

# **Blawarthill Parish Church - Social Media Guidelines**

These good practice principles were issued by the Church of England, with minor amendments to reflect our own church. They have been compiled to help clergy, office-holders and staff already active on social media (or thinking about it!) fulfil, with confidence, their role as online ambassadors for their local parish, the wider Church and our Christian faith.

All are based on principles of common sense and good judgement. Essentially, you should participate online in the same way as you would in any other public forum. Your actions should be consistent with your work and Christian values and you are responsible for the things you do, say or write.

## **1. Don't rush in**

The immediacy of social media is one of its benefits – we can respond quickly to questions, correct misunderstandings, give our perspective about a breaking story in the news media. Responding quickly doesn't mean doing so without due consideration.

Before posting always think:

- Is this my story to share?
- Would I want my mum to read this?
- Would I want God to read this?
- Would I want this on the front page of a newspaper?

This point applies even before you start posting your own content. Spend a while listening to others, getting a feel for the tone in that particular forum, giving thought to how you might participate.

## **2. Transient yet permanent**

Social media updates are immediate and will outdate quickly BUT they can have a more lasting impact and you should assume that anything you post is permanent. Even if you delete it later on, it may have been seen and re-published or referred to elsewhere.

## **3. You're an ambassador**

Like it or not, if you are ordained, lead in or are employed by the Church, others will see you in your public role as a representative of the Church. If talking about a church matter, make it clear that these are your personal opinions and not those of the Church of Scotland or the local congregation or any of its organisations.

## **4. Don't hide**

Anonymity and 'hiding' behind aliases when using social media is frowned upon. It's also at odds with what we consider the main reason for using social media networks. How can anyone really connect with an alias? On any social media platform, if you choose a username or profile different to your real name, include brief personal details in the about section. When

the account is a shared one, for example, a Facebook page for your parish, ensure people can easily find out who is responsible for the content.

## **5. Blurring of public/private life boundaries**

In everyday ministry, the distinction between public duties and private life is difficult to draw. It is no different online. There are risks associated with personal opinions being seen as public statements, a minister's private life being invaded and the difficulties of detaching from work. Consider setting up different accounts for ministry and personal use to help set definite boundaries. Use privacy settings wisely.

## **6. Safeguarding**

The informality that social media encourages can mean that it might be harder to maintain a professional distance that is required when working with children, young people and the vulnerable. Communicating directly online with someone, for example with private messaging, is like meeting them in private. You're advised to send messages to groups, rather than individuals, or share them publicly.

## **7. Stay within the legal framework**

Whilst sharing thoughts and reflections with friends or followers via social media can seem personal and private, it is not. By law, if one or more people can access it, content is classed as published, in the public domain and subject to legislation around libel, defamation, copyright and data protection.

If you wouldn't say something in a public meeting or to someone's face or write it in a newspaper or on headed paper – don't say it online.

## **8. Confidentiality**

Use of social media does not change the Church's understanding of confidentiality. Within the life of the Church there are private meetings and conversations, particularly in terms of pastoral work. Breaking confidentiality is as wrong as it would be in any other context. Arguably, it is worse as via social media a broken confidence could spread rapidly and be impossible to retract. Remember: Is this story mine to share? If in doubt, don't.

## **9. Be mindful of your own security**

Don't overshare personal information. Never publish detailed personal information such as your address or telephone number, unless in a private message to someone you know and trust.

## **10. Local Guidelines for Blawarthill Church and its Organisations and Interests**

See next page.

## **BLAWARTHILL PARISH CHURCH of SCOTLAND - SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES**

### **Use of Social Media at Blawarthill**

- Blawarthill Church's official social media participation is managed by the Minister. This individual is responsible for regularly posting information on the church's behalf and for monitoring and responding to posts on these pages.
- All Church of Scotland Acts and Regulations that deal with matters involving discipline, bullying, professional conduct and software use policies, apply to the use of social media.
- Ministry employees, office bearers and volunteers who misuse social media resources in ways that violate the law or other Church policies are subject to disciplinary action.

### **Social Media Guidelines**

1. Employees and volunteers interested in representing Blawarthill Church or any of its organisations and interests on social media must be approved by the Kirk Session and must familiarise themselves with the recommended practices, limitations and legal parameters for administering the church's social media accounts.
2. Social media postings should not disclose sensitive or confidential information, unless the person that the information concerns has given written consent to share such information. This might include medical information or other personal matters.
3. Social media representatives should refrain from posting photos of individuals — or identifying the individuals — on the church's official social media pages without their prior written consent which may be given by email or text. Social media representatives are responsible for disabling the tagging of individuals in photos posted on the church's Social media. If the photos include location information, this information is to be removed as well.
4. Social media representatives will respect copyright and fair use laws, making sure that they have permission or authority to use content before posting it. Simply giving credit to the author will not protect the church from a possible copyright infringement claim.
5. Social media representatives will monitor the page at least once per week, removing content that is obscene, embarrassing, abusive, or otherwise objectionable. If any posted material appears to be illegal (example: abuse of vulnerable groups, etc.), social media representatives should contact the Minister or Session Clerk and other appropriate authorities.
6. When communicating with youth via social media, employees and volunteers should follow the youth communication policy of the organisation they represent.
7. In addition, ministry workers and volunteers who serve in children and youth ministries should keep their professional image in mind. Online conduct and behaviour affects this image. Blawarthill Church discourages staff members and volunteers from accepting invitations to "friend" youth members within personal social networking sites. Contacting youth members outside any youth group page may create risks for the ministry workers and alter the dynamic between a youth leader and youth.
8. Employees and volunteers are personally responsible for the content they publish online, including content they publish through their own social media pages. Employees should be sure to identify themselves as part of the ministry staff, including their role at Blawarthill Church and make it clear that they are speaking for themselves, not officially for the ministry.
9. As an employee or volunteer of Blawarthill Church, remember that your online posts have the potential to affect the ministry, even those you make on a personal level.
10. In the event of a crisis, contact the Minister or Session Clerk, and through them, if necessary, the Church of Scotland Law Department before responding to any posting or comments related to the crisis.