



# Complete guide to using Instagram for your Church

A guide for all in our District

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## Setup

### Have a public account

As a church you need to have an open account on Instagram. If your account is set to private, only followers you approve can see your posts. A public account means all potential visitors can see your content straight away. This is the most open and approachable method of communicating with those outside your church.

### Account name and handle

In the online world, a 'handle' is another word for a username and is what follows the '@' symbol on social media. Your Instagram account 'name' is what appears at the top of your profile in bold type. Consider carefully what to choose as your Instagram account name and handle. Even if you've already set these up you might want to consider if they are working effectively for your church.

**Handle:** We would recommend using the same handle on Instagram as you do for all your other social media platforms (if it's available). Your handle is what you will advertise (whether online or in print) for people to find you. Top tips for you handle: choose something short, memorable, easy to spell and avoid unnecessary numbers, symbols or underscores. In Instagram your handle will appear above all your posts in people's feed.

**Account name:** the 'name' field in your Instagram bio is searchable and completely customizable, so this means you can change it to really showcase who you are. Avoid using acronyms. You might want to stick with something straightforward like "Example Methodist Church", but you could also include a few extra words to help your visitors, such as a location: "Example Methodist Church, London". Your name and handle can be exactly the same, and there's nothing wrong with this, but we would recommend using your 'name' to expand and provide a little more detail than your handle does.

### Keep your log in details safe

Make sure to store your church Instagram details safely and securely. Many churches and individuals forget their password and must start a new account as a result (which doesn't look very professional and can confuse visitors when you have two accounts). It's also good to make sure more than one person has access to your church Instagram account, not least for safeguarding purposes. Giving access to multiple people also spreads to workload and means if someone leaves your church who was responsible for social media, then there's someone else who can still access your social media accounts.

### Profile Picture

Add your church logo as your Instagram profile picture. We want to avoid using the church building – "Church" is not the building, but the people. It's great to share photos of your building, just don't make it the first thing people see. Logos work best and there are many ways to produce a 'logo' if you don't have a church one already. *Canva* is a great resource which is free.

## Bio

Instagram gives you a “Bio” which is like a description about your account. It’s the text at the top of your profile, displayed below your account name. It’s a place to share essential information, and should say who you are as a church and what you do. It’s your main opportunity to encourage people to engage with your account – speak to those who have never stepped into your church. You only have 150 characters so make every word count. Provide useful info such as your regular service or worship times. Read your bio out loud – would you want to attend your church?

## Add a link to your website

Instagram allows you to add a link in your profile, just below your bio. It is the only place in Instagram where you can add a clickable link, so make use of it. In most cases you will want to add a link here to your church website. This is a great opportunity to direct people to find out more about your church. To add the link: Go to your profile > click ‘edit profile’ > add a link under ‘website’.

## Convert to a business account (Link to Facebook)

You can convert your Instagram profile to a business account to access additional features and link to your church Facebook Page. These additional tools give you access to ‘insights’ that can help you understand who is engaging with your church on Instagram. You can also utilise additional profile options such as displaying your Facebook Page ‘category’ (usually ‘Church’ or ‘Methodist Church’), displaying your church contact information (an ‘email address’ and ‘phone’ button will appear on your profile for visitors to click and contact you directly), and finally you can list a clickable location (which frees up space in your bio). To convert to a business account: Go to your profile > tap the three lines in the upper right corner > select ‘settings’ > tap ‘account’ > select ‘Switch to a professional account’ > select ‘business’ > follow the instructions > tap ‘done’

## Content

### How to post?

On Instagram you can only post images or videos, and it is a social media platform focused around visuals. You can take photos on your smartphone or create graphics (using a software such as *Canva*) to post straight from your phone. Check the quality of the photos you take and avoid posting blurry or pixelated pictures. Generally, it’s better to go for quality over quantity, although you do want to be posting regularly. Note: you can’t include clickable links in your posts on Instagram, and you also can’t share posts from other accounts (although there are many apps that enable you to repost content).

Here’s some top tips of things to try and include in all your Instagram posts:

### Write a caption

Remember to include a caption with each post you make. Try to describe what’s happening in the photo and ask questions to engage people in conversation. There’s no easy shortcut to writing great captions but try to let your church personality show through and bear in mind your church’s tone of voice. Depending on what and who you’re trying to communicate, it’s normally good to keep it professional.

### Tag a location

Try to add a location to every post you make. When you make a post, Instagram gives you the option to display a location (make sure you have location facilities on your phone turned on). People can search for locations on Instagram (such as your village, town or city) and you want your

posts to show up in order to reach more people in your area. You can even add your church as a physical location so other people can check in to it as well. If this isn't already coming up as an option, you can create it by heading over to Facebook and setting it up there.

### Use relevant hashtags

Hashtags are important for Instagram! What are they? A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by a hash mark (#) and is used to identify a keyword or topic of interest which can then be searched for. Whenever a user adds a hashtag to their post, it's indexed by Instagram and becomes searchable/discoverable by other users. Have a look at the kind of hashtags other churches are using, and also ones used by your local community. It's a great way of making your account easy to find. You can use from 1 to 30 hashtags on each post, but we would recommend somewhere around the middle and aim for about 10 - 15.

Advanced tip: Try to include a few niche hashtags (not many using it - under a few thousand), a few broad / popular hashtags (lots of people using it - in the hundreds of thousands, or millions) and the rest aim for somewhere in the middle (hashtags with a few thousand, but less than 500k). Here's some examples to get you started:

# [yourchurchname]  
# [your city/town/village]  
# [your location]  
# [yourMethodistCircuit]  
# [yourMethodistDistrict]  
# MethodistGB  
#Jesus  
#God  
#love  
#faith  
#Christian  
#prayer  
#peace  
#blessed  
#believe  
#inspiration  
#Sunday  
#christalone  
#goodmorning  
#celebrate  
#instachurch  
#community  
#sundayvibes  
#churchfamily  
#sundaymorning  
#thoughtoftheday  
#welcome  
#worship

### Tag relevant accounts

Tag your photos with the people in them (where appropriate) or with a relevant account or organisation that might be interested. For example, if your church has had a charity coffee morning or similar event, post a photo of the event and tag the charity in your post.

## What to post?

Try to post: 80% conversational (provoking engagement) and 20% broadcasting (publicising your events). Be careful to avoid posting just service information and events. Instagram isn't a noticeboard for your church, it's a conversation – our aim is to post meaningful and engaging content.

Some suggestions on what to post:

- Testimony from your church congregation
- Photos of your church mission activities
- Invites to your church services (graphic)
- What to expect on Sunday's? (photo of your church building)
- Sermon quotes (graphic)
- Pictures from events
- A Church promo video
- Prayers / prayer requests
- Pictures of your minister, superintendent or church staff (with bios)
- Bible passage (graphic)
- Ask a question or run a poll
- Behind the scenes photos from church

## Reaching more people

Here are some tips for improving how many people your posts are seen by (largely down to the Instagram algorithm):

### Respond to all comments and messages

Social media is about building relationships – it's a two-way conversation, so it's important to reply to every message sent to your church Instagram, and every comment made on your posts. Ask engaging questions in your comments to keep the conversation going, and reply to messages as soon as possible.

### Post regularly

A busy Instagram feed shows a busy church. It's important to stay active on social media to effectively engage with our communities. There's lots of different recommendations out there for how often you should be posting, but as a guide try for between a minimum of once a week to a maximum of once a day (for most churches, somewhere in the middle is ideal, but it will depend on the human resources you have available).

### Post at the right times

Are you posting at times when your audience is online? Use your Instagram insights to find when your audience is online.