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Diocesan social media policy

Introduction

Social media has transformed the way we connect, share, and interact. It offers numerous opportunities for individual Christians, parishes, chaplaincies and church schools to share information, facilitate meaningful connections, and engage in dialogue. These platforms also enable parishes, chaplains and schools to share their mission and values, and promote services and events in an effective way.

As members of the Church of England, we are called to engage with social media in a manner that reflects our Christian values and principles. This guidance is designed to support all individuals, including clergy, employees and officers (volunteer or paid), in using social media platforms responsibly while representing their parishes, schools, chaplaincies, deaneries, the diocese and the Church of England.

These guidelines serve as 'best practice' in the Diocese in Portsmouth, providing directions on how to engage online constructively. They offer insights on respectful interactions, privacy protection, and responsible content. They also emphasise the importance of authenticity and transparency. Following these guidelines not only safeguards individuals from potential pitfalls, but also contributes to fostering a more positive and safer environment for all users.

The [Church of England's Digital Charter](#) outlines the principles for a respectful online presence. Many of us have already embraced this charter, recognising the importance of responsible digital engagement in today's world. As parishes and church schools play a crucial role in their local communities, it is important for them to align with these principles. The diocese strongly encourages individuals to read the Church of England's Digital Charter, understand its significance, and consider signing the pledge.

For clergy, their usage of social media platforms would fall under the Church of England's [Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Clergy](#), which set certain expectations about how clergy should behave. This document should be seen as a adjunct to those guidelines.

If you're new to social media, our communications team can help you take your first steps. And if you've already begun using these valuable tools, we can help you develop content ideas and optimise these platforms. If you would like support, contact the diocese's [communications team](#).

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1. Representing the Church

- Always maintain a respectful, compassionate, and Christ-like tone in all your interactions, regardless of others' beliefs, opinions, or backgrounds.
- Ensure that the social media content associated with your personal, parish or school account is appropriate for your job role and reflects Christian values of love, tolerance, truth, and forgiveness.
- Be mindful that any account that carries the logo, address, or website of the parish, church school or diocese is seen as representing the parish, school or diocese, and therefore views will be seen as such.
- Be clear about your affiliation with the Church when discussing religious or Church-related topics.

2. Privacy and confidentiality

- Do not share sensitive information to which you might be a privileged party; this would include confidential details provided during PCC meetings, governors' meetings, Diocesan Synod, or any personal data without appropriate authorisation etc.
- Obtain consent before posting photos or information about individuals, especially minors, and be mindful of their privacy. Equally, if any individual then asks for their image or details to be removed, please respect their wishes.

3. Content and engagement guidelines

- Apply the same standards in your social interactions as in face-to-face or public settings.
- Use clear language and avoid 'Church' terminology or acronyms.
- Be mindful that what you put online has the potential to last. Including in private conversations, there is no guarantee that recipients will not copy and paste the conversation into the public sphere or distribute the messages via other means.
- Exercise caution when discussing sensitive topics, such as politics, controversial issues, or personal conflicts. Remember that your online presence reflects on your parish or school.
- You should not post, like or share explicit content, or racist or homophobic content.
- Ensure that your posts are based on reliable sources. Where possible, verify information sources for accuracy and consider if they are relevant to your audience.
- Balance immediacy with thoughtful responses. Don't feel obligated to respond to a comment immediately.

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- Remember that online statements can attract media attention, and you may be approached by the media as an individual or on behalf of your parish or school. If you have any doubts, ask for advice from the [communications team](#).
- Respect copyright laws when sharing content, giving proper credit to creators. Ensure that you only share images that you have permission to use.

4. Social media accounts

- The line between a clergy person's personal and professional life can easily blur when it comes to their online presence. To address this, some clergy opt for maintaining two distinct social media profiles—one for close friends and family, and another for their professional connections. This approach provides a more secure space for sharing personal photos and thoughts. It may also be appropriate for other church employees or officers.
- There is one social media account in the name of 'the Diocese of Portsmouth' on Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, Youtube, Threads and TikTok. We do not recommend that specific diocesan departments, or specific ministries (eg. all Readers) run their own, separate social media accounts. But individuals (eg. the bishop, the dean), parishes, deaneries, church schools and chaplaincies may choose to do so.
- Best practice is for more than one individual to have admin access to each parish/chaplaincy/church school social media account, in order to cover for illness/holidays, cope with lost passwords, and to ensure accountability. These individuals are ultimately accountable for their behaviour online to your PCC or school governors.

5. Safeguarding

- There is a section (section 12) in the Parish Safeguarding Handbook which specifically relates to social media, which you can download [here](#). You should check your practice against this to ensure that your parish or church school is using social media safely.
- One of the guidelines is that there is a named person (a church officer) to whom all others setting up social media accounts are responsible. He/she should have the passwords and be able to log on to each account to monitor communications.
- If a church employee or volunteer is using a mobile for work, they should be supplied with a dedicated phone, allowing them to switch it off outside work hours and to create a distinction between their work and personal numbers/accounts.

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- Church employees or volunteers should only use an approved church/ministry account to communicate with children, young people or vulnerable adults. Private messaging between (say) a youth worker and a single teenager should be avoided.
- Photos of children aged under 18 should not be shared without the consent of their parents or carers. You can download a template for a written consent form from [here](#).
- For public events or large group shots, verbal consent may be enough. Organisers should ensure there is a verbal notice or obvious physical notice informing participants that photos will be taken.
- You should also act in accordance with [Part 4 of the House of Bishops' Safer Environment and Activities guidelines](#).

Conclusion

The Diocese of Portsmouth encourages its members to use social media, alongside other forms of communication, as a platform for spreading the gospel and fostering community. By offering this guidance we aim to promote a positive and respectful online presence that reflects our values and mission.

We would commend this policy to all, as we seek to uphold the highest standards in mission and ministry. In the rare situations where these guidelines aren't adhered to, we would expect there to be a consequence. In some cases, that may involve the person being asked to step down from their position of responsibility within their parish, deanery or diocese.

Thank you for your cooperation in fostering a safer digital environment for all.

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