

Social media policy for staff of the Salisbury Diocesan Board of Finance and Diocesan Board of Education

This policy and guidelines applies to all staff employed in the Salisbury Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF), the Board of Education (DBE) and SALED.

Introduction

The Internet provides a number of benefits in which Diocesan staff may wish to participate, from sharing photos with friends on *Facebook* to keeping up with the news on *Twitter* to following discussions around the Church of England on blogs.

However, when someone clearly identifies their association with the Diocese and/or discusses their work, they are expected to behave appropriately when online, and in ways that are consistent with the Diocese's values.

This guidance sets out the principles which Diocesan staff are expected to follow when using social media, microblogging services and blogs. The intention of this policy is not to stop Diocesan staff conducting legitimate activities on the Internet, or in taking part in discussion and debate, but serves to flag up those areas where conflicts can arise. If in doubt, speak to the Diocesan Director of Communications. This policy should also be read in conjunction with the IT-PC Policy.

Definitions of Social Media

For the purposes of these guidelines, social media is a type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. This includes online social forums such as Facebook, microblogs such as Twitter, CV sharing sites such as LinkedIn, video and image-sharing websites and similar facilities. Similar principles should be applied to the use of blogs.

Employees should be aware that there are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. Employees should follow these guidelines in relation to any social media that they use.

Basic Principles

As a broad and national church, the Church of England's members and staff have a wide range of interests, life experiences, church traditions and political opinions. Many of its staff belong to other Christian churches, other faiths or are of no religion.

Many staff members will take part in a range of public Christian activities as members of their own local churches and other Christian organisations.

While staff will, naturally, have differing views on matters of controversy, whether inside the Church, in secular politics or otherwise, it is imperative that all are seen as people of integrity, committed to serving both the parishes and people of the Diocese of Salisbury and wider society without favour.

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To this end, when identified as a Diocesan staff member, people should not engage in activities on the internet:

- which might bring the Diocese into disrepute;
- which attack or abuse colleagues or others;
- breach confidentiality;
- in posting derogatory, offensive or discriminatory comments ;
- for any illegal purpose.

Any online activities associated with work for the Diocese, as opposed to purely personal activities, should be discussed with and approved by the Diocesan Director of Communications in advance.

Social Networking Sites

The DBF/DBE Saled Ltd recognises that many staff make use of social media in a personal capacity. While they are not acting on behalf of the Diocese, staff must be aware that there is the potential to embarrass, damage or discredit the Diocese if they are recognised as being one of our members of staff.

All Diocesan staff should be mindful of the information they disclose on social networking sites, not only in relation to official Diocesan accounts, but their own personal accounts. As well as being important in terms of protecting the reputation and standing of the Diocese, this is simply common sense. All social networking activity takes place, to some degree, in public. Staff should, therefore, be mindful of both the information they disclose on social networking sites and the manner in which they conduct themselves on them. They should act in a manner which underscores their capacity to carry out their duties effectively and impartially and which does not bring the Diocese into disrepute.

Staff should be considerate to people they interact with online, particularly towards colleagues and churchgoers and clergy in the Diocese. Under no circumstances should offensive comments be made about colleagues, or clergy and people in the Diocese on the Internet.

Remember that you work for a Christian organisation. Leave a positive impression online. In an online world too often characterised by intolerance, aggression and casual abuse, it is an effective communications technique as well as being principled.

Staff are allowed to say that they work for the Diocese, which recognises that it is natural for its staff sometimes to want to discuss their work on social media. If staff do discuss their work on social media, they should include on their profile a statement along the following lines: "The views I express here are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer, the DBF/DBE Saled Ltd." Shortened versions, for space-restricted contexts such as Twitter profiles, can work, e.g., "Views may not be my employer's."

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Any communications that staff make in a personal capacity through social media must not:

- breach confidentiality, for example by:
 - revealing confidential intellectual property or information owned by the Diocese or;
 - giving away confidential information about an individual or organisation (such as a partner institution); or
 - discussing the Diocese's internal workings (such as agreements that it is reaching or its future business plans) or;
- do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, for example by:
 - making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age or;
 - using social media to bully another individual (such as an employee of the DBF/DBE Saled Ltd) or;
 - posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content or;
- bring the Diocese into disrepute, for example by:
 - criticising or being abusive towards colleagues, or others with close association with the Diocese or;
 - making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups or;
 - posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content in the context of their employment with the Diocese

Blogging and microblogging

Many bloggers use their personal blogs, and increasingly microblogs like *Twitter*, to discuss matters of importance to the Church in ways that benefit the Church and wider society.

The Diocese welcomes this, and this guidance is not intended to restrict this, as long as confidential information is not revealed and the impartiality and integrity of staff is not called into question.

