

# Social Media Guide



## Mars Hill Church

*Questions or comments? Email Corrin Bauer at [corrinb@marshill.com](mailto:corrinb@marshill.com)*

First off, thank you so much for all you do! Those of us in social media know how time consuming and emotionally exhausting it can be to manage social media. But you get to be on the front lines of God's work not only in your church but all over the world.

This guide for church social media admins is full of advice, lessons, and Mars Hill policies that we hope will bless and encourage you. We've also added a table of contents so that you can go back to this doc as things arise.

All that being said, we deeply appreciate you and are praying for you, your team, and your church. If you ever have any questions or just want to talk with someone who understands, please feel free to email me at [corrinb@marshill.com](mailto:corrinb@marshill.com).

God bless,

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# Why We Do Social Media

**Guiding Scripture:** *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”* Matthew 5:14–16

## **PURPOSE** of Social Media:

1. To **share** the gospel of Jesus Christ on mission through Social Media, a mission field populated with actual people who need the gospel;
2. To **encourage** one another with various glimpses of what God is doing with the body of your church;
3. To **understand** the greater scope of God’s work through the global church;
4. To **collaborate** and share resources, insight, etc.

## **Stewarding Social Media**

Whether you’re tweeting from a personal account or from your church account, as members, deacons, pastors, and Christians, you represent not only your church, but the global church.

In this technological age, we’ve been given an amazing gift of reaching more people in more ways than ever before. From Facebook to Twitter to Pinterest, we have many platforms to preach the gospel of Jesus. We want to steward that gift well by being Spirit-led, Christ-centered, and discerning about how we share our lives through words and photos.

Our priorities on social media are to share the gospel, help disciple Christians, and foster community. We don’t want to replace attending church for our followers, even if the account you admin is part of an online church. Whether church is online or not we want to help supplement Christian community into the social media world where people already are.

Let the Holy Spirit lead you in your planning, posting, and replying to comments. Things may not always pan out the way you thought they would, but we serve a big God who loves us and works all things for his purpose (Romans 8:28).

## Why We Love Social Media

Jesus' last commandment to his disciples was to "be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8) For the first time, our entire world is connected through social media. Facebook is "the end of the earth" because it's where we truly are able to "make disciples of all nations." (Matt. 28:19) Those nations are on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest, and every other social media.

As Christians, our biggest goal is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with as many people as possible, and we see social media as a mission field populated with actual people who need the gospel.

Jesus said Christians are the light of the world. The world is now on social media and Jesus loves every man and woman on social media sites, the popular sites and the not-so-popular ones. We want to reach everyone on social media so we hope to create posts that fit each social media site. It's important for us to become all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:22) because it's important to Jesus.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the most wonderful and compelling thing we can share with others. As social media admins, our job is to make the gospel the hero of every post and get out of the way.

### Jumping into Social Media Head First

Social media is the Wild Wild West. Even the experts are still trying to figure it out—and it changes every day. If you post with love and discernment [[see the section on haters](#)], and let your supervisor know what you're doing, try new things and don't be afraid to fail! You know your church best. How can you best engage with your congregation?

You'll learn a lot from trial and error. That's why research, stats and analytics are so important [[see the section on insights](#)]. Find out what worked and what didn't and see how you can make them both better. So much of social media is learning what's new and trying it out. If you're excited about teaching yourself, you'll be an expert in no time.

# The Dos and Don'ts

## Please do:

- Take your church leaders' lead for tone and direction.
- Share stories, testimonies, and events going on at your church.
- Share posts from and link to other church and pastor accounts. But don't be redundant by sharing everything, unless it has a specific application to your church.
- Interact with your followers, care for your followers, pray for your followers.
- Ask your supervisor or a pastor how to best answer theological questions.
- Post photos during or right after each service of the life around your church.
- Do your best to get the legal permission of everyone you take a photo of. This means a signed photo consent form for anyone you post a photo of.
- If you're filming/photographing a crowd, post signs saying something like "this event is being recorded and may be posted publicly..."
- Whenever your church has baptisms, post a few photos of the baptisms. Everyone loves baptisms photos!
- It's more important to be clear than clever. Being funny is great for sharing, but it doesn't always translate well when you can't reflect tone with text. It can backfire so just be careful.

## Please do not:

- Don't argue or debate with people online as an official church account. Pray for critics and remember Galatians 6:7 [[see the section on haters](#)].
- Do not have Twitter automatically post to Facebook or vice versa. If you want to post to both, use Hootsuite or another aggregate site. If at all possible, use each channel for different information. Facebook is more relational and personal (allows people to interact easily in comments) and Twitter is more informational (events, articles, etc.)

