

Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of All Saints' Sidmouth

Social Media and Communication Guidelines

Adopted 14/11/2017

1. Introduction

It is recognised that people communicate using various forms and this is an important part of our 'world'; therefore, it is essential for our ministry that we engage with it. By setting good practice guidelines and boundaries, we aim to protect our people and help them stay safe online. Responsible engagement with people through social media can be an effective part of our ministry. It can also be an opportunity to help educate people to engage with social media and other forms of communication safely. The guidance in this document, although it refers to young people, is equally applicable to everyone, regardless of age.

The text that follows has been copied from guidance produced by the Diocese of Exeter to help churches and clergy considering their presence on social media.

2. 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"*

3. 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'.*

4. Safeguarding

Remember that the law and the church's safeguarding policy apply in your communications with children, young people and adults. You should not exchange private messages with 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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 be identified and contacted.

8. Further advice

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 on copyright which may be useful

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/copyright-notice-digital-images-photographs-and-the-internet>

If you would like to talk through any issues relating to social media, contact the Communications Team at the Diocese. Rebecca Paveley, Director of Communications on 01392 294919. If your query is non-urgent, [email Rebecca](#).

The Methodist Church has produced an excellent document: Social Media – [Guidance for Youth Workers](#) which they have allowed All Saints' Church to reproduce freely. This document is stored in the Safeguarding Dropbox folder.

9. Approval

This policy was approved and adopted by All Saints' PCC at its meeting on 14 November 2017. The PCC will review this policy annually, next review due November 2018.