



Diocese of Carlisle – Social Media Guidelines and Policy

Guidelines

Social media is immediate, interactive, conversational and open-ended. This sets it apart from other forms of communication and demands a new way of thinking. As well as the many opportunities, users should also be aware of (though not put off by) the associated risks.

These good practice guidelines have been compiled to help clergy, office-holders and staff already active on social media (or thinking about it) fulfil, with confidence, their role as online ambassadors for their local parish, the wider Church and our Christian faith.

Electronic communication, particularly social media, takes us into new territory where we have to think differently and more carefully about what we say – unlike printed matter, it is interactive, conversational and open-ended, and it always happens in a public space. However, it should not change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility and Christian witness.

1. Don't rush in

The immediacy of social media is one of its benefits – we can respond quickly to questions, correct misunderstandings, give our perspective about a breaking story in the news media. Responding quickly doesn't mean doing so without due consideration.

Before posting always think:

Is this my story to share?

Would I want my mum to read this?

Would I want God to read this?

Would I want this on the front page of a newspaper?

This point applies even before you start posting your own content. Spend a while listening to others, getting a feel for the tone in that particular forum, giving thought to how you might participate.

2. Transient yet permanent

Social media updates are immediate and will outdate quickly BUT they can have a more lasting impact and you should assume that anything you post is permanent.

Even if you delete it later on, it may have been seen and re-published or referred to elsewhere.

3. You're an ambassador

Like it or not, if you are ordained, lead in or are employed by the Church, others will see you in your public role as a representative of the Church.

If talking/commenting about a church matter, please see details below under Policy.

4. Don't hide

Anonymity and 'hiding' behind aliases when using social media is frowned upon. It's also at odds with what we consider the main reason for using social media networks. How can anyone really connect with an alias?



On any social media platform, if you choose a username or profile different to your real name, include brief personal details in the about section. When the account is a shared one, for example, a Facebook page for your parish, ensure people can easily find out who is responsible for the content.

5. Blurring of public/private life boundaries

In everyday ministry, the distinction between public duties and private life is difficult to draw. It is no different online. There are risks associated with personal opinions being seen as public statements, a minister's private life being invaded and the difficulties of detaching from work.

Consider setting up separate accounts for ministry and personal use to help set definite boundaries.

Alternatively, use privacy settings wisely. For example, you may not want to 'over share' personal updates on your Facebook profile – so keep close friends as 'friends', and all other people as 'acquaintances'. That way content you post on Facebook can be filtered. Blurring of boundaries also applies to private messaging through any social media: if the conversation wouldn't be appropriate person to person, nor would it be online.

6. Safeguarding

The informality that social media encourages can mean that it might be harder to maintain a professional distance that is required when working with children, young people and the vulnerable.

Communicating directly online with someone, for example with private messaging, is like meeting them in private. You're advised to send messages to groups, rather than individuals, or share them publicly.

Any such activity should be conducted in accordance with [Part 4 of the House of Bishops' Safer Environment and Activities guidelines](#) which refer specifically to Social Media and Mobile Communications.

If you are unsure about how to approach a communication, or are having problems with an existing online relationship, we have a [Safeguarding Diocesan Adviser](#) who is here to help.

7. Stay within the legal framework

Whilst sharing thoughts and reflections with friends or followers via social media can seem personal and private, it is not. By law, if one or more people can access it, content is classed as published, in the public domain and subject to legislation around libel, defamation, copyright and data protection.

If you wouldn't say something in a public meeting or to someone's face or write it in a newspaper or on headed paper – don't say it online.

8. Confidentiality

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 is as wrong as it would be in any other context. Arguably, it is worse as via social media a broken confidence could spread rapidly and be impossible to retract.

Remember: Is this story mine to share? If in doubt, don't.



Particular care needs to be taken over prayer chains; of course it is good to pray for others but you should assume that information about a person's illness is confidential unless you have their explicit permission to share it. Sometimes prayer chains are invoked in an emergency – this is not a good time to ask for or get consent for sharing; indeed those directly caught up in the situation are probably very vulnerable. Instead keep the information in the prayer chain very general. God, who hears and answers prayer, does not need us to tell Him the details.

9. 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.

10. Get in touch

If you have any questions or issues with using social media, feel free to get in touch with the Diocesan Communications manager at communications@carlisedioocese.org.uk or on 07469 153658.

Policies

Policy for clergy of the Diocese of Carlisle

For the purpose of this Policy, "the organisation" includes the Church of England or Diocese of Carlisle.

- If you comment on any aspect of the work of the organisation or any policy issue for the organisation, you must clearly identify yourself as a member of the clergy within the organisation in your postings or blog site(s).
- When leaving comments on other blogs or posts, if the original subject is related to the Church of England or the Diocese of Carlisle then the person posting their comment must identify themselves and their connection with the Church of England or the Diocese.
- It is your responsibility to be aware of and to follow the Diocese of Carlisle's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. This includes the transmission and publication of images of young people. Please contact the Safeguarding team for advice or with any concerns.
- You must be clear about who you are. When discussing topics relevant to the Church of England or the Diocese of Carlisle, you must use your real name. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out. Protect yourself and your privacy.
- By virtue of identifying yourself as a member of the clergy, within a social network, you are nurturing connection with your colleagues and the global Christian community. You must ensure that content associated with you is consistent with your work and the Christian values of love, tolerance and forgiveness.
- Those who fail to take the Diocesan Policy into account may face disciplinary measures.



