



FREE GUIDE · DIGITAL FOUNDATIONS

Google Business Profile Setup Guide for Churches

Set up and optimise your church's Google Business
Profile in 30 minutes to improve local search visibility.

We try hard to get everything here right, and every guide and template shows when it was last reviewed. But they are free, they are general and things change: the law, prices and the tools themselves. We cannot guarantee they are complete, current or right for your church, so check anything you rely on and take professional advice where a decision matters.

Google Business Profile Setup Guide for Churches

Who this is for: whoever manages the church's website or social media, and has been asked to make sure the church shows up properly when someone searches for it.

Setting this up means checking whether your church already has a Google Business Profile (most do, created automatically), claiming and verifying it, then filling in your category, service times, description and photos - free, and about 30 minutes' work in total.

Why This Matters

When someone searches "churches near me" or types your church name into Google, the first thing they see isn't your website - it's your **Google Business Profile**.

It's that panel on the right-hand side of Google search results (or the listing on Google Maps) showing your address, service times, photos and reviews.

If your profile is incomplete, out of date or unclaimed, the first impression someone gets of your church could be wrong opening hours, no photos and a generic description. That's not the welcome you'd offer in person - and it shouldn't be the welcome you offer online.

The good news: setting this up properly takes about 30 minutes and costs nothing.

Step-by-Step Setup

Step 1: Check If Your Church Already Has a Profile

Your church probably already has a Google Business Profile - Google creates them automatically from public data sources (like the Charity Commission register, denominational directories and other listings).

How to check:

- ☐ Open Google Maps (maps.google.com)
- ☐ Search for your church name and town
- ☐ If a listing appears, your church already has a profile

If a listing exists but looks wrong or incomplete, don't worry - you'll fix that by claiming it in the next step.

Step 2: Claim or Create Your Profile

If your church already has a profile (most likely):

- ☐ Go to google.com/business and sign in with a Google account
- ☐ Search for your church name
- ☐ Click on your church's listing
- ☐ Click "Claim this business" or "Manage now"

If your church doesn't have a profile:

- ☐ Go to google.com/business
- ☐ Click "Manage now"
- ☐ Enter your church name, address and category
- ☐ Follow the prompts to create your listing

Important: Use a shared church Google account (e.g., office@yourchurch.org.uk) rather than a personal one. This means the profile doesn't disappear when someone moves on.

Step 3: Verify Your Church

Google needs to confirm you're authorised to manage this listing. Verification options include:

- **Video verification:** Now the method Google offers most often. You record a short video on your phone – the outside of the building with its signage, the inside and something showing you have access, such as unlocking a door or opening a cupboard. It can be reviewed within a few days.
- **Postcard:** Largely gone. Google has been moving from postcards to video verification since 2023, so treat a posted code as unlikely to be offered rather than as your fallback. If you were waiting on one, check the profile for a video prompt instead.
- **Phone or email:** Sometimes available, usually where your website and domain already match the listing.

- ☐ Take whichever method Google offers you – **you don't get to choose**
- ☐ For video verification, walk the route once before recording, and film in daylight
- ☐ Complete verification the way Google asks: record the video walkthrough there and then, or enter the code if one is sent

A note for churches with poor signage. Video verification is harder for a building with no visible name board, which is a common problem for church halls and shared premises. If yours is hard to identify from the street, that is worth fixing anyway – it is the same problem a visitor has.

Tip: While you wait for verification, you can start filling in your profile details. They'll go live once you're verified.

Step 4: Set Your Primary Category

Your primary category helps Google understand what your church is and show it in relevant searches.

- ☐ Set your primary category to "**Church**" (this is the broadest and most discoverable option)
- ☐ Optionally add secondary categories for your denomination: "Methodist Church", "Church of England", "Baptist Church", "Catholic Church", etc.

Why this matters: Someone searching "churches near me" will find you if your category is set correctly. If it's set to "Community Centre" or "Charitable Organisation", you'll be invisible to that search.

Step 5: Add Service Times

Use the "Hours" feature to show when your church holds services.

- ☐ Add your regular Sunday service time(s)
- ☐ Add any midweek services, prayer meetings or regular gatherings
- ☐ Use "**Special hours**" for Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Easter and any other dates when your times change
- ☐ Update special hours at least 2 weeks before the date

Tip: If your church building is open at different times to your services (e.g., open for visitors on weekday mornings), you can add "More hours" to show building opening times separately.

Step 6: Write Your Description

You have up to 750 characters (roughly 100–120 words) to describe your church. Make it count.

Include:

- ☐ Your denomination or tradition (e.g., "We're a friendly Methodist church in the heart of Chelmsford")
- ☐ What makes you welcoming (e.g., "Everyone is welcome – whether you've been coming for decades or are visiting for the first time")
- ☐ A sense of your community (e.g., "We have a thriving children's ministry, a weekly coffee morning and an active community outreach programme")
- ☐ Your location context (e.g., "Located on the High Street, opposite the library, with step-free access")

Avoid:

- Jargon or insider language ("We're a Spirit-filled, Word-centred fellowship" might mean a lot to you, but less to someone searching online)

- Listing every activity – keep it inviting, not exhaustive
 - ALL CAPS or excessive punctuation
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Step 7: Add Photos

Photos make an enormous difference. A listing with photos gets significantly more clicks than one without.

