

Diocese of Oxford Social Media Guidelines

A Summary

The full document can be found on the Diocese website at <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/support-services/communications/social-media-guidelines/>

Social media offers exciting possibilities to share the Gospel and to interact with people we might not otherwise connect with. We can communicate with people faster and more cheaply than ever before. However, social media takes us into territory where we need to think carefully. It is interactive, conversational and open-ended and happens in a public space.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

As Christians, the same principles that guide our offline conversations should apply to those that take place online. Interacting through social media does not change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility and Christian witness. Remember: the reputation of the Church is always at risk.

GUIDELINES

1. Legal considerations

The law views anything you share online, using social media or email, as being in the public domain. So, if you wouldn't say something to the local newspaper or in a meeting, you shouldn't say it online.

2. Honesty and transparency

Truth matters. Don't repeat unsubstantiated claims without finding out if they are true. Make sure you've got the facts right; if in doubt, check. When discussing topics relevant to the Church of England or the Diocese of Oxford, use your real name

3. Tone

Think about the tone you use. Without visual cues, humour can easily be misinterpreted online. Make sure you are not attempting to pass off offensive comments through attempts at humour. Treat your colleagues with respect and do not sound off online. As a rule of thumb, ask yourself:

- Would I be happy for my Mum to read this?
- Would I be happy for God to read this?
- Would I be happy for my worst enemy to read this?
- Would I be happy with this appearing on the front page of a national newspaper?

4. Permanence

Assume what you say is permanent. Even if you delete an online comment, it could already be in the public domain, seen by other people and/or re-published on other, unconnected sites. So always think carefully before you 'speak' and never make personal comments about someone that you wouldn't also say in public or to them in person.

5. Security

Do not assume anything electronic is secure. You might be able to delete or recall an email but there's no guarantee the recipient will. Equally, your privacy settings on your social media tools might mean only your accepted "friends" or "followers" can see the things you say, but there is *no guarantee* that they will not pass them on outside your trusted circles. Equally, be careful about any personal details you share online.

6. Confidentiality

When telling a story about a situation that involves someone else, always ask yourself, "Is this my story to tell?" Would it cause distress, inconvenience, upset or embarrassment to others if they found out you had shared in this way? If in any doubt, do not share it online. Equally, be careful when

copying others into an email which has gone backwards and forwards a couple of times – there may be confidential information earlier in the correspondence.

7. Public vs. private

Remember that the distinction between public and private lives is increasingly blurred. If you are a member of the clergy, anything you do or say in the public domain will be interpreted by the public as being representative of the Church. Reputational damage caused may be widespread. Be aware that controversial or sensitive comments you make may attract attention of the media. If in doubt, take advice, but please remember that you are responsible for your online activities.

8. Children and young people

Maintain clear boundaries. Remember that the law and [diocesan safeguarding policy](#) apply in your communications with children and young people – you should not exchange private messages with young people via social media and should not accept “friend requests” from young people without due consideration. With social media, try to keep all your communications public and only send messages to whole groups, rather than to individuals. Please be aware that sharing photographs of children and young people online can put them at risk of harm. If in doubt, don't.

9. Courtesy and respect

Increasingly people use Twitter and other social media to comment live as events unfold. Consider whether it is courteous to those around you to be commenting on the contributions of others. Are you acting with grace?

10. Social media is a tool, not an end in itself

Ask yourself: what am I trying to achieve here? Is this the best tool to use for that en? While social media is an exciting forum and presents opportunities, the value of face-to-face relationships should never be forgotten.

HELP

For help and advice, please contact the Communications team at Diocesan Church House (01865 208225) or email webmaster@oxford.anglican.org and jo.duckles@oxford.anglican.org

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