

Internet Use Guidelines



Communications Development Committee
Board of Communications
Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Church House
Fisherwick Place
Belfast
Northern Ireland
BT1 6DW

Developing Good Practice

The internet provides congregations with a creative opportunity to share their mission and fellowship with congregational members, the local community and the World Wide Web. A website may be the first point of contact for many people with a congregation or the Church in general. With imagination this unique opening to share more than information about dates, times and venues can provide a dynamic introduction to Christian faith.

Whether providing access to the internet or publishing material on the internet, each congregation should develop and maintain a set of guidelines to ensure good practice in the use of internet resources, using imaginative and engaging material.

The following material is provided as the basis for developing congregational guidelines but should not be viewed in any way as a final statement. Each congregation should revise the material carefully with respect to their individual needs.

The final congregational internet guidelines should be approved by the Kirk Session.

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Congregational Website Guidelines

1. Website Administrator (Webmaster)

- I. The Kirk Session will designate the person(s) authorized to add or remove material from the congregational website(s). If more than one person is authorized, then one person will be designated by the Kirk Session as the Primary Site Administrator. The website(s) will be under frequent review by the Kirk Session whose decision over the inclusion of content will be final.
- II. The Administrator(s) should be someone with skill, enthusiasm, and long-term commitment. The administrator(s) must be trusted to develop and maintain the website(s) regularly without supervision. The administrator(s) will need to have, or be provided with, equipment and software.

2. Purpose

- I. To provide a safe online environment, connecting and informing congregational members and site visitors, protecting their privacy, and promoting the current mission of the congregation in a creative and attractive manner.

3. Content

- I. All web content should support the congregation's mission and fellowship.
- II. Any material which the Kirk Session and/or its representatives consider contrary to Church doctrine or congregational ethos should be removed immediately.
- III. No content should be submitted for posting on the site that may subject the congregation to claims of copyright breaches, or to claims for libel or slander. All illegal internet activity will be reported immediately to the appropriate civil authorities.
- IV. A copy of these guidelines and privacy statement shall be made available for review by site visitors from every web page. This information will usually appear via hyperlink at the bottom of each web page.

4. External Links

- I. External links may be included which are considered helpful to site visitors.
- II. The congregation assumes no responsibility for material on websites linked to the congregational website(s). All external links shall contain the following disclaimer: *"(Congregation Name) are not responsible for the content of external websites nor do they necessarily endorse their sponsoring organizations."*

- III. External links will open a new browser window to indicate that the visitor is exiting the congregational website(s).
- IV. The congregation will not include links to sites which contain material unsuitable for children.
- V. The content of every external linked site shall be reviewed by the Site Administrator(s) for suitability prior to inclusion and not less than every 3 months thereafter.

5. Consent Issues

- I. All site material must have the consent of those represented or whose material is used.

i. Privacy

- Express permission will be sought before any e-mail address or phone number, other than that of congregational staff or church office, is included on the website.
- No personal information of congregational members or site visitors will be shared with third parties. This includes names, e-mail addresses, phone numbers and mailing addresses.
- E-mail links to individuals should be minimized. Online forms are preferred for interactive communications from the site.
- If the site employs the use of cookies which capture the user's IP (network) address for the purpose of determining the web pages viewed by visitors to our site, at no time will this information be shared with third-party organizations. Visitors may refuse the use of cookies by modifying the permission settings in their web browser.

ii. Copyright

- All material included must comply with copyright requirements.
- Copyrighted works can include, but are not limited to, news stories, software, novels, screenplays, graphics, pictures, music, video clips and email, and should not be used without permission.

iii. Use of Photographic Material

- The use of photographs of individuals appearing on any congregational webpage should be minimal. Express permission from each congregational member in a picture to be used must be obtained.
- The Site Administrator(s) will have discretion concerning the size and placement of images on web pages.
- When using photographs of congregational children and young people, it is preferable to use group pictures. All images of children shall comply with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Board of Social Witness *Taking Care* guidelines: www.presbyterianireland.org/bsw
- Consent forms (*Taking Care*, TCF5/04) will be used to obtain parental consent for the use of images of congregational children for general church purposes.
- Stock photography of children not connected with the congregation may be used, as long as material is not protected by copyright.

6. Security

- I. No one other than designated site administrator(s) shall have access to passwords for posting website material. Passwords should be regularly changed.
- II. Appropriate firewall software and anti-virus software should be installed and regularly updated to ensure the protection of restricted data.
- III. Posting new messages on forums (message boards), chat rooms or e-mail shall be restricted to registered users and appropriately monitored.

7. Accessibility

- I. Reasonable steps will be taken to provide access to website services for people with disabilities who may use specially designed software or hardware to access content on the internet. Web content should follow World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) guidelines: www.w3.org/wai

8. Indemnity

- I. The congregation shall ensure appropriate indemnity for all internet use

9. Software

- I. All software used for developing and maintaining the website will be legally registered (if necessary) with the appropriate fees paid.

Providing Internet Access

It is essential that the use of the internet is managed securely and openly.

1. Access to the Internet

If internet access is provided (in a youth club, coffee bar, etc) equipment will be placed in an open position allowing group leaders to monitor internet activity.

- I. No one will be allowed to view offensive or abusive material.
- II. All internet access for children and young people shall be monitored by appropriate child-content monitoring software (“cyber nanny” software) or by constant supervision.
- III. The inappropriate use of internet resources will result in the immediate withdrawal of access to the internet.
- IV. Any illegal internet material will be reported to the Internet Watch Foundation and appropriate civil authorities: www.internetwatch.org.uk

2. Messaging

i. Email

- Personal e-mail addresses should never be posted on a website.
- Personal e-mail addresses of congregational members or website visitors should never be given to third parties.
- It is good practice to use e-mail alias (for example *user@congregation.org*) rather than personal email addresses.
- The congregation will not send unsolicited email (“Spam”)

ii. Instant Messaging The use of instant messaging services by children and young people should be monitored at all times.

iii. Message Boards

- All message boards must be moderated by a designated supervisor.
- It is good practice to restrict access to message boards. Users must register details before being allowed access via their username and password.

3. Child Protection

- I. There may be occasions when congregational staff or youth leaders wish to demonstrate the Internet to children or young people, or encourage them to access online information as part of the teaching programme.
- II. All use of internet resources with children and young people shall comply with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Board of Social Witness *Taking Care* guidelines: www.presbyterianireland.org/bsw
- III. All web material used should be previously checked to ensure that it is appropriate for the age group taking part.
- IV. No child or young person shall be allowed access to the internet without supervision at any time.

4. Downloaded Material

- I. No material shall be downloaded illegally.
- II. Illegal downloads include the copying or sharing of any copyrighted material including, but not limited to, music, video files, games, online articles, organ music, choral music, or photographic images.
- III. It is good practice not to install peer-to-peer file sharing systems (such as Kazaa, BiTorrent, eDonkey, etc.) that encourage illegal downloading or transmission of viruses.

5. Internet Security

- I. Appropriate anti-virus software shall be installed and frequently updated to ensure that downloaded material and e-mails are virus-free.
- II. Appropriate firewall software shall be installed and frequently updated to protect restricted data.

6. Training

- I. All congregational staff members and volunteers with internet access should be provided with appropriate training opportunities.

7. Software

- II. All software used for accessing internet services will be legally registered (if required) with the appropriate fees paid.