

Social Media Policy 2022

INTRODUCTION

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

Remember that the law views anything you share online as being in the public domain. Sharing your thoughts and reflections with friends using social media or email might feel personal and private, but if more than one person can read what you have written the law would class it as “published”, and therefore subject to numerous laws around libel, slander, copyright, Freedom of Information and data protection. 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. Repeating an untruth does not make it true, and you are opening yourself up to the charge of libel and/or slander if you do so.
- Be clear about who you are.
- If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, point it out. It may be appropriate to use a disclaimer to the effect that views expressed are your own.

3. Tone

- As with any other communication, 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 God to read this?

Would I be happy for my Mum 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 have been seen by other people and/or re-published on other, unconnected sites. It can be easy to say something in the heat of the moment that you will come to regret, and it could remain online permanently for all to see. So always think carefully 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.
- 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.
- Be careful about any personal details you share online – again, assume anything you share about yourself is in the public domain.

6. Confidentiality

- Social media does not change our fundamental understanding about confidentiality across the whole life of the Church. 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.
- 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.
- A good name is easily lost, and the 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. The guidance in the Parish Safeguarding Handbook (2019) Section 12 on the use of social media is followed by St James' & St Lukes' Church, Whitfield Parish.
- Please be aware that sharing photographs of children and young people online can put them at risk of harm. No child should be identifiable in the church's social media pages. If in doubt, don't. share or publish.

9. Courtesy and respect

- Increasingly people use Twitter and other social media to comment live as events unfold. While this can enhance participation in a debate or conference, consider whether it is courteous to those around you to be commenting on the contributions of others.
- Are you treating the speaker with courtesy and respect? Are you giving the meeting or event your full attention? Might you be distracting those around you? 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 end?
- If you start something, do you have the resources to monitor and manage it?
- Remember the value of other forms of communication! It can become easy to hide behind an online persona and neglect other relationships.
- Remember that while social media is an exciting forum and presents opportunities, the value of face-to-face relationships should never be forgotten.

St James' & St Luke's Church, Glossop

The Vineyard, 18-20 Charlestown Road, Glossop SK13 8JN

tel: 01457 853330 e-mail: office@whitfieldparish.org

web: www.whitfieldparish.org



Amendments by St James' & St Luke's Church, Whitfield Parish to include Parish Handbook

References

Signed: T May - Incumbent

T Fellows – Parish Safeguarding Officer

Date: 4-7-22