 Diocese of Bristol

Social Media Guidelines for Licensed Ministers
(lay and ordained)

This is a short summary as FAQs. The full policy starts on the next page.

FAQ

Should I use social media?
Yes! It is part of public life and younger generations are often 'digital natives'. However, keep it sustainable. Only create accounts that you can maintain with reasonable regularity. Think: Who is this for? Why? Is it sustainable and helpful?

What should I post?
Personal stories are very popular. Blogs share your personal opinions which allow your faith to be known. Social media is a good way to advertise your church events. Consider why you are using this platform and use that to guide you.

Can I use pictures?
Pictures are viewed more often and shared by more people. However, ensure that you observe copyright. If you share photos of people, get their permission first. Be aware of safeguarding concerns.

Should I have a private and a public account?
Yes and no. Having a private account for family or close friends and a public account for church matters and parishioners is often helpful. However, be aware that that a 'private' post may be reposted publicly (or seen by others if your privacy settings are not set correctly). Also remember that your conduct does not split into private and public. As licensed ministers, we always represent the Church; as Christians, we always represent Christ.

Help! I am feeling bullied on social media! / I have got myself into trouble!
Ask for help. If you feel bullied or harassed, keep screenshots of the offensive behaviour and report the person to the site administrator or police (see full policy). If you have made a mistake and someone has taken offence, try to keep the situation calm and seek advice (see full policy).

Can anyone help me to do this well?
Your church's social media account might be something that can be delegated to a younger person (with strong rules that they need to follow). If you want to know more for yourself, contact the Bristol Diocese Comms team for an appointment or look at national Church webinars (see links in policy).

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(lay and ordained)

Issue date: July 2025

Purpose

Social media offers exciting possibilities to share the Gospel and to interact with people whom we might not connect with otherwise. We can communicate with people faster and more cheaply than ever before. However, social media takes us into territory where we need to think carefully. It is interactive, conversational, open-ended and happens in a public space; hence we need to keep in mind some basic principles to protect ourselves, our churches, the DBF and the wider Body of Christ.

These guidelines indicate an expectation of high standards and good practice for all licensed ministers. Clergy and Licensed Lay Ministers hold a particular representative role within the church and the world, and therefore our conduct may be subject to extra scrutiny and higher expectations.

These Social Media Guidelines for Licensed Ministers (lay and ordained) are based on the DBF Social Media Policy and should be read in conjunction with the [DBF Digital Safeguarding Policy](#). It may also be helpful to look at the national [Social media community guidelines | The Church of England](#) and (for clergy) [Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy | The Church of England](#) .

General Principles

These guidelines provide a framework for using social media (any online platform where people exchange information, opinions and experiences to learn, develop and have fun). Licensed ministers may be using their church's social media accounts or personal accounts, including group chats such as WhatsApp. However, any social media post by a licensed minister on any account may be associated with the Church and reflect on the reputation of the Church as well as the minister. The Bible gives many instructions about our use of communication – it may be worth reflecting on these within a social media context. Similarly, blasphemy, violent or offensive language is unacceptable at all times. Ministers should demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

Specific Guidelines

Our diocesan values are openness, generosity, creativity and bravery.

Openness: Openness includes being authentic.

- Be authentic and honest. Don't hide behind an avatar. Include your name and, if appropriate, your position. Don't have different personas on different platforms.

- Explain that any views are your own. As a broad church, ministers and congregants have a wide range of interests, life experiences, church traditions and political opinions. Ministers may hold strong personal views in any of these areas. However, please do not write in a way that implies these views represent the opinion of the diocese or Church. A post may include a statement such as: *"The views I express here are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the wider Church."* Shortened versions, for space-restricted contexts such as X / Bluesky profiles, can work, e.g., *"Views are mine alone".* If you disagree with someone, reasoned disagreement with their expressed opinions or behaviour is acceptable. You should not write anything which could be seen as an attack on a person's character or suspected motives.

- However, remember that ministers, particularly clergy, are public figures whose opinions often have weight. This should encourage wisdom in the use of language and timing.

