

Beverley Minster

Social Media Policy and Guidelines

2018

In recent years, social media platforms have massively changed how people communicate, find information, and access news and entertainment. People are spending more and more time online. Not having a website or a Facebook page is like not having a church building in a town: people cannot come to us if we're not there.

Most churches now have a website, or up-to-date details on A Church Near You (achurchnearyou.com) However, there's still a lot of uncertainty around social media – Should churches use social media? How should they do it? What spaces should they use?

The following are guidelines, not designed to be comprehensive instructions on how to use social media, but as points to consider when communicating in these spaces.

The opportunities of social media

Interaction on social media gives us new opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. This is a form of communication and interaction, which is growing and growing, and in many cases, replacing more traditional forms of media. The minster already uses Facebook and Twitter and other forms of electronic communication.

- If you are a clergyperson, a Reader, or a lay person with a role in a church,

your interactions will reflect on the church and our faith. As church representatives in social media spaces, you are unusual and interesting. There may be an element of vocational calling in your presence there. You can represent the Minster, the Church of England, your faith – it's a great responsibility and a great opportunity. If you use social media wisely, you can shine a light on the church - often through how you act. If you need to apologise – do! Show that church people sometimes make mistakes and aren't above apologising.

- As a Church representative you can be visible in social media spaces. Don't be scared of trolls or people wanting to abuse the church – the biggest risk to your reputation (and the reputation of the church) is yourself.
- Take responsibility for what you write, and assume everything is public. On the internet, everything is visible, and everything is stored. Nothing you say will be forgotten or hidden. Post as though your grandmother or your bishop is reading over your shoulder.
- In social media spaces, the distinction between the public and private arena is blurred. Some clergy chose to have two social media presences – one for their close friends and family, and one for people they know in a professional sphere. This means you have a 'safer' space to let off steam or be silly. Others have one social media presence but create it more carefully.
- Be prudent – don't post or share text or pictures that might compromise you, your church or your faith. Remember to love your neighbour as yourself – don't post anything which is or could be seen as sexist, racist, or homophobic.
- Don't gossip, and respect confidentiality. If you're telling a story about someone, ask yourself – is this my story to tell? Don't talk about people without their permission - this includes your family.
- If someone uses a social media space to access pastoral care, or disclose information inappropriately, you may need to take the conversation

offline or into a more private location.

- If you are a clergy person, remember you hold public office, and remember your bishop could be reading what you post. What you share online could provoke a disciplinary hearing. If you're applying for a post, most parishes will check to see what sort of a presence you have on social media.
- Remember, social media is subject to laws of safeguarding, libel, slander, copyright and data protection. There is no legal protection offered by posting anonymously or under an alias.
- Most advice on staying safe in social media spaces is the same as using the internet more generally. Use secure passwords, and check what security or privacy settings you have on various social media sites. Don't click on links you are unsure about.
- If anyone makes a threat, defames you 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. There are simple instructions on how to do this on WikiHow (<http://www.wikihow.com/Take-a-Screenshot-in-Microsoft-Windows>) . Save the screenshot and contact your communications officer.

Children, young people, and vulnerable adults

- It's important to put more thought into your boundaries when communicating with children, young people and vulnerable adults. The law and diocesan policies around safeguarding apply in your communications with children, young people and vulnerable adults.
- Get parents' or guardians' permission before you contact young people via social media or email, and consent for use of photographs.
- If young people want you to have their mobile phone numbers email

addresses or similar, make sure that their parents know and have agreed.

- Keep communications short. If you need a discussion fix a time to do so face to face.
- Use an appropriate tone: friendly but not over familiar. Beware of 'jokey' remarks as these can be misinterpreted, especially when conveyed electronically.
- While communications should be friendly, they should not suggest a special relationship.
- Respect the young persons confidentiality, unless abuse is suspected or disclosed.
- You should not add children or young people on your personal social networking page who are part of the children's and youth ministry/ choir and who are under the age of 18. You can set up a Facebook group for your project or group and invite them to be members (if they are over the required minimum age limit).
- Keep all your communications public and only send messages to whole groups, rather than to individuals. Behave as you would in a public setting - always maintain a second leader 'in the room', and make sure your line manager is able to see what is posted or emailed.
- Only contact young people during office hours, not in the evening or at night.
- Leaders and young people could develop agreed 'Internet Guidelines'. A youth group is a good context for healthy use of the internet to be encouraged (for more ideas on this see <http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/children-and-youth/the-well-for-workers/downloadable-resources/social-media-guidelines>)
- It's potentially easier to form inappropriate relationships using social media. Online banter and private messaging can lead to a level of intimacy that you'd ordinarily guard against. Be alert to the potential

for misinterpretation. Keep your boundaries in place.

- If a young person uses social media to disclose sensitive or difficult information to you, save these messages in case they are needed later, for example in sharing with the police or social workers. If someone uses a social media space to access pastoral care, or disclose information inappropriately, you may need to take the conversation offline or into a more private location.
- Avoid interacting more with one young person than another, eg, if you wish happy birthday to one person, you need to do it for all users.
- Humour - without the cues of non-verbal communication, humour can be easily misconstrued. Be alert to adolescent sensitivities.
- Be a good example. Remind young people that there's no such thing as 'private' online. Tell them what kind of photos and information are okay to post and to never share personal information like name, school, age or address.
- Before sending a communication, ask yourself, would you be embarrassed if it were to be seen by the young person's parent or a church official?
- There is a risk that young people can be drawn into violent extremism via social media. For help on this, see The Channel, which draws on existing collaboration between local authorities, the police, statutory partners (such as the education sector, social services, children's and youth services and offender management services) and the local community and has three objectives: to identify individuals at risk of being drawn into violent extremism; to assess the nature and extent of that risk; to develop the most appropriate support for the individuals concerned:
<https://www.counterextremism.org/resources/details/id/115/channel-process>
- There is a short, online training course on the CHANNEL process, available at:
http://course.ncalt.com/Channel_General_Awareness/01/index.html

- **Other useful resources**

- Other useful websites on children and social media include:
- Child Online Exploitation and Protections' Thinkuknow at <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>
- The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service document here <http://files.ccpas.co.uk/documents/InternetSafety-GamingSocialNetworking.pdf>.
- Childnet International at: <http://www.childnet.com/>
- Safer Internet Centre: <http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/safer-internet-day/2016>
- The City of York Council YOR-OK website offers advice on using social networks when working with children, families and communities, at: <http://www.yor-ok.org.uk/workforce2014/Voice/sns>
- Nb. If you have any concerns about the safety and/or wellbeing of a child or vulnerable adult, please refer, and act in accordance with, the Minster's safeguarding procedures.

Policy Adoption

This policy and guidelines are adopted by the PCC of Beverley Minster.

Signed

Vicar _____

Safeguarding Coordinator _____

Date _____

The policy will be reviewed in 2021 or earlier if deemed necessary.