

## Social Media Guidelines – For clergy and church representatives



Lots of our priests and church officers use social media every day – and this is fine.

Some use it to spread the word, to highlight events and stories or even to have a chuckle.

**But please remember that if you use social media as yourself, it should represent YOU, YOUR views, YOUR beliefs etc. If you use social media as your church, let it reflect your church and keep personal opinion out of it.**

Please don't write in such a way that implies that any view given is a diocesan opinion.

### **So, be authentic:**

- If you are going to use social media as YOU – then be you and be upfront. Don't hide behind an anonymous avatar, include your name and if appropriate your position or title.
- Make it clear that any views are your own. Like it or not, if you are ordained, in a position of leadership or are employed by the Church, others will see you in your public role as a representative of the Church.
- If you are posting as a church or deanery, make sure you don't include personal views.
- Are you posting as yourself (ie a person who happens to be a vicar) or as the vicar of a specific church? Be sure to make the distinction.

### **Before posting always think:**

- Is this my story to share?
- Could this be 'Fake News'?
- Would I want my mum or colleagues to read this?
- Would I want God to read this?
- Would I want this on the front page of a newspaper?

### **Be Responsible**

- Use of social media does not change the Church's understanding of confidentiality. Within the life of the Church there are private meetings and conversations, particularly in terms of pastoral work.
- Breaking confidentiality through social media is as wrong as in any other context.
- Remember: Is this story mine to share? If in doubt, don't.
- Comments you make online are permanently available and open to being shared by others. Stay within the law and be aware that safeguarding, defamation, copyright and data protection laws apply
- Defamation law in England and Wales currently states that each time a web page is viewed it becomes a published entity. Anyone defamed by a webpage has 12 months

from that point to bring an action. Web pages are essentially permanently open to action until twelve months after they are taken offline

- Always give people proper credit for their work. Make sure you have the right to use something with attribution before you publish (eg photographs, drawings, charts etc).
- If you tag someone, eg in a photo, make sure they are happy to be tagged first!

### **Be aware of privacy settings**

- The use of social media blurs the boundary between public and private. The safest assumption is that the use of social media is always public
- The information we share with friends and family maybe different to those we wish to share with colleagues or parishioners. Be careful when accepting friend requests and consider setting up a separate page for your church to allow parishioners to contact you and each other. (Our Communications Team at Derby Church House can advise you further on this.)
- Check your settings to ensure people can only see what you want them to see
- Don't be offended if a colleague or contact rejects your friend request - they may wish to keep their home life private.

### **Consider your audience**

- Remember that when you publish anything on the internet – via a blog, comments section or social media - your readers include current parishioners, potential parishioners as well as current / past / future employers and employees. Treat the internet as you would any face-to-face meeting, party or public forum
- Engaging in social media may attract the media
- Make it clear if you are joking. Humour doesn't always translate into the written word and it is easy for it to be misinterpreted.
- Encourage discussion but be specific in your question. If you are too general, eg by starting an 'Ask the church' thread, you may well get everyone who has a gripe asking really awkward questions!

### **A picture is worth 1,000 words**

- Tweets and status updates with an image are shared more frequently and receive more 'likes'.
- There's nothing wrong with sharing photos on line and it is often the best way to show off your church and what you do. You just need to make sure you have permission from anybody who features in the image before sharing, especially parental permission for children (ideally written permission). Be ready to remove an image quickly if requested.
- **Remember: Just because a photo or video is already on the internet or social media, this does not automatically give you the right to use it.** Photographers and artists whose work is used on line have a right to be paid for its use.

## Safety

*“The vast majority of people who use social media are like society. The vast majority are decent, intelligent, inspiring people. The problem comes with a small minority, as in society, who spoil it for everyone else.”*– John Cooper QC

- Some posts may be distasteful, upsetting or express unpopular views but may not be ‘criminal’ in these cases:
  - Think carefully before you respond, will this calm the situation or simply ‘feed the troll’ provoking more of a reaction?
  - Keep a record of any offensive tweets or posts by taking a screenshot
  - Report the behaviour to the site administrator
  - Use the ‘block’ settings on the sites to stop people contacting you.
- Others maybe grossly offensive or be part of a campaign of abuse or threats of violence against a group or individual and could meet the threshold for prosecution. If you become aware of this:
  - Keep screenshots of the offending post
  - Report to the network administrator
  - Report to the police using the 101 number.

**Be mindful of your own security. Don’t overshare personal information. Never publish detailed personal information such as your address or telephone number, unless in a private message to someone you know and trust.**

### **If you are posting for your PCC, church or Diocesan organisation or committee**

- Be extra careful! Anything you post WILL be seen as a view held by the Diocese or the Church of England generally – even if this is not the case. If it is an activity, it will be seen as something organised or endorsed by the C of E or the Diocese – even if it is a locally organised event.
- Ensure your message is clear and upholds the values of your church, the Diocese and the Church of England.
- Don’t get into debates and arguments that could be seen as personal (healthy discussion is encouraged; personal gripes are not).

### **Remember:**

**Anything you publish on line is there for all to see. Even if you remove it, it may be that someone else has already shared it or copied it. So, treat each post as a printed publication – once published, it cannot be undone!**

**Time is irrelevant. You might think that a post is officially published when you press the button or upload it. That’s not the case. In law, a post or article is considered to be published each time someone sees it.**

**Safeguarding, libel, privacy, data protection and copyright laws all apply. Just because it is ‘social media’ does not mean it is outside the law.**

For more information or advice, please contact:

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