



Information Technology Policy

This policy addresses the use of Information Technology (IT) on Church Premises and also remotely e.g. Church web site and social media sites. It is specifically designed to protect all users, particularly children and adults at risk, but is good practice for all.

Everyone with access to a church electronic device or any church IT account must confirm that they have read and agree to abide by this policy.



Taunton Baptist Church

1. Church IT Equipment

1.1 All church owned IT equipment will have the following installed/configured to safeguard the user and any personal information stored about church members/contacts:

- Automatic downloading and applying of security update patches.
- Functioning and up to date Antivirus software.
- Daily data back up regime or data is kept in encrypted cloud-based storage (such as Dropbox)
- DNS filtering software on the church network router to prevent access to inappropriate web sites via the church internet services.

1.2 All church owned equipment may be subject to audit at any point in time with the approval of the Trustees.

2. Personal Information

2.1 Personal information will be processed lawfully and fairly in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) – see *Taunton Baptist Church Data Protection policy* for further details.

2.2 The processing of “special category” (sensitive) data will only take place when one of the extra conditions (as listed in Article 9 of the GDPR) applies. Where this applies, the special category data:

- Must be stored in an encrypted format
- Must not be shared by email, or other electronic communication unless end-to-end encryption is applied;
- Must not be stored on personally owned computers used for church business.

n.b: ‘Special categories’ of data includes information about a person’s: racial or ethnic origin; political opinions; religious beliefs; trade union membership; physical and mental health, sexual life, sexual orientation, criminal offences or allegations of offences.

3. Church Internet and Wifi

3.1 Access to the Internet using the church’s Internet Service Provider and WiFi facilities is made available in order to support the mission and ministry of the church. Every Internet site visited is capable of identifying the user, the organisation they represent and the host domain, so any use of the Internet should deploy good judgment, common sense, and careful discretion. The following rules apply when using the church’s internet services:



Taunton Baptist Church

- Limit use to appropriate Church use only; access for more than minor personal use is prohibited;
- Do not attempt to gain unauthorized access to remote systems;
- Do not perpetrate any form of fraud, or software or music piracy;
- Do not participate in any form of online gambling;
- Do not undertake any activities for commercial or personal gain;
- Do not access Internet sites that contain obscene, racist, hateful, terrorism, militant or pornographic material;
- Do not knowingly make available or upload files containing a virus, worm or corrupt data that may damage the operation of any computer or property of another;
- Do not impersonate any person or entity for the purpose of misleading others;
- Do not attempt to bypass the security settings or use the Internet Service in a manner that may damage or disable its functionality.

3.2 The Church Internet service is protected by DNS filtering software on the network router to prevent access to inappropriate sites. No attempt must be made by any user to bypass this protection.

3.3 Serious violation of this policy by the ministers, officers, employees, volunteers, members of the church or hirers of church premises will be subject to disciplinary procedures, up to and including immediate termination of employment / Church membership / cancellation of hire agreement.

4. Church Website and Social Media

Taunton Baptist Church (TBC) values the potential good that comes from web pages, social networking pages, blogs, texting, instant messaging, e-mail and other forms of electronic social networking/communication. However, it is also recognised that misunderstanding, personal offence, hurt, legal exposure and damage to church community can potentially accompany use of these mediums. The Apostle Paul instructs that “Everything is permissible but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.” With the principles of 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 in mind, all church employees, members and volunteers are to abide by the following communication guidelines:

4.1 Public domain

All information shared on the Church web site, Church Facebook page or other social media site should be considered public domain information (with the exception of the Members area of the web site). A good way of determining what is correct communication is to imagine that the local newspaper were publishing the electronic communication. If the actions/words would bring the church or individuals into disrepute, then find an alternative way of communicating. Specifically, do not:



Taunton Baptist Church

- Post, publish, distribute or disseminate material or information that is offensive, defamatory, obscene, indecent, threatening, abusive, harassing or unlawful;
- Post, publish, distribute or disseminate material or information that incites discrimination, hate or violence towards any person or group on account of their race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, disability, nationality or otherwise;
- Send junk email, spam or any other unsolicited messages;
- Infringe any copyright, trademark, patent or other proprietary right of any other party through the download or use of any information or material.

