The Diocese of Sodor and Man

Guidance on use of social media & emails

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

With all new forms of communication come opportunities to share our Good News and have interactive conversations with people we might not otherwise connect with. The Diocese of Sodor and Man welcomes the enthusiasm of many clergy, readers and diocesan officers to use online social media (please see the appendix below if you need explanation of what social media means), but it is necessary to outline a few issues all users should bear in mind when communicating online.

Electronic communication, particularly social media, takes us into new territory where we have to think differently and more carefully about what we say – unlike printed matter, it is interactive, conversational and open-ended, and it always happens in a public space. Interacting through social media does not, nor should it, change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility and Christian witness.

As Christians, the same principles that guide our offline conversations should apply to those that take place online.

Scripture says:

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.'

1. **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 it is highly likely that 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 in the local newspapers, in front of a meeting, or the pulpit, you certainly shouldn't say it online.

2. **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 parents 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?

3. Assume that what you say is permanent Even if you delete a comment you have made on a website, it could still have already 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, but 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.

4. 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.

5. Be sensitive about confidentiality and the risk of intrusion 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. Remember that the distinction between public and private lives is blurred Whether you like it or not, for clergy, readers or diocesan officers, 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. Be aware that any controversial or sensitive comments you make may attract attention of the media. If in doubt, take advice, but even so remember that it is you who are ultimately responsible for your online activities.

7. Have clear boundaries when communicating with children and young people Remember that the law and diocesan policies around safeguarding 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. Please be aware that you need parental permission and that sharing photographs of children and young people online can put them at risk of harm. If in doubt, don't.

For further detailed information please refer to the Diocesan Safeguarding Photo Policy.

8. Be mindful of your own security Be careful about the personal details you share online – again, assume anything you share about yourself is in the public domain.

9. 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.

10. Social media is a tool not an end in itself; ask yourself is this the best tool to use for that end? Am I trying to score points or make positive contributions? 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
If you need advice or guidance on any aspect of social media please contact:
Diocesan Director of Communications
Reverend Canon John Coldwell
T: 01624 621694
E: media@sodorandman.im

Digital Nun – Ten Suggestions for Online Use

These are merely guidelines put forward by Sister Catherine Wybourne (aka The Digital Nun), suggestions, for ensuring our online relationships are truly Christian.

Two points to remember as you read them. Before we go online, we need to ask ourselves **why** we are doing so and **what** our purpose is. A little reflection will show that the 'friend' model of online relationship I'm writing about is not suitable for every situation; and if you are wondering what the 'friend' model is based on, I can't do better than quote St Aelred: 'You and me, with Christ making a third.'

1. **Pray**. Bring Christ into the relationship at the very beginning, and let your prayer have more of the 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening' than 'Lord, open my lips that I may declare your praise . . .'

2. **Listen**. Engage with others, don't preach at them. Know when to be quiet. It's O.K. to have nothing to say!

3. **Respect.** Don't abuse anyone or vent your anger online. It will scare off some people and make others feel uncomfortable in your presence.

4. **Encourage**. Give help when you can; affirm, compliment, if appropriate.

5. **Spend time:** you can't build good relationships in just a few minutes. You have to be serious about wanting to build a relationship and prepared to commit yourself.

6. **Share:** not only what you are doing, but also what others are doing. This particularly applies to Twitter — don't use it just for self-advertisement!

7. **Be welcoming**: you need people who disagree with you.

8. **Be grateful:** whingers are not very attractive, nor are those who take things for granted.

9. **Be yourself:** truthfulness is essential. 'You' online should be the same person as 'you' offline.

10. **Love.** Like prayer, it's obvious, but unless you pray, unless you love those with whom you come into contact online, you're wasting your time as well as theirs.

The digital revolution has created a new kind of eternity. What we do online is there for ever, so let's make sure it is worthwhile and consistent with what we believe.

Appendix:

Some common social media tools

Blogs: these are online diaries or personal websites where the owner will publish regular posts, and comments are invited.

Twitter: this is the most common micro-blogging site, where users publish short messages (140 characters max), known as "tweets". Users can choose to follow other users, meaning they receive a stream of all the updates made by the people they are following. Private and public messages can also be sent between users.

Facebook: this is the most popular social networking site worldwide. Users can build networks of friends, find people with similar interests and backgrounds to them, organize events and social gatherings, send messages and join campaigns. Users can select the levels of privacy they wish to have, but the mechanisms for doing this have received widespread criticism for being complicated and confusing.

Other social networking sites and applications include Ning, MySpace, Bebo, Face Time, Snapchat, Skype, Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest and others are added to the list regularly in the

Flickr: this is a photo sharing website. Users upload pictures and can share them with others. You can also search for photos uploaded by other users on a particular theme.

Forums and discussion boards: many websites have discussion boards or forums. These allow users to discuss, debate and ask questions. Many are open to registered users only, but some are fully public.

YouTube: this is a video sharing website. It is free and easy to upload video from a computer or mobile phone. The site has caused controversy over issues of copyright infringement.