

Updated guidelines for the use of social media in ACSA

ACSA Media Committee

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Introduction

Social media is a very public way of enabling us as Christians to live out our calling to share the good news of Jesus Christ. One of its many joys is that it is immediate, interactive, conversational and open-ended. This opportunity comes with a number of downsides if users do not apply the same common sense, kindness and sound judgement that we would use in a face-to-face encounter. The following guidelines are offered for the consideration of Dioceses and Parishes for their own use and for groups and ministries they supervise.

The golden rule for social media

You are responsible for the things you do, say or write. Although social media enable us to initiate or respond to communications instantly, don't do so without careful consideration. If you would not say something in a public meeting or to someone's face, or write something in a local newspaper or on headed notepaper – DO NOT put it online!

Before posting always think:

- Is this my story to share?
- Would I want my Mom to read this?
- Would I want God to read this?
- Would I want this to be attributed to me on the front page of a newspaper?

Social media can seem very much like verbal communication – transient and outdated tomorrow or next week. But you should treat your posts as permanent. Even if you go back and delete a post later, it is likely someone else will have copied and shared it. You should assume that anything you post is permanent and can have a lasting impact on your and other peoples' lives. Sharing thoughts with friends or followers via social media can seem personal and private. It is not – if one or more people can access it, content is classed as published, in the public domain and subject to laws on defamation, copyright and data protection.

What is required of church members using social media

- Be safe. The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained. If you have any concerns, ask a diocesan safeguarding adviser.
- 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 of people. If you have a criticism or critique to make, consider not just *whether* you would say it in person, but the tone you would use.
- Be honest. Don't mislead people about who you are.
- Take responsibility. You are accountable for the things you do, say and write. Text and images shared can be public and permanent, even with privacy settings in place. If you're not sure, don't post it.
- Be a good ambassador. Personal and professional life can easily become blurred online so think before you post.
- Disagree well. Some conversations can be places of robust disagreement and it's important we apply our values in the way we express them.
- Credit others. Acknowledge the work of others. 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.
- 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 report it to the respective company.

Observing Christian values on social media

...[I]f we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

Like it or not, if you are ordained, or are employed by or play a leadership role in the Church, others will see you in your public role as a representative of the Church. Don't hide who you are behind aliases or establish anonymous accounts.

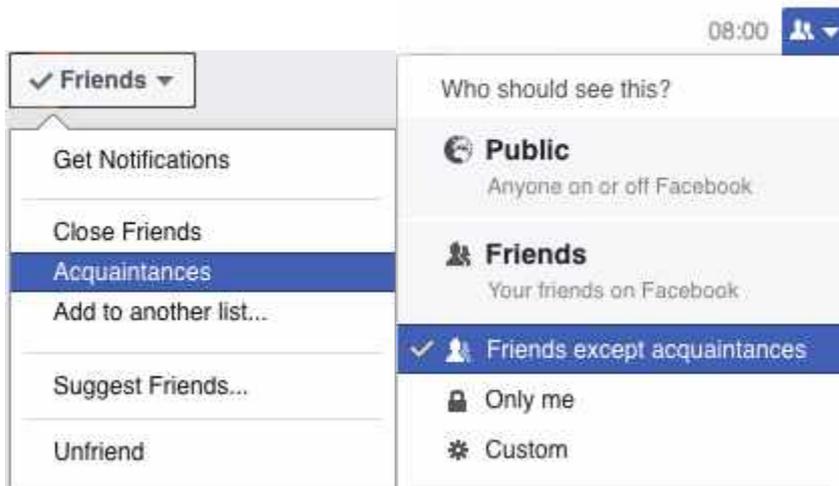
Practical steps

On any social media platform, if you choose a username or profile different to your real name, include brief personal details in the “About” section. When 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.

In everyday ministry, the distinction between public duties and private life is difficult to draw. It is no different online. There are risks associated with personal opinions being seen as public statements, a minister's private life being invaded and the difficulties of detaching from work.

Consider setting up separate accounts for ministry and personal use to help set definite boundaries.



Alternatively, use privacy settings wisely. For example, you may not want to ‘over share’ personal updates on your Facebook profile – so keep close friends as ‘friends’, and all other people as ‘acquaintances’ (pictured). That way content you post on Facebook can be filtered. Blurring of boundaries also applies to private messaging through any social media: if the conversation wouldn't be appropriate person to person, it wouldn't be online either.

Safe Church and young people

The informality that social media encourages can mean that it might be harder to maintain a professional distance that is required when working with children, young people and the vulnerable.

Running a media page for young people can be particularly challenging. While allowing members to share views, clear boundaries also need to be observed. Advise members not to exchange private messages on social media, to maintain distinctions between personal and organisational pages, and encourage them not to accept friend requests without careful consideration. Try to keep communications public and send messages only to groups rather

than individuals. Please be aware that sharing photographs of children and young people online can put them at risk of harm. If in doubt, don't.

Communicating directly online with someone, for example with private messaging, is like meeting them in private. You're advised to send messages to groups, rather than individuals, or share them publicly.

Confidentiality

Use of social media does not change the Church's understanding of confidentiality. Within the life of the Church there are private meetings and conversations, particularly in terms of pastoral work. Breaking confidentiality is worse on social media than in other contexts, since a broken confidence can spread rapidly and be impossible to retract.

Remember: Is this story mine to share? If in doubt, don't.

Be mindful of your own security

Don't overshare personal information. Never publish detailed personal information such as your address or telephone number, unless in a private message to someone you know and trust.

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