4.2 Promote integrity

Electronic communications should be consistent with the teaching of scripture and the values of TBC. Nothing should be written online that would not be said in person as a representative of the church (Proverbs 10:9). If a public dialogue gets heated, it is best to stop using a public forum and make the conversation private (Matthew 18:15-17). Leaders are expected to have the foresight to anticipate, within reason, how their words and/or actions may be perceived by their audience and to those under their care. Any potentially difficult posting should be reviewed by the church officers.

4.3 Promote credibility

Facts should be checked to ensure they are correct; in proper context and that positions are justifiable (1 Corinthians 13:5-7). Response to those who disagree should be in a spirit of love and grace (Luke 6:28-30). Electronic communications should not be used to resolve interpersonal conflicts that are best handled face-to-face. Any potentially difficult posting should be reviewed by the church officers.

4.4 Maintain confidentiality

Communications should not inadvertently share confidential information (churches deal with a lot of confidences so extra care must be taken with this). With any public postings the author is legally liable for what is written. Laws governing slander, libel, defamation and copyright apply. Outside parties can pursue legal action against individuals for postings.

4.5 Avoid political posting

As part of TBC's status as a faith-based charity it cannot be seen to endorse or support a political candidate or party. Any public posting on a political issue which is made on behalf of the church must be agreed by the church officers. It is recognised that Church ministers may wish to speak in their own right on political issues when posting personal blogs, facebook postings, tweets etc., but they should make it clear that this is their own view and not necessarily the view of the church and church IT platforms should not be used in these cases.

4.6 Show respect

Since electronic communications are public (or easily made public), everyone associated with the church should be respectful to the church and leaders,



Taunton Baptist Church

employees, volunteers and members. Any employee or member who uses electronic communications to disparage the name or reputation of the church, its practices, or its ministers, officers, employees, volunteers or members will be subject to discipline, up to and including immediate termination of employment / Church membership.

4.7 Avoid misunderstandings

Written words can easily convey the wrong message as the “non-verbal” channels that accompany face-to-face communication (body language, facial expressions and tone of voice) are absent. Reread everything prior to sending to ensure there is no possibility of misunderstanding. Too many relational problems are brought on by poor word choices or communications sent in anger/haste. Remember the motto: “Think before you press send”.

4.8 Communication with children and adults at risk

All interaction via social media sites with children and vulnerable adults should be through church accounts, not through personal individual accounts. Avoid one-to-one/private messaging with young people through social media. On the rare occasions this is necessary for a specific purpose, share the message with another leader and then terminate the conversation.

The following guidelines relate to the use of social media platforms with children:

- Set up a church group account to communicate with young people (under 18) rather than using private individual social media accounts.
- Personal user account holders should not accept “Friend” requests from under 18’s in their care.
- Set up and communicate with young people through a closed group, to avoid direct messaging and to keep all content outside the public domain.
- Assign one or more group leaders (18+) to act as administrator for the group taking responsibility for approving new members and content
- Post all information (news, events, information or reminders) on the wall/group space to avoiding the use of one to one private/inbox messages.
- Keep up to date with social media channel policies (age, privacy settings etc.) and adhere to them. For example, at present Facebook requires all users to be over the age of 13 years.
- The administrator(s) should be responsible for the addition of photographs (of under 18s) ensuring that permission has been given for their use and that no picture is tagged or used as a personal profile picture (see TBC Safeguarding policy)
- All group leaders (paid and voluntary) should ensure that their private social media accounts reflect the values and ethos of the church.
- Engage the young people involved in a church social media group in writing a positive code of conduct relating to behaviour, purpose, management, setting, monitoring and use of the social media platform.