Policy for employees of the Carlisle Diocesan Board of Finance

For the purpose of this Policy, “the organisation” includes the Church of England or the Carlisle Diocesan Board of Finance.

- If you comment on any aspect of the work of the organisation or any policy issue for the organisation, you must clearly identify yourself as a paid employee of the organisation in your postings or blog site(s), and respond in line with the views of the organisation. If you wish to raise concerns about the work or policies within the organisation, your line manager is the appropriate channel.
- Should the comment be about a hobby or non-work related topic then clearly there is no potential for professional bias coming into play and hopefully no conflict of interest.
- When leaving comments on other blogs or posts, if the original subject is related to the Church of England or the Diocese of Carlisle, then the person posting their comment must identify themselves and their connection with the Church of England or the Diocese.
- An ‘official’ account (naming a team, project or work area) of the Diocese of Carlisle on any social media website may only be set-up with written consent from a line-manager.
- It is your responsibility to be aware of and to follow the Diocese of Carlisle’s Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. This includes the transmission and publication of images of young people. Please contact the Safeguarding team for advice or with any concerns.
- You must be clear about who you are when discussing topics relevant to the Church of England or the Diocese of Carlisle, you must use your real name. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out. Protect yourself and your privacy.
- By virtue of identifying yourself as an employee of the Diocese within a social network, you are nurturing connection with your colleagues and the global Christian community. You must ensure that content associated with you is consistent with your work and the Christian values of love, tolerance and forgiveness.
- Paid employees, including members of the clergy who fail to take the Diocesan Policy into account may face disciplinary measures.

Opportunities

- Increases communications impact, scale, efficiency and immediacy
- There is no printing or mailing. You can share your message in powerful and effective ways and others can then share it and pass it on.
- Builds relationships and community
- Social media feels personal. It provides interactive ways of connecting to other people in a communal way, and is a great way for the Church to live out and extend its corporate life. As we express our life online, those outside the Church can observe its witness.
- Provides opportunities for participation, collaboration, feedback
- There are great examples of how social media has been used for social change. It also provides an opportunity to get feedback.
- Reaches and connects with new groups where they are communicating
- Social media is a space where people who the Church struggles to connect with are communicating. And we can join them in that space.
- Enhances learning and generates ideas
- Discipleship can be fostered and nurtured.



Risks

- Forming inappropriate relationships
- Online banter and private messaging can both lead to a level of intimacy that you would naturally guard against.
- Saying things you should not – with increased impact
- Social media is public, permanent and has published status. There is a risk of [illegal] comments that could be seen as hate crimes, libellous, defamatory remarks etc. Remember the golden rule (in the box at the top of the page).
- Breach of confidentiality and gossip
- As with saying things you should not, electronic and online communication can be used to breach confidentiality and spread gossip.
- Blurring of public ministry/private life boundaries
- The distinction between public ministry and private life is difficult to draw. This is no different online. There are risks associated with personal opinions being seen as public statements, a minister's private life being invaded and the difficulties of detaching from their work. It is advised that ministers draw clear boundaries around their social media usage associated with their private life and use different social media for their public ministry (more details on this above).
- Bullying, harassment and malicious accusations
- Social media can be used to bully and harass others and is a forum for malicious accusations. Young people are particularly vulnerable to this.
- Grooming and impersonation
- There are clear dangers, particularly for children and young people, from those who use social media as a means of grooming.

Popular Social Media Platforms

Blogs: these are online diaries or personal websites where the owner will publish regular posts, and comments are invited.

Twitter: this is the most common micro-blogging site, where users publish short messages (140 characters max), known as "tweets". Users can choose to follow other users, meaning they receive a stream of all the updates made by the people they are following. Private and public messages can also be sent between users.

Facebook: this is the most popular social networking site worldwide. Users can build networks of friends, find people with similar interests and backgrounds to them, organize events and social gatherings, send messages and joint campaigns. Users can select the levels of privacy they wish to have, but the mechanisms for doing this have received widespread criticism for being complicated and confusing.

Flickr: this is a photo sharing website. Users upload pictures and can share them with others. You can also search for photos uploaded by other users on a particular theme.



Forums and discussion boards: many websites have discussion boards or forums. These allow users to discuss, debate and ask questions. Many are open to registered users only, but some are fully public.

Instagram: users can upload photographs and short videos, follow other users' feeds, and geotag images with the name of a location. Users can connect their Instagram account to other social networking sites, enabling them to share uploaded photos to those sites.

YouTube: this is a video sharing website through which users can also create their own YouTube channel. It is free and easy to upload video from a computer or mobile phone.

Useful Links

[Church of England National Social Media Community Guidelines](#)

[Church of England Digital Charter](#)

[Understanding Your Audiences on Social Media](#)

[Five Tips to Develop an Effective Church Digital Strategy](#)