SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Staying Safe with Social Media
Social media connects and informs people, as well as encouraging participation and the sharing of views and perspectives. It's therefore a brilliant tool in ministry. These guidelines outline the opportunities, but also the potential risks, particularly in relation to safeguarding issues.

VALUE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Reach and immediacy
You can communicate immediately with potentially large numbers of people (including those with no connection to the church) and others can pass on what you say. Conversations can be had between the most unexpected people - and observed by others.

It's personal
Social media feels personal and inclusive. It can help build relationships and community.

It's interactive
Social media isn't just about broadcasting; it enables people to participate, converse, develop ideas and give feedback. It is, for example, being used constructively for social change.

RISKS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

It's public
Because social media feels personal and chatty there's a risk you can forget it's public, or gain the impression that the ethical codes for confidentiality and gossip are relaxed. They're not. If you wouldn't say something in a public meeting or to someone's face (and wouldn't like to see it in a newspaper beneath your photo), don't say it online.

It's publishing
The laws around libel, copyright, freedom of information and data protection apply here just as in print and broadcasting. So, consider carefully: are my facts correct and could anyone find my message offensive or discriminatory?

It may not be private
Whatever your privacy settings, others can pass it on. Assume whatever you write will be open to the world. What impression are you giving of yourself and the group you represent?

It's transient but permanent
Even if you delete something, it could have already been shared. (A digital imprint doesn't go away. Would you want a future employer to see it?)

Blurring of public and private lives
The personal opinions of church workers may be taken as representative of the church. Use separate social media for public ministry; confusion could lead to disciplinary action. (Eg, keep a Facebook page for public ministry and a Facebook profile for private life).

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE
Some of the risks associated with social media, particularly for young people, include cyberbullying, grooming and potential abuse by online predators. You need to act as role model in e-safety. Remind young people that there's no such thing as 'private' online. Tell them what kind of photos and information are okay to post and to never share personal information like name, school, age or address.

Boundaries - It's potentially easier to form inappropriate relationships using social media. Online banter and private messaging can lead to a level of intimacy that you'd ordinarily guard against. Be alert to the potential for misinterpretation. Don't exchange private messages with young people via social media or accept 'friend requests' from them without due consideration. Keep your boundaries in place.

Use different accounts for personal and public use - use a designated account/site that's solely for your church work (not your personal profile), eg a Facebook page which is public and can be moderated by more than one person, so any inappropriate postings can be immediately removed and personal profiles aren't accessed.

Favouritism - avoid interacting more with one young person than another, eg, if you wish happy birthday to one person, you need to do it for all users.

Humour - without the cues of non-verbal communication, humour can be easily misconstrued. Be alert to adolescent sensitivities.

See more at www.thinkuknow.co.uk

If in doubt, ask
The diocesan safeguarding policy and extensive advice are available on the Safeguarding pages of the diocesan website. Any questions should be directed to the **Safeguarding Officer, Jenny Price** (07800 740001) or the Communications Officer, Alison Bogle (07768 110175).

Common social media tools - and how to use them in ministry

Facebook
The most popular social networking site. Users can build networks of friends, find people with similar interests, organize events and social gatherings, send messages and join campaigns. Users can select the levels of privacy they wish to have. Churches can use the functionality for events, gathering, promotions updates. (Churches should use a page not profile.)

Twitter
The most common micro-blogging site, where users publish short messages (140 characters max), known as 'tweets'. Users can follow other users, meaning they receive a stream of the updates made by the people they're following. Private and public messages can also be sent between users. The local church and any minister can use a Twitter profile. It's great for sharing immediate news, brief opinion and drawing attention to links and other news. It's also a way of expressing more personality, particularly if you're not using Facebook.

Blogs and forums
Online diaries or personal websites where the owner will publish regular posts, and comments are invited. Blogs can be used to express opinion, comment or teaching. (Be prepared for blog posts to be picked up by the press.)

Much more at mashable.com/2012/06/12/social-media-beginners-guide