

Inclusive Image Guide

Images help us to bring stories to life. They can make our words feel more personal and help us connect the big picture to individuals. Good image use can include, empower and respect the dignity of the people being represented. However, images can also be used to misrepresent or to reinforce stereotypes.

Thinking carefully about the kind of images we use is important as we seek to demonstrate the strength diversity brings to our church community and to wider society.

“All members of the Church need to be able to say ‘I can see me’ in images and stories of the life of the Church which reflect their own experience.”
(‘The Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity’, p. 765)

This is so that people can feel they full have a part in the Church which is the Body of Christ.

Note: *In this resource, we are primarily considering the use of images which include people – photos and graphics.*

What is meant by inclusive images?

Using images in an inclusive way is about engaging positively with as many people as possible. At times we might find that people feel excluded or harmed by the kind of images we use. When we make an effort to use inclusive images, we are trying to be more aware of how images can make people feel.

God has created all human beings as unique and diverse from one another, and our congregations and communities are made up of many different expressions of individuality. General guidance is provided here, but it’s a good idea to talk to people in your community about how the images you currently use make them feel.

Why is this important?

Part of the work of being a justice-seeking Church is about recognising and acknowledging that harm has been done to marginalised groups in the past, not just by wider society but at times also by the Church. It is the Church’s responsibility to make amends for this and to lead the way in acknowledging hurt caused to marginalised communities by living out the ‘good news’ that God includes us all, whoever we are.

As Christians we believe that all people are loved and valued by God, therefore all deserve our respect and all can help us to understand and grow in our relationship with God.

Images which *include*

We want churches to use photographs which represent the wide diversity of people who make up our wider Methodist church family. Only using images which represent a small proportion of our community may lead to some feeling left out or unimportant – or at worst, discriminated against.

Ask yourself:

- Do the people in my images represent the full diversity of the Methodist Church, in gender, sexuality, racial and ethnic background, physical disability, neurodiversity and age?

Some aspects of our identities are not visible. We may never be able to tell that someone has a different set of abilities or their sexuality, for example. Despite this, if we are creating our own images, we should invite a wide range of people to participate. Inclusion in the process matters as much as the end result.

Images which *empower*

The images we use can empower people by demonstrating genuine equality. We should seek to avoid images that potentially stereotype, sensationalise or discriminate against people, situations or places. Sometimes stereotypes can be hard to spot. We should look at images not only in isolation, but in the wider context of the other images they sit alongside.

Ask yourself:

- Is one group of people represented as less powerful in these images? For example, are one group always represented as the staff rather than the guest, or the 'helped' rather than the 'helper'?
- Is anyone shown as powerless in these images, for example unable to access what they need or to be independent? Unless you are trying to demonstrate a particular issue or challenge, can you avoid showing someone who is depicted as powerless?
- Is there one group of people/type of person who is shown as powerful in the images? Is there always the same kind of person in charge, or in control of the scenario being pictured?

We can depict people with agency, power and ability in our images in a wide range of ways. Often, considering the dynamics between multiple people in an image is important. How do the people in the image relate to one another? Is one more powerful than another?

Putting your images alongside others in the publication, website or resource is a helpful way of ensuring you are not consistently misrepresenting a certain group or valuing one identity above others.

Working towards a fully
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www.methodist.org.uk/inclusive-mc-strategy



Images which respect dignity

If we believe that all people are loved and valued by God, then all aspects of a person's identity are valuable and all have an inherent dignity that is worthy of respect – whether it is their gender, their sexuality, their ethnic and racial background, their age, interests or hobbies. We can communicate this in the images that we use.

Ask yourself:

- Am I purposefully (or accidentally) concealing part of who this person is in this image?
- Are the people in the photograph depicted in a certain way which shows them as valuable?
- Is the person depicted in a vulnerable state or situation? Would they be happy with this depiction of themselves?

Unless we are seeking to represent a certain issue and can justify use of images which show pain or hurt, we should take great care to avoid using images of people who are vulnerable without the express understanding of their consent and good reason to use the image.

Images of God

We can reflect the fullness of God's character, love and relationships in how we depict God.

In Western Europe any anthropomorphic images of God, have reinforced a masculine, white, Western-centered understanding of God. The Holy Spirit has often been represented symbolically (eg as a dove or flame) and Jesus has often been depicted in a white, Euro-centric way. We can use images of God which help us to explore the breadth and depth of who God is and how God relates to all of humanity.

Ask yourself:

- Does this imagery depict God as a certain gender or ethnicity?
- Does this imagery depict Jesus as a certain ethnicity?
- Does this image restrict how others would relate to God in some way?
- Are there diverse images which you can use to expand our understanding of God?
- Where an image is Western, but well-loved for pastoral reasons, can you put other diverse images alongside it?

Sourcing images online

When sourcing images, please be mindful that copyright may apply to the images you find and permission may be required for their use. Information and guidance on copyright issues and a list of 'safe' sights to use can be found at methodist.org.uk/copyright

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Further guidance on imagery, design and branding for your church's material can be found at methodist.org.uk/digital/design

Getting the whole picture

Why not invite a few 'friends' of the Church, who are not your regular church members, to have a walk around your building, outside and inside, and let you know what the church is 'saying' to them through the choice of images they can see? This should also start some interesting conversations!