## Specific to Pastors

### Please do:

- Be discerning and be listening to the Spirit (yes, even for Twitter).
- Glean what you can from interactions with your followers.
- Go with your gut/conscience.
- Share what God has been teaching you.
- Encourage your congregation in imaging Jesus in community, mission, and worship.
- Share photos or statuses of your family and/or activities.
- Be discerning when posting photos. Any picture you upload could have GPS data on it; people could figure out where you live (that is the default iPhone setting but you can

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turn it off for your whole phone or just the camera: on the iPhone: Privacy > Location Services > Off).

- Use discernment when “checking in” on Facebook. Avoid posting pictures that could identify your home, street, children’s school, etc.
- Be discerning when sharing your travel plans. If you post that you're leaving town, people will know that your family may be alone.

### **Please do not:**

- Do not debate with followers. Only engage with antagonists out of love and to clarify or correct something that is wrong. Otherwise, use the rule "if you engage you will enrage" and stay out of it [[see the section on haters](#)].
- Do not have Twitter automatically post to Facebook or vice versa. If you want to post to both, use Hootsuite or another aggregate site. If at all possible, use each channel for different information. Facebook is more relational and personal (allows people to interact easily in comments) and Twitter is more informational (events, articles, etc.)

### Social Media No-Nos

- **Consider the Internet a permanent record. Every pastor and church not only influences the reputation of the church but, ultimately, Jesus.**
- Don't engage in online debates with other critics [[see the section on haters](#)].
- Don't post anything political. This can be a PR issue as well as a legal issue, but more importantly it can divide the church and turn people away from Jesus.
- Don't cuss. Not even a little bit. Not even WTF.
- While its use is debatable, don't use OMG either. Better to air on the side of caution.
- Use discretion when speaking of liberties (alcohol, tobacco, gambling, etc.)
- **Be careful about who you link to, retweet, or follow.** A link is a quasi-endorsement.
- Don't post links or articles that paint your church in a negative light or possibly negative light.
- Verify all the info you post. If you're mentioning someone from your church, be sure of their title/status: pastor, deacon, member, attender, etc.
- Be careful when criticizing someone/something online; they can find it.
- Don't post addresses / phone numbers / email.

### Questions to Ask before Posting

- How does this point to Jesus and the gospel and support the mission of the church?

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- What are you trying to accomplish with this status/tweet?
- Do you want your enemies to know this? Are you giving rocks to your critics?
- Do you want this to be public record in thirty years?
- Could this be misrepresented, taken out of context, and used to malign your character or the church's?
- Worst-case scenario: how could this information be used?
- Don't just seek to make a point. Ask, "Am I making a difference?"

# What Churches Should Post (Especially Sunday)

## Life at Your Church

The most important things for the churches to post are the things that show the life of the people in your church. The stories, photos, baptisms, baby dedications, parties, sermon series launches, picnics in the park, or even just Sunday services. All these things show the world that church is about loving Jesus and loving people. When you upload photos, caption them. If I don't know what's going on in the photos, your followers probably don't either.

Quotes from the sermon are also great to post, but please make sure the quote is correct. And of course post about upcoming events.

RT people and reply to them on Twitter and comment back on Facebook when you can and when appropriate. People love interacting with pages.

Try to always be giving your followers links to find more info (ie, if you post a quote from Sunday's sermon, include the link to the sermon, YouTube clip, and/or hashtag for the series so folks can find more content easily). Tag other pages when quotes or posts are from them.

## When to Post

When you want to post and how often you post is up to you and your church leaders. A great tool for figuring out the best times and days is under the Facebook Insights [[see the section on insights](#)]. You can typically post 4 to 5 times a day on Facebook and 7 to 8 times a day on Twitter without annoying your followers. Find what works best for your audience, measure and analyze it, and make changes as necessary. Not everything needs to be an urgent post.

## What to Do When You Don't Have Anything to Post

Don't have anything to post? No problem!

Photos from just a regular Sunday service is a great way to show a "day in the life" of a church. Other things to post are events coming up, Bible verses, theologian quotes, and old blog posts or sermons (especially if it's timely: holiday, speaker, topic, verse, etc.)

Theologian quotes can be tricky, so make sure your supervisor knows what quotes you are going to post and know the theology of whoever said the quote so you know it's someone you

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endorse.