Staff members who already have a personal blog, microblog or website which indicates in any way that they work at the Diocese should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with the Diocesan Director of Communications. Similarly, staff members who wish to start blogging or microblogging, and wish to say they work for the Diocese, should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with the Diocesan Director of Communications.

If a blog or microblog merely mentions where the individual works, and does not discuss Church matters or other areas of public controversy, it is unlikely that there are potential conflicts of interest.

Unless there are specific concerns about the nature of their role (for example, because they act as a public spokesperson for the Church or involved in a quasi-judicial role within the Church) staff members are free to discuss Church matters on their blogs or microblogs. If in doubt, staff members should consult the Diocesan Director of Communications.

Personal blogs, microblogs and websites should not be used to reveal confidential information about the Diocese. This might include details of internal discussions. If in doubt

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about what might be confidential, staff members should consult with the Diocesan Director of Communications.

Personal blogs, microblogs and websites must not be used to attack or abuse colleagues. Staff members should respect the privacy and feelings of others.

Staff should also remember that if they break the law on a blog or microblog (e.g. by posting something defamatory), they will be personally responsible.

If a staff member thinks something on their blog, microblog or website gives rise to concerns about a conflict of interest, impartiality or confidentiality, this must be discussed with the Diocesan Director of Communications.

If a third party offers payment to produce a blog or microblog for a third party, this could constitute a conflict of interest and must be discussed with the Diocesan Director of Communications

When a staff member is contacted by the press about posts on their blog or tweets on their microblog that relate to the Diocese, they should seek advice from the Diocesan Director of Communications before responding.

Staff members are allowed to update their personal blog or microblog from a Diocesan computer or portable device under the Acceptable Use of Internet policy.

Disciplinary Action over Social Media Use

All DBF/DBE Saled Ltd staff are required to adhere to this policy and guidelines. Staff should be aware that the use of social media in a way that may be deemed as deliberate, or inadvertent misuse which could be a breach to these guidelines, may lead to disciplinary action under the DBF/DBE Saled Ltd's Disciplinary Policy.

Key principles those operating official Diocesan social media accounts

- While it is important to be human on social media, do keep a clear distinction between your work and personal accounts. If you find yourself sharing a lot of personal news and opinion on your work account, it is probably time to create or revive a separate personal account.
- It can be very useful to share news stories relating to debates within the Church – our Faith is not a privatised one. But be careful not to express personal opinions on matters of controversy that could be construed as representing an official statement from the Diocese.
- Similarly, it can be important to share links to news stories or articles about those who disagree with or have objections to the Church. Be careful neither to seem to agree with them, or to be abusive or disrespectful in disagreement.
- Be careful in your choice of language. If it strikes you that something you say could be construed as offensive, then it probably could be. Say it differently, and consider whether you need to say it at all.
- One will occasionally encounter people who debate with you in an angry or offensive manner, whether because they have an anti-Church agenda or simply enjoy trolling for kicks. It is sometimes important to respond to these people, given the public nature of social media debates. Rise above any temptation to respond in kind! Keep a level head and avoid sinking to their level.

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- If you find your temper boiling, remember you can usually delay responding until the next day when you have had time to calm down.
- If you find yourself in a sticky situation, seek advice immediately from the Diocesan Director of Communications. Don't sit on the problem – in the fast moving world of social media, that can allow a minor issue to explode.
- Don't say anything you wouldn't be happy for the *Salisbury Journal* or *Church Times* say came from an official representative of the Diocese. Remember, social media is inherently public.

Key Principles for personal social media accounts

- The Church of England is a broad Church, and you are entitled to your views, on theological and other matters. We are committed to being a Diocese that values those of all strands of Church tradition. But be careful that in expressing your views, especially on matters of controversy, that you do not call your integrity or capacity to serve all in the Diocese impartially into question.
- “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” – when debating with people you disagree, be respectful of their convictions and sincerity. Be agreeable in disagreement.
- Avoid getting drawn into arguments about work matters on your personal social media account. Do not disclose confidential or privileged information under any circumstances.
- If contacted by journalists or other third parties about work matters on your personal social media account, refer to the Diocesan Director of Communications for advice.
- Be careful in your use of language. If you find yourself typing something that could be construed as offensive, either in content or choice of language, ask yourself whether you need to say it in that way, or at all.
- Remember, social media is inherently public. While posts can be deleted, other people can take screengrabs before you delete them. The best way to protect your privacy on social media is to assume that anything you say there could end up in the public domain, even though it is unlikely that much of it would be of interest.
- Be careful not to say anything that directly contradicts public statements by the Diocese, that could create a perception of conflict of interest, or that could call your impartiality or integrity into question.

Related Policies and Procedures

IT-PC Policy June 2016

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