

Social Media Guidance and Expectations for Clergy and Lay Leaders (role holders) in the Diocese of Guildford

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AMENDMENTS

Date	Section	Summary of change
	Page 4	Take Responsibility – clarification of personal and church roles and identifying yourself on social media. Recognising the complexity here for lay leaders. Addition of missing words

Introduction

This document sets out the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) guidance and expectations for social media use by role holders – clergy and other office holders, or those with a representative role, within the Diocese of Guildford. For the rest of this document, we will refer to the Diocese for simplicity.

These guidelines serve as 'best practice' in the Diocese, providing directions on how to engage online constructively. They offer valuable insights on respectful interactions, privacy protection, and responsible content. They also emphasise the importance of authenticity and transparency. Following these guidelines not only safeguards individuals, their parishes, schools, and chaplaincies from potential pitfalls but also contributes to fostering a more positive and safer environment for all users.

The Diocese of Guildford has signed up to the [Church of England Digital Charter](#) and adopted their universal principle based social media Community Guidelines. We believe that our social media channels and individuals own channels should always be run in a way that reflect our values.

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. Our actions should be consistent with our work and Christian values and every individual is responsible for the things they do, say, or write.

Our conversation should be '*seasoned with salt*' ([Colossians 4:6](#)), and these guidelines aim to help us to do so.

Scope

This sets out the Guidance and Expectations for Clergy and Lay Leaders, or those with a specific parish representative role, within the Diocese of Guildford.

Our approach

The Diocese of Guildford believes that social media offers a fantastic opportunity for our churches, chaplaincies, schools, and communities. In this digital age, where communities are forming online, we need to be part of the conversation. It is a way for our churches, schools, hospitals, and others to branch out beyond their physical boundaries to meet people where they want to be met and be ambassadors for our faith.

This opportunity is not without risks but if people apply the same common sense, kindness, and sound judgement that we would use in a face-to-face encounter, social media can be a tool harnessed for good.

'Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.' **Ephesians 4:29**

Social media is immediate, interactive, conversational, and open-ended. This is different from other forms of communication. We have less control, less time and sometimes less information, but we still need to engage and engage well. **This means we need to think differently in how we use it, what we say and where we say it.**

Our Expectations

- **Be safe.** The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained and is of paramount importance. If you have any concerns, ask our [diocesan safeguarding adviser](#). Communicating directly online with someone, for example, with private messaging, is like meeting them in private and therefore all communication should act in accordance with [Part 4 of the House of Bishops' Safer Environment and Activities guidelines](#).
- **Protect yourself.** Never share personal details like a home address and phone numbers, except with someone you know and trust. If you decide to do so, use a private message.
 - Be aware an address can be disclosed in many ways for example via photos or a GPS position, as well as in written form and once given can be shared by the recipient.
 - The line between a clergy member's personal and professional life can easily blur when it comes to their online presence. To address this, some clergy members opt for maintaining two distinct social media profiles—one for close friends and family, and another for their professional connections. This approach provides a more secure space for sharing personal photos and thoughts. Please make sure you are aware of each social media platform guidelines so as not to breach these. For example, Facebook don't allow fake profiles but you could have a public page and a private profile.
- **Protect information: respect confidentiality, copyright, data protection and legal frameworks.** The existence of social media does not change the Church's understanding of confidentiality however breaking confidentiality over social media can see information spread with alarming speed.
 - Do not share sensitive information to which you might be a privileged party this would include confidential details provided during Bishop's Council; Diocesan Synod, information shared by your PCC or project work you have access to.
 - Obtain consent before posting photos or information about individuals, especially minors, and be mindful of their privacy. Equally, if any individual then asks for their image or details to be removed, please respect their wishes.
- **Be respectful.** Do not post or share content that is sexually explicit, inflammatory, hateful, abusive, threatening or otherwise disrespectful.
- **Be kind.** Treat others how you would wish to be treated and assume the best in people. If you have a criticism or critique to make, consider not just *whether* you would say it in person and in front of a large group of people, but the tone you would use and how it might be interpreted by others. [Proverbs 12:25](#)
 - Exercise caution when discussing sensitive topics, such as politics, controversial issues, or personal conflicts. Remember that your online presence reflects on the parish and diocese.

- **Disagree well.** Some conversations can be places of robust disagreement and it is important we apply our values in the way we express them. Disagreement is not a bad thing but disagreeing well – respecting other opinions and being kind - can make a massive difference in how we engage with others.
- **Be honest.** Do not mislead people about who you are and identify yourself, especially if you are commenting on topics that your identity may change how your comment could be perceived.
- **Take responsibility.** You are accountable for the things you do, say, and write.
 - Be aware that what you say may attract media interest in you as an individual, especially if perceived that you are acting in an official capacity (even if it is your personal view). If you have any doubts, ask for advice from the Communications Team.
 - Text and images shared can be public and permanent, even with privacy settings in place.
 - If you are not sure, do not post it and seek guidance.
- **Be a good ambassador.** Personal and professional life can easily become blurred online. As an ambassador for Christ and the Church, make it clear when speaking personally and when speaking on behalf of the Church. Let [Galatians 5:22-26](#) guide your behaviour.
 - Always be respectful, compassionate, and Christ-like tone in all your interactions. Regardless of others' beliefs, opinions, and backgrounds.
 - Ensure that the social media content associated with your personal or chaplaincy account is appropriate for your job role and reflects Christian values of love, tolerance, truth, and forgiveness.
 - Be mindful that if you are using an account that carries the logo, address, job title or website of the Diocese it may be seen as representing the Diocese and so views could also be seen in this light.
 - Be clear on your affiliation with the church when discussing topics that relate to the Diocese or your parish.
 - Be aware that your role is seen as a position of power and recognise that sometimes your words will carry more weight or be perceived by others as carrying more weight. A perception you will not be able to change.
- **Credit others.** Acknowledge the work of others. At times we do not need to reinvent the wheel, but we must acknowledge where the ideas came from.
 - Respect copyright and always credit where it is due.
 - Be careful not to release sensitive or confidential information and always question the source of any content you are considering amplifying.
- **Is it your story to tell?** Consider whether this is someone else's story or voice that should be heard?

- **Follow the rules.** Abide by the terms and conditions of the various social media platforms themselves. If you see a comment that you believe breaks their policies, then please report it to the respective company.

When things go wrong

If you have concerns or questions on social media, please contact the Diocesan Communications Team or look at our parish support pages on our website for additional guidance.

If a complaint is made

The Guildford Diocesan Board of Finance recognises that from time-to-time complaints might arise from members of the public or from your parish communities.

Our policies can be found [here](#)

Formal complaints about a member of clergy or licensed lay ministers will be managed under the **Clergy Discipline Measure 2003**.

Conclusion

It is often easy to focus on the challenges rather than the opportunities of social media but by following these safe guidelines you can enjoy engaging with many different people across the globe, of all faiths and none, and on all topics. Please enjoy it. The Diocese of Guildford encourages the use of social media as a way of communicating God's love.

Acknowledgement

These guidelines have been compiled to help clergy and role holders fulfil their role as online ambassadors for their local parish, the wider Church, and our Christian faith by promoting a positive, respectful, and faith-centred online presence. These are based on the best practice from the Diocese of Gloucester, Europe, Worcester, Exeter, Church of England, and the Methodist Church