



Social Media Policy

Our Approach

Today, social media and the internet have become an increasing influence on people's lives. For many people, it has become a primary source for gaining information about the world around us and networking with friends and acquaintances.

Social media is immediate, cheap, interactive, conversational and open-ended. Used responsibly, it can be of benefit to the Church and wider community. However, we recognise that we can actually have less control, less time and sometimes less information, and we therefore need to learn to engage and engage well. This means we all need to think differently about how we use it, what we say, the way we communicate and where we say it.

We believe that social media offers great opportunities and benefits for the Church, providing new ways of networking, friendship building, gaining and sharing information about church events, learning about faith and spreading the Gospel, reaching out beyond our physical boundaries to meet people in innovative ways as good ambassadors for our faith.

We acknowledge that this opportunity is not without risks and so seek to strive to ensure that people apply the same common sense, kindness and sound judgement that we would use in a face-to-face encounter so that social media can be a tool harnessed for much good.

'Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those that listen.'

Ephesians 4:29

Our Policy

The Parish of Widcombe wholeheartedly endorses and has signed up to the [Church of England Digital Charter \(churchofengland.org/charter\)](http://churchofengland.org/charter) and adopted their universal, principle-based Social Media Community Guidelines. We believe that our social

media channels and individuals' own channels should always be run in a way that reflect our values.

As Christians, the same principles that guide our offline conversations should apply to those that take place online. Interacting through social media does not change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility and Christian witness. Our actions should be consistent with our work and Christian values, and individuals are responsible for the things they do, say or write. Our conversation should be '*seasoned with salt*' (**Colossians 4:6**), and these guidelines aim to help us do so.

- **Be safe.** The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained and is of paramount importance. If you have any concerns, ask our PSO (Parish Safeguarding officer) or DSA (Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser).
- **Protect yourself.** Never share personal details like a home address and phone numbers, except with someone you know and trust. If you decide to do so, use a private message. Be aware an address can be disclosed in many ways, for example via photos or a GPS position, as well as in written form, and once given can be shared by the recipient.
- **Protect information: respect confidentiality, copyright, data protection and legal frameworks.**
 - The existence of social media does not change the Church's understanding of confidentiality, and it must be understood that breaking confidentiality over social media can see information spread with alarming speed.
 - Do not share sensitive information to which you might be a privileged party. This would include confidential PCC items, staff briefings or pastoral matters.
- **Be respectful.** Do not post or share content that is sexually explicit, inflammatory, hateful, abusive, threatening or otherwise disrespectful.
- **Be kind.** Treat others how you would wish to be treated and assume the best in people. If you have a criticism or critique to make, consider not just *whether* you would say it in person, but the tone you would use. **Proverbs 12:25**
- **Disagree well.** Some conversations can be places of robust disagreement, and it is important we apply our values in the way we express them. Disagreement is not a bad thing but disagreeing well – respecting other opinions and being kind – can make a massive difference in how we engage with others.
- **Be honest.** Do not mislead people about who you are and identify yourself, especially if you are commenting on topics that your identity may change how your comments could be perceived.

- **Take responsibility.** You are accountable for the things you do, say and write.
 - Be aware that what you say may attract media interest in you as an individual, especially if perceived that you are acting in an official capacity (even if it is your personal view). If you have any doubts, ask for advice from the clergy team or churchwardens.
 - Always remember that text and images shared can be public and permanent, even with privacy settings in place.
 - If you are not sure, do not post items and seek guidance.
- **Be a good ambassador.** Personal and professional life can easily become blurred online. As an ambassador for Christ and the Church, make sure you disclose your position as a member or officer of the Church, making it clear when speaking personally. Let **Galatians 5:22-26** guide your behaviour.
- **Credit others.** Acknowledge the work of others. Sharing fresh wisdom or insights is good, but we must acknowledge when those ideas originate from others.
 - Respect copyright and always give credit where it is due.
 - Be careful not to release sensitive or confidential information and always question the source of any content you are considering amplifying.
- **Is it your story to tell?** Consider whether this is someone else's story or voice that should be heard.
- **Follow the rules.** Abide by the terms and conditions of the various social media platforms themselves. If you see a comment that you believe breaks their policies, then please report it to the respective company.

Lastly, enjoy it! It is often easy to focus on the challenges rather than the opportunities of social media, but by following these safe guidelines, we can enjoy engaging with many different people across communities, of all faiths and none, and on all topics.

Acknowledgement

These guidelines have been compiled to help clergy, PCC members, office holders and the staff team, both employees and volunteers, to fulfil their role as online ambassadors for our local parish, the wider Church and our Christian faith. They are based on the best practice from the Dioceses of Gloucester, Worcester and Exeter, the Church of England and the Methodist Church.