

Appendix P - Social Media Guidance

Getting started on social media

Creating a page or profile for you or your church is completely free. It creates another set of tools that you can use to contact your existing community and reach new people.

In this guide, find out how to create an account for your church on the main social media networks, plus advice for managing your account safely.

Which platforms should you use?

There are plenty of options so before you create a new social media account, consider which platforms your community are using most. Typically, these will be Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

It might be tempting to create multiple accounts across several platforms. However, if you don't have time to keep all of them up to date, it might give the wrong impression about your church so it's best to start with one or two.

Where do you start with a new social media account?

- **Choose a profile name and picture**
Try to use the same profile name across all your accounts so that it is easy for your community to find you. It's good to have a consistent profile picture too so your church is easily recognisable.
- **Login and contact details**
When creating a new social media account, use a general church email as the login and main contact details. Ensure that more than one trusted person in your church has the login details. However, for Facebook, each admin needs their own personal account which can then be added to the page.
- **Share the new account**
Once set up, encourage your congregation to like or follow the profiles at the end of services and events. Update your website and newsletters with the link.
- **Keep it up to date**
Posting at least once a week keeps your social media fresh – people who are perhaps planning on visiting will know that your church is open and active.

Our Diocesan Social Media Guidelines

In this social media age, communities are brought together online. More than ever, churches are using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as tools to connect new people with the Good News. However, there are some risks to be considered. Being online should not change our understanding of safeguarding, confidentiality, or our Christian ethos.

1. Consider the Law

Sharing your opinions with friends and followers online might feel private, but if one or more people can read what you have written, the law classifies it as published. It is then subject to legislation around libel, defamation, copyright, Freedom of Information, and data protection.

Think carefully about what you write online: if you wouldn't write it in the national news or say it in a meeting, it's best not to say it online.

2. Remember You're an Ambassador

If you are ordained or work within the Diocese, others will see your personal opinions as reflecting the Church's too. You may want to use a disclaimer that the views expressed are your own on any social media accounts.

3. Don't Rush In

Social media is quick and sometimes we can respond without thinking in order to keep up. When telling a story that involves someone else, always ask yourself, "Is this mine to share?" If in any doubt, do not share it.

Think about the tone you use. Without visual cues, what you say can easily be misinterpreted online. As a rule of thumb, ask yourself: Would I be happy for God to read this? Be aware that controversial or insensitive comments that may attract unwanted attention from the media. If in doubt, ask for advice.

4. Social Media is Permanent

While social media is fast and will outdate quickly, you should assume that what you post is permanent. Even if you delete it later, it could already have been seen by other people or screenshot to be reposted.

5. Your Safety

Be careful about any personal details you share online. Your privacy settings on social media might mean only your friends or "followers" can see the things you say, but there is no guarantee that they will not pass them on to others you do not trust.

Online, people sometimes act in ways they would not in person. If anyone makes a threat, makes accusations against, or impersonates you online, firstly, take a screenshot of what has been posted – the person may later take a message down if they are challenged about it. Send it to the appropriate place such as the social media site or the police if you feel unsafe.

6. Confidentiality Matters

Confidentiality matters both off and online. Within the Church, there are pastoral issues that need to be treated with respect and kept in confidence. If you share it online, it could be shared and impossible to retract. Similarly, be careful when copying others into an email as there may be confidential information earlier in the correspondence.

7. Mixing Public and Private Lives

The boundaries between public and private can be hard to manage. If you are a member of the clergy, you may want to consider setting up separate accounts for ministry and personal use to set definitive boundaries. Remember blurring boundaries also applies to private messaging – ensure it is appropriate.

8. Safeguarding

While informality is encouraged by social media, remember that you need to maintain a professional distance with children, young people, and vulnerable adults. If your work includes sending private messages on social media, send them to whole groups rather than individually. Get a parent's or guardian's permission before sharing photographs. It is crucial to maintain clear boundaries.

If you are unsure about safeguarding online or are having problems with an existing online relationship, we have a Safeguarding team who are here to help you.

9. Don't Hide

It can become easy to hide behind an online persona or be anonymous. But this contradicts why we use social media as a Church which is to bring people to Jesus. On any social media platform. If the account is a shared one, for example, a Facebook page for your parish, ensure people can easily find out who is responsible for the content.

10. Get in Touch

If you have any questions or issues with social media, contact the Diocese Communications team at comms@southwell.anglican.org

Other Useful Resources:

- The Church of England's Social Media Guidelines are at <https://www.churchofengland.org/terms-and-conditions/our-social-media-community-guidelines>
- The Archbishops' Social Media Charter is a voluntary pledge for individual Christians and churches to sign to help make social media and the web more widely positive places for conversations to happen: www.churchofengland.org/terms-and-conditions/our-digital-charter
- Child Online Exploitation and Protections' Thinkuknow at www.thinkuknow.co.uk/
- Thirtyone:Eight (formerly Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service) offers advice on internet safety at thirtyoneeight.org
- Safer Internet Centre: www.saferinternet.org.uk

Some Examples of Social Media:

Blogs: these are online diaries or personal websites where the owner will publish regular posts, and comments are invited.

Twitter: this is the most common micro-blogging site, where users publish short messages (280 characters max), known as “tweets”. Users can choose to follow other users, meaning they receive a stream of all the updates made by the people they are following. Private and public messages can also be sent between users.

Facebook: this is the most popular social networking site worldwide. Users can build networks of friends, find people with similar interests and backgrounds to them, organise events and social gatherings, send messages and joint campaigns. Users can select the levels of privacy they wish to have, but the mechanisms for doing this have received widespread criticism for being complicated and confusing.

Instagram: this is a popular photo and video sharing website. Users can follow others and share content as well as advertise. Users can also share “stories” which disappear after 24 hours and can contain both images and videos. Private messages – referred to as “direct messages” can be sent to groups and individual users. It also features a “discovery” page which features content from users and accounts you may not follow. Unless your account is private, anybody can see your posts and will be able to comment as well as like.

Tik Tok: is a social media platform for creating, sharing, and discovering videos up to 3 minutes. The app is used by mostly young people and allows users to create videos and share them across a community. Videos shared can appear on the “for you” page and will be shown to any user. You can follow other users as well as have a private account. You do not need to make videos to use the platform. Other users can comment, like and share any videos on the site unless private. Users can also private message.

Flickr: this is a photo sharing website. Users upload pictures and can share them with others. You can also search for photos uploaded by other users on a particular theme.

Forums and discussion boards: many websites have discussion boards or forums. These allow users to discuss, debate and ask questions. Many are open to registered users only, but some are fully public.

Youtube: this is a video sharing website. It is free and easy to upload video from a computer or mobile phone. The site has caused controversy over issues of copyright infringement.