Essential photos to add:

- ☐ **Exterior** – so people can recognise the building when they arrive. Take it in daylight, ideally from the angle someone would approach from the road.
- ☐ **Interior** – so people know what to expect. Show the main worship space, ideally set up for a service.
- ☐ **Welcome area** – the entrance, foyer or wherever people arrive. This reduces anxiety for newcomers.
- ☐ **Community life** – coffee after the service, a children's group, a community event (get permission from anyone identifiable in photos)
- ☐ **Signage** – your church noticeboard or welcome sign, especially if it shows service times

Aim for 5–10 photos minimum. Update them at least once a year so they don't look dated.

Photo tips:

- Use a smartphone in landscape (horizontal) orientation
 - Take photos in good natural light
 - Avoid photos of empty, dark or cluttered spaces
 - Make sure photos show your church as welcoming and alive
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Step 8: Leave the Service Area Alone

The service area is for businesses that travel to their customers, such as plumbers. A church is visited, so your address is what Google needs, and adding a service area can hide the pin on the map.

- ☐ Leave "Service area" unset
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Step 9: Add Your Website Link

- ☐ Add your church website URL
- ☐ If you have a specific "Visit us" or "What to expect" page, consider linking to that instead of just the homepage
- ☐ Double-check the link works by clicking it yourself

Step 10: Messaging – Gone, and What to Do Instead

Google retired Business Profile messaging on 31 July 2024, and the Google Business app has been discontinued too. You now manage your profile directly through Google Search and Maps by searching for your own church name while signed in. If a guide or a volunteer tells you to "open the Google Business app", it no longer exists.

There is nothing to enable here, which removes a decision. Make sure the routes people *can* use are the ones you actually watch:

- ☐ The **phone number** on the profile rings somewhere that gets answered, or goes to a voicemail that is checked and says when you'll call back
 - ☐ The **website link** goes to a page with a working contact form or a monitored email address, not a `info@` nobody has opened since 2019
 - ☐ Someone is named as responsible for both, with a backup for holidays
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Ongoing Maintenance: Monthly Checklist

Set a reminder to check your profile once a month. It takes 5 minutes.

- ☐ **Check your hours** – are they still correct? Any bank holidays or special services coming up?
 - ☐ **Update photos** – add a recent photo from a service or event
 - ☐ **Check for and respond to reviews** (see below)
 - ☐ **Post an update** – Google lets you post short updates (like upcoming events or a welcome message). These appear on your profile and show that your church is active.
 - ☐ **Check your information** – Google sometimes changes details based on user suggestions. Make sure nothing has been altered incorrectly.
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Responding to Google Reviews

Yes, churches get Google reviews. People review everything now, including their Sunday morning experience.

Responding to Positive Reviews

Keep it warm, personal and brief.

"Thank you so much for your kind words, Sarah. We're glad you felt welcome and we'd love to see you again. The coffee morning is every Wednesday if you're free!"

- ☐ Thank the reviewer by name
- ☐ Acknowledge what they mentioned specifically
- ☐ Optionally invite them back or mention something relevant

Responding to Negative Reviews

Take a breath before responding. Be gracious, not defensive.

"Thank you for taking the time to share your experience, James. We're sorry to hear it wasn't what you hoped for. We'd love the chance to welcome you again – please feel free to contact us at office@yourchurch.org.uk so we can make sure your next visit is a better one."

- ☐ Thank them for the feedback
- ☐ Acknowledge their experience without being defensive
- ☐ Offer to continue the conversation offline
- ☐ Never argue, blame or dismiss – remember this is public and others will read it

Inappropriate or Fake Reviews

If a review is spam, offensive or clearly fake:

- ☐ Flag it to Google by clicking the three dots next to the review and selecting "Report review"
- ☐ Don't engage with obviously trolling or abusive reviews
- ☐ Google may take several days to review and remove flagged content

Common Mistakes

Wrong Opening Hours

The most common problem. If your profile says you're open at 10am and someone turns up to find locked doors, you've lost them. Check your hours are correct and keep them updated.

No Photos

A listing with no photos looks abandoned. It takes 10 minutes to take a few decent photos on your phone. Do it this week.

Unclaimed Profile Showing Outdated Information

If nobody has claimed your profile, Google may be showing information that's years out of date – a previous minister's name, old service times or a phone number that no longer works. Claim it and fix it.

Multiple Duplicate Listings

Sometimes Google creates more than one listing for the same church (especially if the church has changed name or address). Search for your church and check. If you find duplicates:

- ☐ Claim the correct one
 - ☐ Report the others to Google as duplicates so that it merges them. Never mark one "Permanently closed": that label stays on the map and tells people the church has shut
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How to Check Your Profile Is Working

Once you've set everything up, test it.

- ☐ **Google search:** Open a private/incognito browser window and search for your church name. Does your profile appear on the right-hand side? Is the information correct?
- ☐ **Google Maps:** Search for your church on Google Maps. Can you find it? Does it show the right location, hours and photos?
- ☐ **Mobile:** Search for your church on your phone. The profile should appear prominently.
- ☐ **"Churches near me":** Stand near your church and search "churches near me" on your phone. Does your church appear in the results?

If everything looks right, you're done. If something's off, go back to your Google Business dashboard and update it.