

Diocese of Elphin – HR Policy Handbook

Document Name: Social Media Policy
Document No: 3.1.3 (original)
Effective Date: 15th February 2019
Written By: Frank Mitchell, HR Advisor
Approved By: +Kevin Doran, Bishop of Elphin



Operating under the patronage of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, the Diocese of Elphin aims to provide staff members with a safe, caring and supportive Christian environment in which to carry out their work. Work objectives are to be advanced with due regard to the needs and dignity of each staff member and with due regard for the individuals and communities the diocese serves.

This document outlines the Diocesan policy on Social Media. It is applicable to parishes, offices, agencies and any entity operating under the governance of the Diocese of Elphin (hereafter referred to as "the employer"). Line Managers (Bishop, Priests, Deacons, Religious, Lay Personnel who supervise staff members) are responsible for communicating this policy and having it signed off by their staff member(s).

This policy on social media must be read in conjunction with other staff member policies. Particular attention is drawn to the dignity at work, equality, bullying and harassment, internet, email usage, data protection, and confidentiality agreement, all of which are applicable to social media usage.

This policy on social media applies to all staff members. Social media is the collective term referring to social and professional networking sites (for example Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter), blogs, wikis, boards and other similar online fora and the policy extends to all such sites and incorporates any future developments of such media. Breaches of this policy will be investigated and "the employer" retains the right to take disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

All IT resources are the property of "the employer" and are dedicated to achieving "the employer's" objectives. Inappropriate use is not acceptable. Excessive activity is not permitted. Personal use must not interfere with your work commitments.

As appropriate:

A limited amount of personal use of the internet and social media is permitted on "the employer's" equipment, provided the following rules are observed:

- staff members may access social media sites at work for a maximum of 15 minutes per day;
- personal use must not occur during working time, but instead must occur during break time and outside of your normal working hours;
- personal use must comply with the requirements and general principles of this policy and all other internet, security and data protection policies.

Applies to all staff members

"The employer" recognises that staff members use social media tools as part of their daily lives. Staff members should always be mindful of what they are posting, who can see it, and how it can be linked back to "the employer" and work colleagues.

All staff members should be aware that "the employer" regularly monitors the internet and social media in reference to its work and to keep abreast of general internet commentary, its presence in the media and perceptions arising from articles/comments. "The employer" does not specifically monitor social media sites for staff member content on an ongoing basis, however staff members should not expect privacy in this regard. "The employer" reserves the right to utilise for disciplinary purposes any information that could have a negative effect on "the employer" or its staff members, which we come across in regular internet monitoring, or is brought to "the employer's" attention by staff members, parishioners, clients, members of the public, etc.

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All staff members are prohibited from using or publishing information on any social media sites, where such use has the potential to negatively affect "the employer" or its staff. Examples of such behaviour include, but are not limited to:

- publishing material that is defamatory, abusive or offensive in relation to any staff member, office holder, parishioner, or client of "the employer";
- publishing any confidential or sensitive information about "the employer";
- publishing material that might reasonably be expected to have the effect of damaging the reputation or professional standing of "the employer".

Rules regarding usage

All staff members must adhere to the following when engaging in social media:

