

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Billions of people are connecting on social media every day. Facebook has 1.28 billion active users each month \* (\*July 2014 figures). 500 million Tweets are sent every day. Its offers an unparalleled opportunity to connect with people and build relationships with those we might struggle to reach. Many churches are active in using social media to deepen relationships with the congregation and reach out beyond them to the community.

But we are all aware of the risks. Of the stories that hit the tabloids about unguarded remarks that, in seconds, are copied and sent around the world. Of the damage done to relationships and reputations that can take years to heal.

The Diocese of Exeter has drawn up these guidelines in the hope they may help parishes or clergy considering their presence on social media. We hope you will want to engage with social media, whether through a Church Facebook page, Twitter or another platform. If you would like to talk through any issues relating to social media, do contact the Communications Team at the Diocese.

IDENTITY

Be yourself; don’t operate under aliases or a new identity. How can you really connect with other people if you are hiding behind an assumed identity? Be guided by **Matthew 5 14-16** *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven”*

TONE

Be governed by how you would normally speak and act; the same principles that guide your offline conversations should inform your conversations online. You should always aim to be respectful and courteous to those you engage with online.

***Colossians 4:6*** *‘Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone’.*

SAFEGUARDING

Remember that the law and the diocesan safeguarding policy apply in your communications with children and young people. You should not exchange private messages with young people via social media. If your role requires an element of social media, keep all your communications public and only send messages to whole groups rather than individuals. Please be aware that sharing images of children and young people online can put them at risk of harm.

PUBLIC NOT PRIVATE

The distinction between public and private lives online is especially blurred. If you are an office holder in the church, you will be seen as a representative of your church, the Diocese and the Church of England. Putting in a proviso that the views you are expressing are personal or your own will not stop the media picking them up and repeating them. If in doubt, take advice, but always remember you are responsible for your online presence.

PERMANENT NOT TRANSIENT

You should assume that anything you post online is permanent. Even if you delete it shortly afterwards, it may have been copied and published elsewhere. Always think carefully before posting and never make comments about someone online that you wouldn’t also say in public.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Remember that the law regards anything you post online as being published and in the public domain and subject to legislation around libel, defamation, copyright and data protection. So if you wouldn’t say something or share an image with a newspaper or on headed paper, don’t share it online. If you want to post images of children in your church or youth club, make sure you get permission from their parents or carers first, and do not post anything that enables them to identified and contacted. The NSPCC has useful advice on keeping children safe online here <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

The government has published guidance online copyright which may be useful <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/copyright-notice-digital-images-photographs-and-the-internet>

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