If you have old or new stuff you want to get rid of, giveaways are a great way to do that and gain new followers. I prefer Twitter for giveaways (asking folks to RT a status to enter) but if you do giveaways on Facebook, just make sure you're following [Facebook's page policies](#).

## Permission, Please

For any photos you post, you must get a release form. If you don't have permission, you can't post it.

This goes doubly for kids. You **MUST** have a signed release form from their guardian to post.

## Facebook

I would guess you probably have a pretty good grasp on Facebook. It's the most used social media site in the world and [if it were a country it would be the third largest country in the world](#), right behind China.

Facebook is great for creating personal relationships (commenting, liking, and sharing) and images. Facebook is very visual so when you share links make sure the image for the link pops up.

Most people are only going to see your content in their news feed, instead of going to your profile, so make each post stand out and memorable. Also, keep in mind that [your followers are not going to see all of your posts](#), but the more likes, comments, and shares your content gets more people will see it.

## Messages

The rule of thumb for messages is the same for dealing with commenters [[see the section on haters](#)]. One good thing is usually antagonists don't engage through messages because it's less public. Ask your supervisor how they want you to handle theological questions.

Tell folks who want prayer that you'll pray for them (and actually do), if they need a church or don't mention a church and they aren't near a Mars Hill, you can point them to [our partner Acts 29](#). If they live in your area, point them to a Community Group or Bible Study.

## Facebook Admin Levels

Page admins can now assign roles of Manager, Content Creator, Moderator, Advertiser, and Insights Analyst to different people. Here is a breakdown of the privileges for each role:

|                                | Manager | Content Creator | Moderator | Advertiser | Insights Analyst |
|--------------------------------|---------|-----------------|-----------|------------|------------------|
| Manage Admin Roles             | ✓       |                 |           |            |                  |
| Edit the Page and Add Apps     | ✓       | ✓               |           |            |                  |
| Create Posts as the Page       | ✓       | ✓               |           |            |                  |
| Respond to and Delete Comments | ✓       | ✓               | ✓         |            |                  |
| Send Messages as the Page      | ✓       | ✓               | ✓         |            |                  |
| Create Ads                     | ✓       | ✓               | ✓         | ✓          |                  |
| View Insights                  | ✓       | ✓               | ✓         | ✓          | ✓                |

If you have volunteers who monitor comments and messages, you can assign them the Moderator role.

# Twitter

The second most popular social media site in the world is great for short, pithy information like quotes, events, and news links.

## Guide for Writing Better Tweets

**Be sure to check out [Twitter's glossary](#) for Twitter etiquette and specifics.**

Twitter abbreviations: It's always preferable to not abbreviate, but when you absolutely need the characters, here are some guidelines:

- Do not begin a tweet with an @reply unless you are replying to one person/entity. **If you are beginning a tweet with someone's Twitter name, put a period before so that it will show up in your followers' feeds** (otherwise, Twitter thinks it's an @reply and only people who follow you AND the other person will see the tweet)
- Use numerals (0-9) in statuses and tweets to represent numbers but not words (e.g., do *not* use "2" in place of "to")
- Shorten links if at all possible. You can use bit.ly or Hootsuite's ow.ly.
- It's fine to substitute an ampersand (&) for "and" (and to then take out the Oxford comma), "w/" for "with", "w/o" for "without", and "bc" for "because."
- Use the ellipses mark ( ... = [option + ;] ) instead of three periods.
- **Do not take out the apostrophe from "it's".**
- **Never substitute "u" for "you", "ur" for "you're" or "your".**

If you cannot abbreviate any more and are still over the character limit, you have three options:

1. Split the quote into no more than two tweets that you schedule to send simultaneously.
2. Send the quote to Facebook.
3. Don't send it.

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## Tips for Twitter

- **Is the tweet about Jesus? Or, does it proclaim some aspect of the gospel?**
- **Tweet like you talk.** No conversation, no engagement.
- In general, Twitter likes the **pithy and punchy**. If you can't read the tweet emphatically, other people can't either.
- **Would you RT it yourself?** People forget this, but it's one of the best indicators.

Ideally, Twitter should not be the primarily realm of where the conversation itself exists. Tweets should always be hooking people into your deeper content so link to content or use a hashtag that points to other content [[see the section on hashtags](#)].



# Instagram

Ah, Instagram. The most carefree (and my favorite) of all social media. Images with a little text, what more could you ask for?

