

Social Media Guidelines

The use of social media has become commonplace. It is a very useful and powerful tool enabling instant communication around the world and connects us in ways otherwise unachievable. However, it also has numerous drawbacks and has some unintended effects. Social media is not just the likes of Facebook and Twitter, but includes blogs and image sharing sites like YouTube and Flickr.

These guidelines help you make positive use of social media for your ministry, whilst keeping you and the rest of us safe; and minimizing unintended consequences.

Keep a link to this page handy, and refer to this guide when you feel angered or upset any time you are using social media.

You must ensure that your participation in any social media will not draw negative attention to yourself, the church or your colleagues, nor should it damage the reputation of anybody (especially those we disagree with). Comments posted should not be insulting, derogatory nor intended to 'teach them a lesson' nor 'I'll show them...'

If anyone posts something derogatory about you, you will feel tempted to respond. It is usually best to not respond at all, but if you do decide a response is necessary do not respond in any other way than a short 'I do not agree with your comment'. Do not try to explain. No retaliation or reprisal comments. It is best to discontinue that thread: take no further part.

If someone posts a comment about a general subject and you disagree with it: go ahead; but do not make your reply personal or subjective. Remain objective; that is commenting on the content of the message, not on any of the people taking part.

If you see a post by any of our colleagues, or associates which you feel is wrong, do not 'tell them off' or criticize them on the social media. Should one of our people have made an insulting or personal criticism of someone, you berating them online in public view will only make matters worse. If you really feel that you should contact the writer, use email or message them; respond privately, and then copy another colleague in.

If you do see a friend or colleague making a fool of themselves by posting inappropriately on social media, do not try to police them by commenting - you will be inadvertently taking part. Either ignore it, or phone or email them and suggest they stop. Ask a senior colleague to do this if circumstances dictate.

Some things to remember:

- The law still applies, so don't post anything that you would not want a judge to read in court (this does not limit your freedom, rather it enlarges it).

- You are sometimes better to not get involved in some debates; especially if people taking part are getting hot-headed or emotional.
- Be careful not to breach any confidences. As clergy, we must not say anything that might even hint or imply anything which may have been shared with us in confidence.
- Take care about how other readers will interpret your message. Similarly, take care with 'like' tags; if someone's dog has died and you click 'like'...you send the wrong message. The same would apply to a smiley face after the announcement that their dog has died.
- If someone continues to post insults or inappropriate things about you; defriend them. Don't reply.
- If someone from overseas tags you in a picture, check to see that it is a picture of you: if it isn't they might be trying identity theft. Untag yourself and then remove the picture from your profile. Report this as spam if necessary. Then defriend them immediately: you don't need to be friends with identity thieves.
- If anyone adds you to a group and you don't want to be...just leave it.
- If anyone posts surveys or campaign material, canvassing or cold selling (especially dodgy stuff like Viagra): mark the post as spam and if they do it again; defriend them (but see below).
- If you think a friend or colleague has had their social media account hacked (or email hacked) tell them by using another method (phone, email etc).
- Change your sign in password often.

Enjoy your time on social media. It is a great platform to spread the work of the church and to share loads of interesting subjects. Use common sense and stay in control. It is okay to 'not respond'. You should feel as though you are in control, and you can leave any discussion as soon as you wish. Don't let others pressurize you into taking part.