

GUIDANCE FOR MINISTERS, DEACONS AND PARISH WORKERS ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Guidance on the use of Social Media

The Presbytery of Argyll welcomes the enthusiasm of many ministers, deacons, parish workers and volunteer leaders in their use of online social media, but it is necessary to outline a few issues office holders should bear in mind when communicating online.

(please see the appendix below which covers most commonly used social media tools)

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. However, it should not change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility and Christian witness.

- 1. Remember that the law regards 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 in the Church newsletter, you certainly shouldn’t say it online.
- 2. 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. So always think carefully and never make personal comments about someone that you wouldn’t also say in public or to them in person.
- 3. Do not assume anything electronic is secure.** You might be able to delete or recall an email but there’s no guarantee that the recipient will.
- 4. Be sensitive about confidentiality and the risk of intrusion.** The use of social media does not change our fundamental understanding about confidentiality across the whole life of the Church. 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.
- 5. Remember that the distinction between public and private lives is blurred.** Whether you like it or not, as a member of the Church of Scotland anything you do or say in the public domain could 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. Please remember that you are responsible for your online activities.

6. Have very clear boundaries when communicating with children and young people

Remember that the law and Church of Scotland 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 **very** careful consideration. If it is appropriate in your own setting that your youth work includes an element of social media, communications **must** be via that youth group's dedicated site **only**. If this site allows for photographs to be inserted, these must be with the consent of the individuals concerned (their parent/ guardian) and be posted without their full names.

7. Your on line communication should reflect your own Church's ethos and that of your Faith group.

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.

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 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. Other social networking sites include Ning, MySpace and Bebo.

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.

The Presbytery of Argyll acknowledges and thanks the Presbytery of Edinburgh for sharing their Social Media Guidelines on which these are based. (June 2017)