It's best to make your Twitter and Instagram user names the same, that way there is easier sharing and tagging between the two.

## How to Link with Your Phone

- If you have an iPhone or an Android, you can download the Instagram app. Go to the Account section and Edit sharing settings.
- Select Twitter and it will come up with the Twitter accounts linked to your Twitter app. Select the church's account.
- Then select Facebook. It will then go to the Facebook app and ask you to authorize Instagram to Facebook. Approve it and then select Facebook again. It will say the Photo destination is your Wall. Select Post to and it will take you to the Facebook app again and Okay the link to the pages you Admin. Then select the church's page. You're all set!

## What to take photos of

- People love to see photos of the life of the church: worship bands, pastors preaching, people worshipping, baptisms, special occasions or events, and anything behind-the-scenes. But do keep in the mind [the photo policy](#).

## Descriptions

- For the descriptions, just describe what's going on. I would suggest using only first names unless they're staff. You can include info of which service, who's in the photo, and what's going on if it's hard to tell or if you need to explain any background info.

# YouTube

YouTube (and vimeo) live in a weird space between social media and video production. Some churches put their whole sermons on YouTube while some (including [Mars Hill](#)) just have sermon clips to make it easy to share small chunks of the sermon on social media. We also have interviews, stories, trailers, previews, and music videos.

## One Channel

YouTube [updated user profiles](#) to make them more personal. Use a banner image, intro video, playlists, and more to welcome your users.

# **Tumblr**

Tumblr is a simple and easy blogging site. Like Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram, it's more on the visual side, but also does well with stories, quotes, and reblogging (like retweeting).

# Pinterest

I once called Pinterest our love song to women. I *think* it's ok that I say that because a) I'm a woman and b) [Pinterest is almost 70% women](#).

Pinterest is basically a website that functions in place of the bazillion bookmarks you had or the folders you had on your desktop of images to keep. It's used mostly for recipes, wedding and baby decorations, and inspirational quotes. Of those three, we stick to the inspirational quotes.

The [Mars Hill Pinterest](#) has a lot of images, stories, and discipleship blog posts, as well as all of our books and music.

# Google+ and Google Places

## [Google Places](#)

Google Places pages are being replaced by Google+ Local Pages. This changes what happens when people search across the Google properties (search, Maps, mobile, etc) in a few different ways--Zagat reviews and scores are now automatically integrated into search results, there is the integration of a circles filter to find reviews/recommendations from friends/family/colleagues, and within Google+, there is now a "local" tab to allow for searching and sharing.

Essentially, this has made the old Google Places pages interactive, visual, and much more similar to Facebook and Twitter.

## Google+

We treat Google+ similar to Facebook. It's not a hugely used social media site so we don't really post very much unique content there. If the world ever decides to start using Google+ in the way it is using Facebook and Twitter than we will become more intentional there. Until then, it would take away a lot of time and resources to effectively manage it, monitor it, and maintain it for very little return in engagement and reach.

That being said, if you find your church has a large audience on Google+ (maybe your church has a location in Mountain View) then it might make sense for you to concentrate your efforts there. Try it out, measure the engagement, and decide if it's worth the effort at this time.

## Management Systems

For those who don't want to post every status, photo, and video in real time and would rather schedule ahead of time, you can use a social media management system like [Hootsuite](#) or [Buffer](#). Both allow you to schedule posts ahead of time, have integrated link shorteners, and both have browser apps that allow you to post whatever page you're on in your browser to social media.

### **Hootsuite**

Hootsuite lets you have columns of tweets of lists or searches, which is great to retweeting and seeing mentions. If you get a paid account, you can hook up multiple accounts and social media channels. You can see who follows you and how many followers they have and how many people they follow to gauge influence. It also has custom analytics [[see our section on Insights](#)].

### **Buffer**

Buffer is similar to Hootsuite in a lot of ways. One thing that Buffer does better is let you "load" up posts that it distributes throughout the day as per your pre-set "best times to post." Buffer also lets you plug in your bit.ly account into their link shortener and can add Google Analytics.

## Hashtags

Hashtags are a way for people to search for tweets that have a common topic to group them together (ie, sermon quotes), to join a conversation that's already started, or to run a giveaway. You can now use hashtags on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

Here's an example of a Twitter giveaway:

We have 5 copies of @mhm\_citizens' new EP to give away. Tweet your favorite Citizens song with #citizensEP to enter to win.

## How to Avoid Burnout

It happens. The constant dripping of social media and comments from people who are less than polite.

