

Social media is a place that communities can congregate mid-week, and with 40% of the world's population online, spending at least two hours a day, it's easy to see why churches need to have an online presence.

Through our social media training days, we've heard countless stories of how churches are using social media for good, to reach into their communities, build friendships, and extend a welcome that invites one and all. Read some of our stories for first-hand accounts of how churches are using social media, [here](#).

However, we've all heard negative stories about social media, and at times it can be hard not to take negativity personally and to switch off from notifications late at night.

As it's ~~#MentalHealthAwarenessWeek~~, this week's blog focuses on how we can care for ourselves online, and make sure we take some time to
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In September, [Rev Hayley Matthews](#), Director of Lay Ministry: Anglican Diocese of Leeds, spoke at our first [Labs Learning Roadshow in Leeds](#) on the Missional power of social media.

We invited Hayley to share some of her insights on how we can care for ourselves online. Here's what she said:

Think about which platforms feed you more than you feed them

Ditch them and use one or two of the others. It should be a tool, not an addiction. Stay healthy.

Check your ego

Don't obsess over other people's follower count or viral posts/tweets - it's not a competition - your one post could reach that one person who needs it most.

Make it about other people

Shine a light on your church, your faith community; their accomplishments, their service, their celebrations, their faith milestones. Be generous with your retweets and comments. Encourage and empower others so that your focus is always outwards. This will keep you and your profiles energised and positive.

On dealing with negativity online;

Be resilient! You will encounter hostility and trolling if you are online.

Do not circulate toxic content in an attempt to gain sympathy, 'for prayer' or to encourage 'righteous' trolling, you are only giving it more oxygen; simply press delete and stop it dead.

Block habitual trolls

It's simply a pastime for some; don't engage them or waste hours trying to convince them of your point – you've got more important things to be doing, right?

Be gracious and exercise humility

We all say things that come across badly at times – give as much grace as you hope to receive and if necessary apologise publically; 'sorry, didn't mean it to come across like that' wins more souls than you might imagine

Don't fall into the (self-righteous?) trap of 'loving the sinner hating the sin' online.

People are already pretty clued up on what Christians do and don't like. Even when life is at its most challenging, tell people what you stand *for*, rather than what you stand *against*.

There are a few practical ways you can manage your social media accounts and help you maintain a good balance.

1. **Share the load:** Ask others to help you, especially when you are going on holiday.
2. **Set your boundaries:** What times will you check your feeds, when will you turn off for the night, and how long will you spend online each day?
Set them, stick to them, and ask someone else to help keep you accountable.
3. **Avoid mindlessly scrolling:** Set yourself clear tasks to complete, for example, spending 10 minutes just replying to comments. Instagram offers in-app settings that allow you to limit your time on Instagram. Learn how to set it up, [here](#).
4. **Turn off notifications:** Give your mind a break from distractions and get away from your screen.
5. **Curate your feed:** Follow accounts that inspire and motivate you, unfollow the ones that don't.
6. **Talk about it:** This applies to so much more than just social media, but, take time to talk to someone and offload, don't carry the burden all by yourself.

Do you or your church have a story to tell of how you've been using social media to reach your community? We'd love to hear it! Let us know by tagging us on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

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