

# Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle



## Social Media: Policy and Guidelines

### Introduction

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. This policy and accompanying guidelines are for the use of diocesan personnel and clergy in their use of social media within the mission of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle ("the Diocese").

### Guiding Principles

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have affirmed the place of social media within the mission of the Church. In his message for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, Pope Francis wrote: "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."

Social media is profoundly changing how people communicate. It is the responsibility of Catholics to promote the Church's teachings into what Pope Benedict XVI called the "digital continent" (Message 43<sup>rd</sup> World Communications Day, 24 May 2009).

Pope Francis also wrote in the 48th World Communications Day message: "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."

The Church therefore uses social media positively to encourage respect, dialogue, and honest relationships, and what Pope Benedict called "true friendship" (Message for the 43<sup>rd</sup> World Communications Day, 2009). This requires Catholics to approach the social media as a powerful means of evangelisation.

### Definitions

In this document, social media 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, MySpace 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 discussions on web forums or message boards;

- taking part in online polls.

These forms of mass communication allow 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.

In this document “diocesan personnel” means anyone: bishop, priest, deacon, religious, lay employee, or volunteer, who provides ministry or service in the Diocese.

The reference to ‘children’ in this policy is defined as anyone under the age of 18 years.

### **The Church and Social Media: An Overview**

Social media offer opportunities and challenges to Catholic organisations. These can be grouped under the following headings: visibility, community and accountability.

#### **Visibility**

Online social media communities offer excellent forums for the Church's visibility and evangelisation. A church organisation engaging with social media needs to ask the question: How will we engage? A careful evaluation must be made of the particular strengths (and weaknesses) of each form of social media including blogs, social networks, text messaging, and the needs of the individual, ministry, parish, diocese, or other organisation. Strengths must always match needs.

The Church's presence will only be effective if its use of social media is constantly renewed and monitored, faced with the dynamics of the social media. A social networking site such as a blog needs to regularly introduce new content to maintain the interest of its members. Social media in general require good planning and imaginative strategies if they are to be effective.

#### **Community**

Social media can be powerful tools for developing community, but social media interaction must not become a substitute for face-to-face gatherings. Social media can support communities in many ways including connecting people with similar interests, sharing information about events, and providing ways for people to engage in dialogue. A use of social media that is well thought through and integrated encourages what Pope Francis calls "an authentic culture of encounter" (World Communications Day Message, 2014).

The rapid growth of digital social networks means that the "digital continent" is becoming very crowded. The Church can be successfully heard by creating engagement around a message posted on a social network, for example, the bishop's Twitter feed. This invites people to respond and includes likes, comments, and shares. The more engagement there is on a particular message, the more it will be seen and the richer is the experience of community.

#### **Accountability**

Membership in communities requires accountability and responsibility, and users of social media expect site administrators to allow dialogue, to provide information, and to correct mistakes. The information available via social media means that they often only use information from trusted sites or sites recommended by those whom they trust.

While not every demand or inquiry can be met, it is important that creators and administrators of social media understand both the difference between social media and mass media, and the expectations of consumers. It is important to appreciate that for social media users, the emphasis is on social implications, which blur the distinction between creators of content and consumers.

### **Aims**

The widespread availability of social media means it is important to understand how to use it effectively and sensibly, both as diocesan personnel and during personal use.

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. It also aims to ensure that diocesan personnel are protected while using social media, particularly from cyber-bullying and discrimination.

As with other forms of communication it is important to recognise the potential impact of what we communicate to others and to be aware of our responsibilities to others at an individual, diocesan or church level. In this respect all diocesan personnel need to be aware of the responsibilities that fall upon them.

### **Policy**

The Diocese recognises that the social media can be a major tool of communication and provide a powerful means of evangelisation. However, the potential risks associated with its misuse must also be acknowledged. 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 must come from their immediate supervisor, who must seek confirmation from the diocesan Head of the Department for Communications, (currently Mgr. Andrew Faley Tel: 0191 243 3310 Email: head.communications@rcdhn.org.uk).

The Diocese recognises the rights of individuals to exercise personal judgement in their own use of social media. However, if they identify themselves as diocesan personnel or clergy, they must recognise that their views then relate to the Diocese. An ordained priest always represents the Church. In the light of this, the following points are made:

- If an individual comments on any aspect of the work of the Diocese, 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 damaging views are expressed and, after investigation, are considered harmful to Catholic teaching, the individual will be subject to disciplinary procedures if a Diocesan employee and, if a member of the Diocesan clergy, will be subject to sanctions by the Bishop. Any other personnel will be subject to sanctions by the Chief Operating Officer on behalf of the Board of Directors.

Compliance with this policy is mandatory and diocesan personnel are responsible for knowing and understanding this policy.

### **Guidelines**

The following guidelines are provided for all diocesan personnel:

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;

2. When setting up a parish website, consult with the Head of the Department for Communications and the Diocesan Website Manager;
3. Personal websites must not be used when communicating diocesan and/or parish matters;
4. Personal information relating to individual diocesan personnel must not be shared without their express and acknowledged permission to comply with Data Protection legislation;
5. Since blogs are personal to the writer, they must be identified by name and must not be connected to the Diocese, parish or diocesan group or other body. Any reference to the Diocese must include a disclaimer;
6. Posting information on social media may draw attention to the individual from a (world) wide audience, including the press. In these circumstances, it is up to the individual to take personal responsibility for their communication and its outcome;
7. 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 documents, music scores, and music tracks;
8. The laws of libel and defamation relate to individual communications and it is up to the individual to seek protection, if required;
9. You must always treat others with dignity and respect and avoid all negative references. 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;
10. Confidentiality of information must always be maintained in all communication. Diocesan personnel are also referred to the recommendations and requirements of Diocesan Policy on IT Communication and Monitoring and the Diocesan Policy on Confidentiality;
11. Diocesan guidelines on Safeguarding must be followed in all communications, especially regarding the posting of images of children;
12. 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 Communication;
13. Communication with children and young people via social media must provide access to parents or guardians;
14. Social media sites designed for children and young people must have two administrators to provide effective management and monitoring;
15. Video links must not be used to communicate with children and young people;
16. The Diocese does not support the use of social media during the recruitment process and the profile page of candidates must not be knowingly accessed.

Social networking guidance from the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service can be accessed at <http://www.csas.uk.net/resource-area/section-four/social-networking/>

Compliance with this policy is mandatory and representatives of the Diocese are responsible for knowing and understanding this policy.

Diocesan personnel must alert the Head of the Department for Communication if they become aware of any breach of this policy (Tel: 0191 243 3310 or Email: [head.communications@rcdhn.org.uk](mailto:head.communications@rcdhn.org.uk))

### **Monitoring and Review**

The Diocese will continually review the use of social media by diocesan personnel. This will ensure the development of 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 other church matters.

End of document