



First Unitarian Universalist CONGREGATION OF ANN ARBOR

Social Media Guidelines

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Adapted from [this guide](#) by Terrace Crawford for the United Methodist Church.

Table of Contents

[Table of Contents](#)

[Why Use Social Media?](#)

[The Importance of Social Media for UUAA](#)

[How to Use Social Media](#)

[Best Practices](#)

[What to Post](#)

[When to Post](#)

[Social Media Platforms](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Instagram](#)

[How to Deal With...](#)

[Comments](#)

[Creating a Comment Policy](#)

[Mistakes and Apologies](#)

[Who to Follow](#)

Why Use Social Media?

In this virtual age, where we have so much technology on our hands, it is so important not only that we use social media, but that we use it well.

Goals of Social Media

1. To share the values and principles of our faith to the general public
2. To provide community and welcome to prospective members of our congregation
3. To inform and educate our community on the ways we can stay connected

The Importance of Social Media for UUAA

Whether you are posting about UUAA from your personal account or the church's accounts, as members or staff, you represent not only UUAA, but Unitarian Universalism worldwide. For many people, the first impression of Unitarian Universalism and/or UUAA is going to be our social media presence online.

This is more important now than ever. We can't talk to new visitors in the foyer on a Sunday morning anymore, so the online platforms where we meet ARE the foyer. It is important that our church's presence on social media be a great reflection of who our church is.

Our priorities on social media should be to share our values, provide space for spiritual reflection for all people, engage with fellow UUs, and ultimately encourage people to attend our programming, from our Sunday service videos, to SGD classes, and more. If our church can do this well during the pandemic and beyond, we will be truly set up for an age of growth and beloved community in the next few decades.

How to Use Social Media

For specific training on how to use each of the social media platforms you will be engaging with, reach out to the Communications Ministry Specialist (communications@uuuaa.org), and they will get you in touch with someone who can teach you the basics.

Best Practices

Here are some guidelines to follow when posting on social media.

- Take the lead of previous posts, especially those by the ministry team, for tone and direction. Determine the “voice” of the posts, and try to match it.
- Share stories, testimonies, and events going on at your church.
- Highlight as many congregants as possible. Make sure they represent the diverse community (in gender, age, race, length of membership, and more) of UUAA.
- Share relevant posts from the UUA and other national UU organizations like #UUTheVote, Black Lives of UU (BLUU), UU College of Social Justice (UUCSJ), Side With Love, Diverse Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries (DRUMM), Association for UU Music Ministries (AUUMM), Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) and more.
- Interact with followers, as appropriate (refer to updated Communications Committee interaction and comments policies)
- Refer specific requests to relevant teams (pastoral to Pastoral Care team, theological to ministers, etc.)
- Post photos before and after services to share about experiences.
- In the virtual church era, share photos of “online church” setups from congregants (families around a TV, morning tea with a laptop streaming the service, etc.)
- Do your best to get signed photo consent forms from individuals (and always get permission from guardians for photos of minors).
- Avoid posting photos that could identify location (GPS settings, tagging post with a location, identifying homes, etc.)
- When tagging the location on photos about the church, tag the location of the church, regardless of whether the photo was posted from the church. When people search the church on social media they will be able to see those posts.

- It's more important to be clear than clever - funny posts aren't funny to everyone.
- Use your conscience when posting.

Here are some cautions:

- Do not argue or debate with commenters.
- Only engage with antagonists to clarify or correct something that is wrong.
- Delete hateful comments and spam comments.
- Avoid cross-posting unless necessary; use each channel for different information:
 - Facebook page: announcements
 - Facebook group: announcements, information, engagement
 - Instagram: updates on what the church is doing, photos/videos from worship and other events
 - Twitter: content about the church/worship services, etc.
- Remember that the Internet is a permanent record.
- When posting political content, make sure that it is in line with our policies as a non-profit. More information is available in our [Communications Policy](#).
- Don't curse or use slang.
- Retweets, links, and follows can be considered endorsement. Use discernment.
- Do not use Direct Messages. Turn off if possible, and direct all DMs to email. DMs can easily be manipulated, deleted, etc.
- Verify all the information you post on UUAA accounts.
- Do not post personal contact information for people that is not available on the UUAA website.

What to Post

What is happening at UUAA? Photos of congregants enjoying the virtual worship service from home (#ChurchFromHome or maybe a UUAA-specific hashtag to collect photos: #OurUUAACommunity). Past photos of events before the pandemic. Content from archives (from the 150 year celebration). Always caption photos!

Quotes from the sermon or other parts of the service (especially on Twitter, but this can work on Instagram too. Look at [@arlingtonstreetchurch](#) on Instagram to see how to do it with some simple photo editing).

Gratitude to UUAA groups for accomplishments. Especially include links to community partners where appropriate.

Information for upcoming events. Take submissions from weekly announcements or monthly newsletter (do not include private UUAA member information. For Zoom links, personal contact, etc., simply include the relevant UUAA staff email and say to ask for more information from them).

Retweet posts about UUAA on social media when appropriate. Engage with followers through comments when appropriate.

Always try to give followers links to find more information (post a quote from a sermon, link to that service. Post a photo from a service, invite to the next service, etc.) Try to send people to the uuaa.org website whenever that might be relevant. They will find out more about our programming there.

Tag other pages when posts or quotes are from them.

When to Post

Decide with the Communications Committee how often and when to post. Use analytics, insights, etc., to see when your followers are most active (what days and times). For Sunday services, post halfway through the week, on Saturday afternoon/early evening, and on Sunday morning right before and after the service.

Guidelines for posting on different platforms:

- Instagram: a few times a week, never more than once in one day
- Facebook page: a few times a week, never more than twice in one day
- Facebook group: whenever relevant (other groups will also post). Never more than once in one day.