1. Be aware of your association with "the employer" when using online social networks. You must always identify yourself and your role if you mention or comment on "the employer". Where you identify yourself as a staff member, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you would present yourself with colleagues and clients. You must write in the first person and state clearly that the views expressed are your own and not those of "the employer". Wherever practical, you must use a disclaimer saying that while you work for "the employer", anything you publish is your personal opinion, and not necessarily the opinions of "the employer".
2. You are personally responsible for what you post or publish on social media sites. Where it is found that any information breaches any policy, such as breaching confidentiality or bringing "the employer" into disrepute, you may face disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.
3. Discretion must be used in posting photographs of diocesan/parish events, specifically to respect the privacy of individuals and the right of children not to be identified (cf. Diocesan Safeguarding Standards).
4. Material in which "the employer" has a proprietary interest – such as software, products, documentation or other internal information – must not be transmitted, sold or otherwise divulged, unless "the employer" has already released the information into the public domain. Any departure from this policy requires the prior written authorisation of the bishop or parish priest.
5. Be respectful at all times, in both the content and tone of what you say. Show respect to your audience, your colleagues, parishioners and clients. Do not post or publish any comments or content relating to "the employer" or its staff members, which would be seen as unacceptable in the workplace or in conflict with the diocesan/parish website. Make sure it is clear that the views and opinions you express are your own.
6. Recommendations, references or comments relating to professional attributes, are not permitted to be made about staff members, former staff members, parishioners or clients on social media and networking sites. Such recommendations can give the impression that the recommendation is a reference on behalf of "the employer", even when a disclaimer is placed on such a comment. Any request for such a recommendation should be dealt with by stating that this is not permitted in line with diocesan policy and that a formal reference can be sought through HR, in line with the normal reference policy.

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7. Once in the public domain, content cannot be retracted. Therefore always take time to review your content in an objective manner before uploading. If in doubt, ask someone to review it for you. Think through the consequences of what you say and what could happen if one of your colleagues had to defend your comments.
8. If you make a mistake, be the first to point it out and correct it quickly. You may factually point out misrepresentations, but do not create an argument.
9. It is very important that staff members immediately report any inappropriate activity or behaviour regarding "the employer", its staff members or third parties. Inform your line manager or HR advisor. All allegations made in good faith will be fully and confidentially investigated. You are required to cooperate with all investigations of alleged policy violations.
10. This policy extends to future developments in internet capability and social media usage.

In addition to the above rules, there are a number of key guiding principles that staff members should note when using social media tools:

- always remember online content is never completely private;
- regularly review your privacy settings on social media platforms to ensure they provide you with sufficient personal protection and limit access by others;
- consider all online information with caution as there is no quality control process on the internet and a considerable amount of information may be inaccurate or misleading;
- at all times respect copyright and intellectual property rights of information you encounter on the internet. This may require obtaining appropriate permission to make use of information. You must always give proper credit to the source of the information used.

Social Media Security

You are responsible for all postings made on or to your social media accounts. This applies to: postings or activity made directly by you, postings or activity made by any other party but under your username/account, and/or postings made by friends or third parties to your accounts (eg, Facebook wall posts made by Facebook friends to your timeline).

You must be conscious at all times of your overall online presence and its effect, or potential effect, on "the employer", its parishioners, clients or your colleagues. Disciplinary action may ensue, in line with this policy and the disciplinary procedures, for any activity on, or related to, your social media accounts, regardless of how such activity occurred.

You are therefore advised to maintain the security of your personal social media accounts. This includes, but is not limited to: using secure passwords, changing passwords regularly, not disclosing your passwords to third parties, and logging out of accounts when leaving your computer/devices unattended. If you are concerned about any activity on your social media account, however created, and its interaction with your employment, please contact your manager immediately. There is plenty of advice available online, on devising secure passwords and on social media security tips.

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Specific Managerial Responsibilities

By virtue of their position, managers have particular obligations with respect to general content posted on social media. Managers should consider whether or not personal thoughts they publish may be misunderstood as expressing “the employer’s” opinions or positions even where disclaimers are used. Managers should err on the side of caution and should assume that their teams will read what is written. A public online forum is not the place to communicate diocesan policies, strategies or opinions to staff members.

Managers should not make ‘friend’ requests or other similar requests of their team members, as this may place undue pressure on a staff member.

Enforcement

Non-compliance with the general principles and conditions of this social media policy and the related internet, email and confidentiality policies may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

This policy is not exhaustive. In situations that are not expressly governed by this policy, you must ensure that your use of social media and the internet is at all times appropriate and consistent with your responsibilities towards “the employer”. In case of any doubt, you should consult with your manager. Monitoring of internet usage applies to personal use as well as normal business use.

For further information please contact:

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