



## Goal and audience

Does your congregation have a plan for social media communications? If not, start with the “Social media planning and procedures: Best practices for congregations” document at [ELCA.org/CongTools](https://www.elca.org/CongTools). It is important to keep in mind the overall goals for your communication and whom you are trying to reach with your message. This should guide the content you develop and the decisions about the relevancy of the messages you are considering for your audience.

The purpose of “Social media platforms and content: Best practices for congregations” is to give suggestions for the types of information you might like to share on your page, as well as give tips for best practices on three popular social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

## Content suggestions

### Bible verses

- The ELCA uses the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible as our text. You can find NRSV verses here: [bible.oremus.org/](https://www.bible.oremus.org/).
- The [Revised Common Lectionary](#) offers verses and prayers for each week of the church year, as well as special occasions.

### Prayers

- [ELCA Prayer Ventures](#) is a resource that is offered as a guide for your own prayer life as together we pray for the needs of the world and give thanks for the ministries of our church.
- [“Bread for the Day”](#) is a devotional book of daily prayer and Scripture readings from Augsburg Fortress. The selections of Scripture are drawn from their relationship to the [Revised Common Lectionary](#).
- You can always offer prayers about timely events in society or in your congregation. It’s a great way to reach your congregation during the week.
- Remember that social media is public. While holding one another in prayer, be sure to not reveal confidential details about medical conditions or personal crises.

### Regular congregational happenings

- Share your congregation’s worship times and an invitation of welcome. Do you have a different worship schedule in the summer? Regular reminders on social media will help guests know when to visit and help members recall what time they should be at worship.
- Provide a link to your congregation’s newsletter.
- Remind people of upcoming events in your congregation and your community, whether it’s a volunteer opportunity for “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday or a local festival in your neighborhood.

- Provide information about ways to get involved in the life of your congregation – fellowship groups, service events, volunteer opportunities, confirmation, children’s ministry, Sunday school – let your community know there is a place for them.

### **Holidays, festivals and important occasions in the church year**

- Provide a message of welcome and share your service times, especially before holidays like Christmas or Easter when you can anticipate a high volume of guests.
- Commemorate special days in the church year like festival days, changes in the liturgical season, days to remember the saints and holidays.
- Say congratulations to people in your community who celebrate baptisms or weddings in your sanctuary.
- Lift up important dates in the life of your church, like its anniversary or the anniversary dates of staff members who serve the church.

### **Music**

- Most social media platforms support video. Post video of your choir or worship band as the congregation sings along in worship.
- Share YouTube links to performances of music that you sing regularly in worship.

### **Platform specifics**

#### **Facebook**

- Try to keep your posts short while still sharing the heart of your message. According to Facebook, posts between 100 and 250 characters receive 60 percent more likes, comments and shares than longer posts.
- Images, links and videos always strengthen posts – try to include one of those with each post.
- Once a link is copied into a Facebook post and the box with an image and headline appears, the long link can be deleted and the box will remain. This makes for a clean post.
- Facebook has photo editing features that allows you to add text and stickers to your photos.
- You can create photo albums in Facebook to share up to 200 photos at once. You can also add pictures to a post if you just have a few select images to share.
- If you have a great video to share, try uploading it directly to Facebook. It will appear right in people’s newsfeeds and they won’t be directed to a different site in order to view it. You can add captions to your video in Facebook, which allows people to experience the video even if they aren’t able to watch it with sound.
- Follow pages that are important and related to your congregation and consider sharing content from those pages by browsing the pages’ feed.
- If you are mentioning another Facebook user, be it a person, business or neighboring church, tag them in the post. They will be notified that they have been mentioned and it gives them an opportunity to see the post.

- Hosting an event? Facebook has an “Events” feature so you can alert others and share the details with a Facebook invitation. People will even be reminded when the event is coming up and encouraged to RSVP.
- Facebook Live allows you to broadcast live video from your phone or computer. Make sure you have a strong internet connection if you go live so the video doesn’t cut in and out.
- Facebook has a live feature called “Stories.” You can share video that you’ve captured live or you can add text or stickers as an overlay to a favorite photo. Facebook stories disappear after 24 hours. It’s a fun way to glimpse what people or congregations are up to in the moment, but not a great idea for content that needs to be available for more than a day!
- Facebook has a built-in scheduling tool for public pages. Use it to plan your posts and schedule when you would like them to go live. You can preview your posts to make sure that they load properly before you share it with your audience.
- Familiarize yourself with the page insights. Pay attention to what performs well with your audience and what doesn’t; use those insights to inform future posts.

## Twitter

- Twitter is for sharing short messages or linking to longer ones. You are allowed a maximum of 280 characters of text.
- Offer tweets about congregational events, short facts about your congregation, special days in the church year or short quotes from sermons or songs. (Search for #SermonTweet to see how some people live tweet sermons.)
- You can share photos, GIFs and videos on Twitter. The maximum length for a video is 2 minutes and 20 seconds.
- Websites like Bitly.com or Hootsuite.com will shrink long links into short, tweet-friendly URLs.
- Follow other people or organizations that are important to the ministry of your congregation and surrounding community.
- Use applicable hashtags whenever you can. A hashtag (i.e. #ELCA) is a way to classify your tweet as a part of a conversation on a topic or event. For example, if you attend a churchwide assembly where people are using the hashtag #ELCAcwa, others who read your tweet will know it relates to that event. You can click on the hashtag and read all the other tweets related to that event, too.
- Organizing a hashtag for your events is a great way to see content from a wide variety of people who are all attending your event and sharing about it on social media.
- Wider, shorter images (2:1) are ideal for Twitter because of the way tweets appear in the timeline. That being said, you can tweet up to four images, no matter the picture’s orientation. You can also click on an image to see the whole image, if Twitter only previews part of the image in the timeline.
- Are you tweeting about someone or someplace that also has a Twitter account? You can mention them in a tweet by including their handle (i.e. @ELCA) whenever possible. If you are mentioned in a tweet, you will be notified.

