



DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**

Social Media Policy

## 1 DEFINITIONS

- 1.0 "The Diocese" refers to the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle including its constituent Parishes and Partnerships.
- 1.1 "Social Media" in this document, refers to all means of electronic communication, including but not limited to:
- emails and text messages
  - maintaining a profile page on social/business networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn
  - writing or commenting on a blog, whether it is your own or the blog of another person
  - photo, document and video sharing websites, such as Flickr and YouTube
  - taking part in discussion and question websites such as online forums or message boards like Reddit and Quora
  - online review websites such as Reevoo and Trustpilot
  - taking part in online polls
- 1.3 "Children and young people" in this policy are defined as anyone under the age of 18 years.

## 2 SCOPE

- 2.1 This policy applies specifically to all Diocesan Personnel: trustees, officers, employees, clergy and volunteers.
- 2.2 This Diocesan Policy is written in line with the Diocesan values: Trust, Service, Respect, Integrity and Compassion.
- 2.3 Neither this Policy nor any part of it is intended to have a contractual effect.

## 3 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The rapid growth of social media as a form of individual and mass communication is a fact of modern life across professions and generations. The Church positively engages with the social media, acknowledging its responsibility to proclaim the Gospel in all times and places.
- 3.2 Pope Francis has affirmed the place of social media within the mission of the Church:  
*"Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ. In the area of communications too, we need a Church capable of bringing warmth and of stirring hearts".*
- 3.3 Social media has profoundly changed how people communicate, as Pope Francis recognises:  
*"The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God".*
- 3.4 The Church must use social media positively to encourage respect, dialogue, honest relationships, as a powerful means of evangelisation.

- 3.5 Social media allows individuals and groups to disseminate ideas and visual content potentially to a worldwide audience, which crosses personal, professional and organisational boundaries. It is therefore essential that we recognise the potential impact of what is communicated to others and to be clear about our responsibilities as individuals, groups and as a Diocese.
- 3.6 This Policy and accompanying guidelines are for the use of Diocesan Personnel in their use of social media in their work within the mission of the Diocese.
- 3.7 To ensure that diocesan personnel make appropriate use of social media, it is important that they are aware of and follow this Policy and guidelines, and that they seek diocesan approval for its specific use in relation to their role. This should come from their immediate supervisor, who should seek confirmation from the Head of the Diocesan Department for Communications.
- 3.8 This Policy aims to ensure that the Diocese is not exposed to legal and governance risks through the use of social media and that its reputation is not adversely affected.

## **4 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 4.1 The Chief Operating Officer (COO) has overall responsibility to ensure that all those involved in the work of the Diocese are aware of the Policy, how it affects them and that they comply.
- 4.2 The Head of Communications has responsibility to ensure that this policy is reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.
- 4.3 All diocesan personnel are responsible for their actions when using social media.
- 4.4 The Diocese recognises the rights of individuals to exercise personal judgement in their own use of social media for Diocesan purposes. However, if they identify themselves as diocesan personnel, they must recognise that their views then relate to the Diocese. In light of this, the following points are made:
- If an individual comments on any aspect of the work of the Diocese or the Church, they are required to identify themselves by name and as diocesan personnel
  - They are required to include a disclaimer that the views expressed are personal and not necessarily those of the Diocese
  - If negative or harmful views are expressed, the individual will be open to the sanctions which apply to diocesan personnel in this respect. Social media should be used observing appropriate behaviours which are in the best interests of the charity at all times.
- 4.5 All social media users should be alert for phishing attempts, where scammers may attempt to use deception to obtain information relating to the Diocese. You must never reveal sensitive details through social media channels and should not click on links in posts or in direct/private messages that may be suspicious.

## **5 GENERAL GUIDELINES**

- 5.1 Recognise that in your diocesan role you are primarily a member of the Diocese and therefore must endeavour to use social media to further Catholic values and the mission of the Diocese with the best interests of the Church and charity at all times.
- 5.2 Before setting up a parish or partnership website or social media page, consult with the Head of Communications.
- 5.3 Social media accounts must be **protected by strong passwords** that are shared only with authorised users. Wherever possible, staff should use **two-factor authentication** to further safeguard their accounts.

