encouraging influence on our congregations and communities and to serve as a powerful tool for delivering the Gospel message to a large audience that extends beyond our contact list. It’s also a great way to share news about our church and ministry—and to invite others to join us in worship and service. Additionally, it can be a useful tool for obtaining feedback and ideas from our audience and can be used to gain insight for sermons, Bible study topics, worship times, and needs of the community. The “good” and positive uses of social media are endless.

No. 3: Stay in love with God

Social media is a great way to find meaningful devotional materials, thought-provoking blogs, inspiring worship videos and media resources, and current articles and tools for our ministry. Users have reported that their social media usage helps keep them informed and enthusiastic about their ministry on a daily basis. While it can definitely help us “stay in love with God,” it also can be very distracting. We will make sure our use of social media does not occupy so much of our time that we are no longer fully participating in meaningful devotion, worship, Bible study, and conversations with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Social media can serve as a tool to aid, promote, and conduct discussions, studies, and devotional times but should not be our primary source of interaction with the world.

TO THINK ABOUT

- Is the post “doing harm” to the reputation of the church, Christ, or another person or organization?
- Can the post be interpreted as harmful, offensive, rude, or distasteful? If I’m posting photos, do I have the permission of the people pictured?
- If using the post as an outlet to vent, what’s the most productive and least harmful way to seek resolution or reconciliation? Is there a less public, more respectful way to do so?

TO THINK ABOUT

- Can the post be described as “good”?
- Will it help the kingdom and fellow believers? How will it be perceived by non-believers? How will the post be received by people with different cultural or faith backgrounds?
- Are we communicating effectively by asking questions in addition to providing information?

TO THINK ABOUT

- How is social media helping me to stay in love with God? How is it hindering me?
- How am I helping others stay in love with God by my social media contributions?
- How am I engaging in meaningful interactions that don’t involve social media? When is personal dialogue more beneficial?

Our character and faith are reflected in each post we make, so if we are unsure about something, we won’t post it.