- If someone mentions you in a tweet, there are several ways to respond. You can reply to them (if they are asking a question, for example), you can “favorite” their tweet or give it a retweet to share it on your timeline.
- You are encouraged to retweet other people or agencies that you follow if they have news or messages that relate to your congregation or members.
- Tweetdeck is a tool that allows you to schedule tweets in advance. The tweets will go live at the scheduled time, even if you are away from your phone or computer.
- Twitter has built-in analytics so you can review your tweets. Familiarize yourself with the analytics, and let your tweet’s performance inform the type of content you share (and don’t share) in the future.

### Instagram

- Instagram is a photo-and-video-sharing platform that is especially good for visual storytelling.
- Instagram is almost an exclusively mobile app. While you can view content on a desktop computer, you are only able to post and caption pictures from a mobile device on the app.
- This platform favors quality over quantity; you are allowed to post a maximum of 10 photos at once, so be sure to pick your best!
- The maximum Instagram video length is 60 seconds.
- Use images that demonstrate the ministry of your church. Share photos from worship services, church events, small groups, or anything that is important to the life of your church.
- There are photo filters built into the app, so you can make small adjustments to your pictures or videos with their editing tools. You can crop an image, adjust the lighting, adjust the color and more.
- Like Twitter, Instagram allows hashtags as a means to classify your picture as a part of a larger event or conversation. Use applicable hashtags, especially if you’re representing your congregation at an event, and join the conversation.
- You can complement your Instagram content with apps like Boomerang, which makes short videos or GIFs, or use the Layout app to create a collage of many photos.
- Instagram also has a live feature called “Stories.” You can share video that you’ve captured live or you can add text or stickers as an overlay to a favorite photo. Instagram stories disappear after 24 hours. It’s a fun way to glimpse what people or congregations are up to in the moment, but not a great idea for content that needs to be available for more than a day!
- You can link your congregation’s Instagram account to your congregation’s Facebook account for easy sharing between platforms.
- Instagram has built-in analytics. Familiarize yourself with the results, and let your picture and video performance inform the type of content you share (and don’t share) in the future.

## Moderator responsibilities

No matter where you are sharing content, you will need to moderate your social media presence throughout the week. Social media activity can and will occur 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is important to have more than one person assist with page moderation. There will be times when one person may be unavailable so this is best done as a team effort.

You may find that you need to hide or remove posts that are malicious, offensive, soliciting funds or not relevant to your congregation. If personal attacks, hate speech, profanity or bullying persist from a commenter on your page, you have the right to ban them from your social platforms. Facebook allows you to select a language filter if you want to be proactive about making sure profanity doesn't appear on your page.

## Content review

Posts should be reviewed for message, spelling and grammar. If possible, share content with a colleague or partner before it goes live to make sure that your posts support the goals of your communications plan.

## Scheduling for multiple platforms in one place

Scheduling content for all of your social media platforms might be overwhelming, but there are tools to keep you organized. In addition to Facebook's Scheduler and Twitter's Tweetdeck, Hootsuite.com and Buffer.com are social media management tools. They allow you to schedule social media content for multiple platforms in one, organized dashboard.

Keep a close watch on your scheduled posts. In times of crisis or disaster, you may need to remove content from the schedule so as to not appear insensitive to the tone of current events.

Remember that you can link your social media accounts for seamless sharing. When you share a picture on Instagram, you can also publish it to Facebook and Twitter. Your time as a social media manager for a congregation is limited, so it is good to take advantage of those shortcuts that can make your work easier.

## Sample resources on congregational communication and social media for non-profits

- Articles on congregational use of social media from *Living Lutheran*:
  - [Social Media Commandments](#) by Nora Brathol
  - [Go social – Facebook basics](#) by David Hansen
  - [Snapchat 101](#) by David Hansen
  - [Church on the go](#) by David Hansen
  - [Prayer – there's an app for that](#) by David Hansen
  - [Media in Ministry: Luther's Small Catechism App](#) by David Hansen
  - [How to use your phone for evangelism](#) by David Hansen
  - [Worship on Live-stream](#) by David Hansen

### Sample resources on congregational communication and social media for non-profits (cont'd)

- “[The Social Media Gospel](#),” book by Meredith Gould, July 9, 2013
- [#ChSocM](#) (ch-sock-em) is a Twitter-based chat about using social media to build church and faith. Find their content on Twitter using #ChSOCM.
- Articles about Facebook from the [Church Marketing Sucks](#) website
- Social media-related articles on [ChurchMag](#)

Social media is a constantly changing landscape. As new platforms are developed and new features are created within existing platforms, the “Help” pages on the platforms themselves often have tips for best use. Any questions you may have that have not been covered here can probably be found by an online search or by asking tech-savvy members of your congregation.

The best congregation social media presence is one with congregation members and staff contributing regularly in ways that enhance community and engage members. This helps make visible the real community that gathers on Sunday morning and during the week and allows others the opportunity to get involved or consider joining.

#### FOLLOW US

- [Facebook.com/Lutherans](https://www.facebook.com/Lutherans)
- [Twitter.com/ELCA](https://twitter.com/ELCA)
- [Instagram.com/ELCA](https://www.instagram.com/ELCA)
- [YouTube.com/ELCA](https://www.youtube.com/ELCA)

This resource is intended to accompany “Social media planning and procedures: Best practices for congregations.” Find more on congregational communications at [ELCA.org/CongTools](https://www.ELCA.org/CongTools).