- 5.4 A careful evaluation should be made of any particular strengths (or weaknesses) of any form of social media before using.
- 5.5 Personal websites and/or social media sites must not be used when communicating diocesan and/or parish matters.
- 5.6 Personal information relating to individuals should not be shared without their express and acknowledged permission to comply with Data Protection legislation.
- 5.7 Since blogs are personal to the writer, they should be identified by name and should not be connected to the Diocese, parish or diocesan group or other body. Any reference to the Diocese should include a disclaimer.
- 5.8 Social media sites need to regularly introduce new content to maintain the interest of its members. Social media in general requires good planning and imaginative strategies if they are to be effective.
- 5.9 Users of social media should have regard to the privacy settings for any social networking site to ensure only the users you want have sight/access to the contents. These should be kept up to date. The default settings for most social networking sites are set to open access.
- 5.10 Posting information on social media may draw attention to the individual from potentially a worldwide audience, including the press. In these circumstances, it is up to the individual to take personal responsibility for their communication and its outcome including responsibility for any libel and defamation claims.
- 5.11 Diocesan personnel should consider that due to the nature of social media, control of information can be lost once published. Information you may choose to delete could have been reposted, shared or published.
- 5.12 Attention to copyright laws is essential when downloading and disseminating material, since the Diocese may be liable if copyright law is broken. This relates to, inter alia, images, documents, music scores, and music tracks.
- 5.13 Others must always be treated with dignity and respect. Abusive postings are likely to amount to bullying and, where they relate to a protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation) may also amount to discrimination, for which the Diocese, as well as the representative, may be held liable.
- 5.14 Confidentiality of information must always be maintained in all communication. Diocesan personnel are also referred to the recommendations and requirements of the Diocesan Policies for Data Protection, Information Governance and Information Technology as well as the Diocesan Policy on Confidentiality.
- 5.15 To avoid common social media pitfalls, you should:
- observe good manners using the same level of courtesy as when communicating by email
  - not make commitments or promises on behalf of the Diocese without knowing that the Diocese can deliver
  - move any sensitive questions or difficult conversations to email or telephone
  - review content before sharing/re-posting, and
  - use reporting/blocking tools if faced with offensive or abusive content from others, and alert the Head of Communications of this

## **6 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

- 6.1 Communication with children and young people via social media is subject to permission from the Department for Safeguarding and the Head of the Department for Communications.
- 6.2 Communication with children and young people via social media must provide access for parents or guardians.
- 6.3 Social media sites designed for children and young people must have two administrators to allow for effective management and monitoring.
- 6.4 Video links must not be used to communicate with children and young people without the presence of a parent/guardian.

## **7 SAFEGUARDING**

- 7.1 Diocesan guidelines on Safeguarding must be followed in all communication, especially regarding the posting of images of children.

## **8 COMPLIANCE**

- 8.1 Compliance with this Policy is mandatory. All Diocesan Personnel, whether trustees, officers, employees, clergy and volunteers are responsible for knowing and understanding this Policy.
- 8.2 Where breach of this Policy is found to be through wilful disregard or negligence, Diocesan employees may be subject to the Diocesan Disciplinary Policy. Trustees, officers and volunteers may be subject to relevant sanctions which will depend upon the seriousness and consequences of the breach.
- 8.3 The clergy are reminded that there may be grave consequences as a result of the breach of this Policy. The Bishop asks them therefore, as a matter of obedience, to comply with its provisions. In the event of a breach, the Bishop may take further action, depending on its seriousness and on the consequences (see canons 273 and 1371, 2<sup>o</sup> CIC).
- 8.4 You must notify the Chief Operating Officer or Head of Communications as soon as practicable if you believe or suspect that a breach of this Policy has occurred or may occur in the future.

## **9 CONTACT**

Any queries relating to social media generally or about this policy should be referred to the Head of Communications by email at [head.communications@rcdhn.org.uk](mailto:head.communications@rcdhn.org.uk) by telephone on 07508 738286 or by post at The Diocesan Department for Communications, St Cuthbert's House, West Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE15 7PY.

## **10 MONITORING AND REVIEW**

The Diocese will continually review the use of social media by diocesan personnel. This will help develop this policy and guidelines for the appropriate use of social media. The review will include monitoring the content of communications made in an official capacity and will also review personal communications posted on social media which make reference to diocesan and church matters.

## **APPROVAL AND AUTHORISATION**

Responsible Officer	Head of Communications
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Author	Head of Communications
Date first approved by Board	13 June 2019
First Review Date	June 2021
Date Review approved by Board	16 July 2021
Next review date	September 2022