



Parish of Finchampstead & California

Parish Social Media Policy Statement

The following policy was agreed at the PCC meeting on 4th November 2013

1. "Finchampstead and California PCC accepts the Social Media guidelines issued by the Diocese of Oxford (attached) and adopts them as our Social Media Policy.
2. We will ensure that the guidelines are well publicised in the parish, particularly to all those leading or helping with Church groups, and encourage compliance.
3. We will review the policy annually to ensure it is in line with Diocesan Guidelines and to monitor its application in the parish.

Signed Parish Priest/Incumbent

 Churchwarden

 Churchwarden

Date ...4th November 2013

(Attached and forming part of this policy are the Diocese of Oxford Social Media Guidelines of Sept 2013)



SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

Social media offers exciting new 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.

This is not simply about connecting with young people, important though that is: 2013 figures showed that almost 53 per cent of the UK population is registered on Facebook, for example. Many others use Twitter, LinkedIn and other social media.

However, social media takes us into new territory where we need to think differently and more 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.

Colossians 4:6

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Galatians 5:22-26

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

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 access 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. If you have a church blog, it is advisable that the PCC passes a formal resolution making it clear that this is the congregation’s blog, not an individual’s.

2. Permanence

Assume that 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 permanently online 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.

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 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 on the front page of a national newspaper?

4. 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 – again, assume anything you share about yourself is in the public domain.

5. Confidentiality

Social media does not change our fundamental understanding about confidentiality across the whole life of the Church. When telling a story about a situation which 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 very 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.

6. 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 – even if you feel you are

speaking in a personal capacity rather than an official one. A good name is easily lost, and the reputational damage caused may be widespread. Be aware that any 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.

7. Honesty and transparency

Please be clear about who you are. When discussing topics relevant to the Church of England or the Diocese of Oxford, you must use your real name. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out. It may be appropriate to use a disclaimer to the effect that that the views are your own and not those of the Church of England or the Diocese of Oxford.

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. If it is appropriate in your own setting that your youth work includes an element of social media, try to keep all your communications public and only send messages to whole groups, rather than to individuals.

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 acting with grace? 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?

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 very easy to hide behind an online persona and neglect other relationships – remember that while social media is an exciting forum which presents many new 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). In particular, our New Media Manager, philip.hind@oxford.anglican.org.

These guidelines were written with the clergy in mind but may also be useful for others including Diocesan Church House staff.

September 2013