- Just because it is true, does not mean that it is wise to say. Consider your audience: a post or blog is not a private journal. Be kind, and consider the potential future impact of your comment.

- Make it clear if you are joking. It is easy for humour to be misinterpreted.

- It is safest to assume that the any use of social media could become public. Any post can be grabbed and re-posted quickly and widely, even many years after the original post. Be careful when accepting friend requests on your personal pages and consider setting up a separate page for your church to allow parishioners to contact you and each other. (The Comms Team can advise you further on this.)

![Diocese of Bristol]

Generosity: Generosity includes our attitudes towards others. Can we approach others with an attitude that seeks their good and believes the best?

- Artists deserve to be paid for their work. If a photo or video is already online, this does not mean that it can be re-used. Observe copyright. More details can be found at Images and copyright: A guide to using images online legally | The Church of England

- If you wouldn't say it in a calm real-life conversation, don't say it online. Avoid arguments or offensive language but do encourage debate and conversation.

- Do not post when you are angry. Leave it for a day and look again.

- Social media is designed to generate controversy / clicks. It is easy to be pushed into a polarised position. Be generous in disagreement and seek to share the values that underlie your post.

- Be sensible and sensitive about sharing information gleaned from conversations. Is it your story to tell?

- Be particularly cautious when making a post which relates to a protected characteristic. Even neutral comments can be interpreted negatively. Value the person, not the characteristic.

Creativity: At its best, social media stimulates creativity of thought and creativity of expression.

- Create content which is positive and good. Link to current topics. Try to utilise trends as soon as possible.

- Personal stories (yourself or others) are very popular.

- Scheduling can save time and creates regular posting through busy seasons.

- Posts with an image are shared more frequently and receive more 'likes'. Unsplash, Pexels and Pixabay offer high quality, free to use images. However, taking your own photos is often easier, since you will be the owner of the images. Check that you comply with GDPR and good safeguarding practice if people are in the pictures.

- Short videos, including 15 second clips taken with a mobile phone, are effective.

- However, AI generated content may infringe copyright.

Bravery: Bravery includes respecting others – even if you disagree with them – and standing up for those who are more vulnerable.

- Social media is part of life for many people, especially the younger generations. Be willing to engage and share your faith in respectful ways.

- Some people may offer posts which are distasteful, upsetting or express unpopular views, but may not be 'criminal'. Think carefully before you respond: will this calm the situation or provoke a greater reaction?

- Follow good safeguarding practice, particularly with children and vulnerable adults[i]. All communication with children should be with parental permission and ideally done in a group forum: see the Digital Safeguarding Policy for more information.

- Remember that social media algorithms are designed to promote 'clicks' and so polarised opinions are amplified. When responding consider whether the post is representative of the author. Be cautious of being forced into a polarised position yourself.

- Social media can become addictive, taking far more time than we expect or would like. If it becomes a problem, seek help. The Adviser for Clergy Wellbeing and the Warden of LLMs can be contacted for signposting to appropriate support.

- If you come across posts which are offensive:

  - Keep a record of any offensive tweets or posts by taking a screenshot
  - Report the behaviour to the site administrator
  - Use the 'block' settings on the sites to stop people contacting you.

- If a post is grossly offensive (e.g. threats of violence) or part of a campaign of abuse

  - Keep screenshots of the offending post
  - Report to the network administrator
  - Report to the police using the 101 number.

- If you find yourself in difficulty on social media, ask for help. Depending on the nature of the issue, contact your incumbent, Archdeacon, the Comms Team, the Safeguarding Team or the Mission and Ministry Support Team.

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If you want to learn more about using social media well, The Church's Digital Labs provides regular webinars and blogs on social media, website editing etc:
https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/church-england-digital-labs
or book a 1:1 session with a member of the Bristol Diocesan Comms team (comms@bristoldiocese.org)

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[i] Note that there is some evidence to show that people with poor mental health post more often on social media. The Impact of Different Types of Social Media Use on the Mental Health of UK Adults: Longitudinal Observational Study - ScienceDirect