Find what works best for your audience. What are they engaging with most? Schedule content ahead of time. Start slow and build up content as you build up followers. Discern what is important to post where, especially as more committees ask you to post their content. Make sure your content is diversified between promotions/publicizing events, simple content (like a photo), and engaging content (video, or question). UUs like a good balance of community events (with photos!), family opportunities, and calls to action for social justice causes.

Social Media Platforms

Twitter

Usage goals: Quotes from sermons, links to services

Usage expectations: Short, news-like information like quotes, events, and links

Engagement goals: likes, retweets, comments

Engagement expectations: repost UUA/other accounts, like retweets, reply to comments

Audience: Millennials, “unchurched,” UUs from around the country, potential members

Twitter-specific advice

- Do not begin a tweet “@username” unless it is in direct response to someone. If you need to start the tweet with a tag, put a period before it so it will show up for your followers: “.@username” for example.
- Shorten links if possible. Use uuaa.org/worship and other similar links first, or use bit.ly.
- Short tweets are better. If it’s over 240 characters, consider whether Twitter is the best platform.
- Tweet like you talk - it’s a conversation. Think about if you’d retweet it yourself.

Overview: Twitter is a means to an end. Bring people into the conversation here, and continue it somewhere else: on Facebook, on the website, in worship.

Instagram

Usage goals: Photos of the community, video clips from services, event publicizing

Usage expectations: Photo and video posts; photo, text, and video stories; Instagram videos

Engagement goals: likes, tags, comments

Engagement expectations: reply to comments, repost tags (especially in stories), redirect DMs

Audience: Gen Z, Millennials, parents, other UUs/religious professionals, potential members

Instagram-specific:

- You can create drafts of posts and add captions so they are ready to upload later.

- Always use captions. Just describe/explain the photo or video. Use first names unless they're staff. Instagram doesn't activate links in captions, so don't include them.
- Tag the location as the UUAA physical church.
- Use hashtags, but if there are more than a few, put them in a comment on the post
- Instagram stories disappear after 24 hours unless you save them on your story as a highlight
- UUAA.org in the "website" link on profile
- People-first, showcase as much of the community on the lg page as possible

Overview: Instagram is the "virtual reality" of church right now. Share photos of the people and places our community holds dear while we can't be together. Instagram is a peek inside UUAA.

How to Deal With...

Comments

Types of commenters and how to deal with them

- Those who leave a compliment or express excitement.
 - Like or reply to their comments, if possible.
- Those with genuine and earnest questions.
 - If possible, answer, or direct them to appropriate resources (generally the ministers)
- Those with antagonistic or accusatory questions or statements.
 - Invite to deeper conversations with a minister or the Pastoral Care team privately (post an email address). Delete if necessary.
- Spammers.
 - Delete immediately, block if necessary.
- Those with malicious intent.
 - Record before deleting (screenshot, etc.) and make sure the Communications Ministry Specialist is aware of this (communications@uuaa.org). If there seems to be a direct threat, notify the Senior Minister immediately.

Creating a Comment Policy

Here is an example of a suggested comment policy:

“Thank you for being a part of the community here on our church’s [social media]. This page is meant to be a way to keep you informed on various church events and content. It’s also an opportunity for us to engage with people who have benefited from our ministry. The page does have administrators who will do their best to answer reasonable questions by posting links to existing content. The administrators also moderate comments and reserve the right to delete any comments. In general, the following types of comments are prohibited and will be deleted:

- Hate speech of any kind
- Inappropriate content, including excessively foul language, pornography, etc.
- Spam of any kind, including reposts of the same comment and/or repeating the same sentiment over and over again
- Insults of other commenters or egging other commenters on
- Malicious attacks against church members and leaders
- Anything demanding, obsessive, threatening, etc.
- Anything that infringes on a copyright

If a comment is deleted, consider the deletion a warning. Those who persist in posting comments that are in violation of this policy will be banned from the page. Social media are 24/7. However, our administrators are not. Therefore, we ask as community members who care about this page, that you do not reply to obvious attempts to bait you into arguments. Please ignore comments in violation of this policy until they can be properly moderated. Please note that the comments expressed on this page do not necessarily reflect the opinions and position of our church.”

Mistakes and Apologies

If you need to apologize or retract something, go ahead and do it. Sometimes it’s better to apologize publicly than to delete something and pretend it never happened because antagonistic followers will comment on other threads saying that you’re hiding something. Remember that your social media channels are yours, and they exist to engage with others in a positive and helpful manner. There’s nothing wrong with moderating your channels and choosing how you want people to use them. Ignoring and blocking are two good friends.

Who to Follow

Also be careful who you follow on social networks. You may think it's wise to follow a critic on Twitter so you can monitor what they are saying about the church, but following someone is perceived as an endorsement. People just browsing your profile, who may not realize who the person is, will think they are OK because you follow them. Sites like Facebook and Twitter will even use your name and likeness in marketing to show that you follow the person.

Some churches choose to only follow official accounts of other churches and pastors. This is a great way to promote those accounts, as people will see that you only follow a handful of accounts, and then they'll follow as well. One of the best ways to increase your followers and reach is to follow other people. It's really hard for people to find your account unless they know specifically that you are there. By following others, particularly like-minded people who you think would be interested in your church, they will typically follow you back if they are interested. Their friends will then see that they follow you and your followers will continue to increase. On Twitter you can search for hashtags or different phrases that will turn up results of people that may be good people to follow. Just be careful not to follow anyone who may give the wrong impression to your followers.

On Facebook, UUAA follows community partners like Alpha House and Habitat for Humanity and Interfaith Power and Light. This allows "mentions" that are good for both organizations.

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF REVISION	REVISED BY
August 2020	Social media internal guide created	K. Gottfried
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