So what do you do?

There are two things I've found that help with [burnout](#) in general but social media in particular.

The first is that whenever you pour yourself out in ministry, you need to take time to be [poured back into by Jesus](#). This means rest and sabbath, whatever that looks like for you.

The second is to have your eyes and heart down on the [ground](#). In social media, it can be really easy to view people online as just names, but they're real people who need Jesus. Be active in biblical counseling or prayer ministry if you can, and at least be active in your Community Group.

And lastly, for every hater out there, there's a lost and hurt person who saw a tweet, came to church and met Jesus for the first time. Find and focus on the good stories.



# How to Handle Haters

## Dealing with Spammers and Antagonistic Commenters

In my experience, you'll get four types of commenters: those who leave a compliment or express excitement, those with genuine and earnest questions, those with antagonistic or accusatory questions or statements, and spammers.

For those with genuine questions, answer them. Feel free to engage to help them with practical questions or theological questions. Usually with theological questions, I'll point them to resources online (sermons and blogs) or tell them to talk to a pastor or deacon after a service.

For spammers, go ahead and delete if you can tell it's spam, if they're asking for money, or if it's telling others to check out another website.

For those who are antagonistic commenters or post on the wall, we have a saying around here: If you engage, you will enrage.

People like that usually aren't looking to learn or get answers to questions, they just want to attack someone or they just want to promote their position. It's usually best to nip antagonistic comments in the bud before they engage debates with your other followers or distract them from the mission of Jesus.

On the main Mars Hill page, we have [a comment policy](#).

Feel free to use the same policy or to adapt it. Here are the things we don't allow on our wall:

- Hate speech of any kind
- Inappropriate content, including excessively foul language, pornography, etc.
- Self-promotion such as links to personal blogs, websites, etc.
- Requests for donations or money
- Spam of any kind, such as reposts of the same comment and/or repeating the same sentiment over and over again
- Promotion of political candidates and policy
- Insults of other commenters or egging other commenters on
- Malicious attacks against church members and leaders
- Anything strange, demanding, obsessive, threatening, etc.
- Anything that infringes on a copyright

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If you see any of these things in a comment or a wall post, explain to them your policy and delete or hide the comment. If the commenter keeps posting, go ahead and ban them. And of course, use your judgment and discernment. Weight out the good vs the bad of possible outcomes and just try to be wise.

It can be hard, but don't take it personally. And sometimes it's [spiritual attack](#), so pray for them and pray for you and your church.

Also be careful who you follow on social networks. You may think its wise to follow a critic on Twitter so you can monitor what they are saying about the church, but following someone is considered an endorsement and 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. If you want to stay on top of your critics, add them to private lists on Twitter (you can do this without following them) or bookmark their pages in your browser.

## Insights

Insights and analytics are a great way to measure what's working and what's not working. I keep a Google doc each week that has the current Facebook and Twitter followers, the five most clicked posts that week, and the five most and least retweets, favorites, and Facebook reach and engagement.

To get all that info, I use [Facebook Insights](#), [Twitter Ads](#), and (since we use Hootsuite) [Hootsuite Analytics](#). However you decide to measure your posts, do it consistently and try to make both the good and the bad better. There are a ton of tools and apps that can help you gather all sorts of info and charts. Try them out and find what works best for you.

## Contact Info for Mars Hill Church

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# Resources

## Some great websites I go to regularly:

- [Mashable](#)
- [TechCrunch](#)
- [UnSeminary](#)
- [Social Media Church](#)
- [Fast Company](#)
- [Church Media Magazine](#)
- [Church Tech Today](#)

## Some specific articles that are helpful:

- [7 Things Every Pastor Should Do Every Week on Social Media](#)
- [Social Media and the Church](#)
- [The Seven Deadly Sins of Social Media](#)
- [The 10 Commandments of Social Media](#)
- [4 Big Mistakes Churches Make on Social Media](#)
- [The 10 Commandments of Social Media for Brands](#)
- [List of most popular Facebook pages of churches and ministries](#)
- [22 Common Mistakes Most Churches & Non-Profits Make On Social Media](#)
- [Free Ebook: "Social Media and the Church"](#)
- [Social Media Sizing Cheat Sheet](#)
- [16 Social Media Marketing Tips From the Pros](#)
- [35 Social Media Questions for Every Church](#)
- [Top 5 Apps for Social Media Success](#)
- [6 Clever Tricks for Social Media Managers](#)