

SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL

Orchardlea Community Church



Version: April 2022 Reviewed 2026

This document has been adapted from an original document from the United Reformed Church.

Table of Contents

Introduction
..... 4

Basic principles
..... 4

Standard Requirements..... 6

Some Do's and Don'ts..... 7

Do: 7

Don't: 8

Sharing9

Safeguarding.....9

Copyright.....10

Finally11

Appendix.....13

.

Introduction

This paper is intended to encourage and support Orchardlea Community Church in its approach to social media. Social media is the umbrella term used to describe websites and applications that allow users to share content (that is words, images and web links) with others and/or to participate in social networking. The best-known platforms at the time of writing are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, but the term – and these guidelines – also cover online forums and blogs as well as any other platforms.

When approaching social media, it is important to see it as an extension of Church. This means that something you wouldn't feel comfortable saying or sharing in Church is also not appropriate online. It is also important to remember that everything that is posted in the name of 'Orchardlea Community Church', or any groups associated with it, is seen as the voice of the Church. More information can be found on the Church of Scotland web-site

Basic principles

1. The golden rule: Remember you are a representative of Orchardlea Community Church and The Church of Scotland—therefore it is important that you are a responsible ambassador for it. In essence, if you wouldn't say it in a loud voice in your local pub on a Saturday night, wearing a very big badge saying: 'I'm a follower of Jesus' then don't say it online. Please.
2. Although it may appear that the internet has little or no regulation, all content is subject to the same laws that apply in the 'real' world. You are completely responsible for the things you post and so could fall foul of the laws relating to libel, defamation and copyright.

3. There is an internet code of conduct. Although not an exclusive list, some specific examples of legally prohibited social media conduct include posting commentary, content or images that are defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libellous, or any material that could be seen to create a hostile environment.
4. Should any post attract wider media interest then all enquiries, both positive and negative should be directed to the Minister, Church Office or Session Clerk.
5. Social media is fast-paced and therefore it is important to stay present and active – monitor your output, keep it fresh and up-to-date and regularly review information about the Church. Aim to post/update content regularly to encourage people to engage with what you are posting, draw them in and keep them coming back for more. On Facebook you can ‘schedule’ posts to appear throughout the week ahead. For general guidance on how to create and manage accounts see [Church of Scotland Social Media Guidelines](#)
6. When communicating via social media, Orchardlea Community Church aims to:
 - convey a sense of welcome and inclusiveness.
 - celebrate the contributions made by many people to the life and worship of the Church.
 - reflect the fellowship enjoyed through Church activities.

Standard Requirements

- There should be at least two people appointed to manage all official social media accounts. Bear in mind that these people will become the ‘voice’ of the Church online. There should always be at least one member of the Monitoring Group as ‘Admin’ i.e. linked to the account and able to manage the account, on all social media accounts at all times.
- All social media accounts must be linked to the email Social-Media@orchardlea.org.uk and **not** a personal email as they are church social accounts, not personal accounts.
- The Technology Convener, Session Clerk, Safeguarding Co-ordinator, Church Secretary and Minister will make up the ‘Monitoring Group’ to ensure that all social accounts are in keeping with the parameters of this account.
- Passwords and log-in details for all social media accounts must be kept centrally and securely by the Church Secretary via Orchardlea’s digital password security wallet.

Some Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Do ensure people adhere to the code of conduct found under the 'About' banner on the Facebook Page.
- Do be respectful of theological viewpoints you do not agree with. Public slanging matches between Christians are never a good thing.
- Do respond to queries quickly – you might find that newcomers to your area are looking for a place to worship and therefore would welcome a timeous response. Be welcoming.
- Do be credible, fair and honest.
- Do respect the privacy of your congregation. The discussion of pastoral care in relation to individuals is NOT for a public forum.
- Do make sure you have the appropriate agreements and written permissions when posting photographs on Church social media sites. More details below.
- Do use social media to share good news of Church life.
- Do post or share (on Facebook) and/or retweet (on Twitter) appropriate stories, reflections and prayers marking key events in the Christian calendar/ church life etc.
- Do monitor the social media accounts to ensure posts and comments are quickly removed that are visibly offensive, threatening or indicative of bullying and the person who posted such content is either given a warning or blocked. *The 'Monitoring Group' have the final responsibility and say over this.*

- Do stay within the legal framework and make yourself aware of safeguarding issues; respect copyright, libel and defamation and data protection laws.
- Do bear in mind that what you post has the potential to be misinterpreted or misread: emotions and attitudes are hard to convey in print – so be careful how you phrase things.

Don't:

- Don't respond censoriously to every little remark just because you don't like it! Make a judgement call between someone who is expressing a different view and someone who is writing abusive comments. You can correct wrong information but do so with grace.
- Never make any comments that could be considered racist, sexist, or homophobic, or engage in any other conduct that would be considered unacceptable within Orchardlea Community Church or The Church of Scotland.
- Never engage with people who are being deliberately hateful. Remove the post in keeping with the code of conduct and warn/block the user.
- Don't neglect the wider community who may be genuinely interested in Orchardlea Community Church or new to the area and looking for their next place of worship.
- Don't gossip or engage in conversations about personal/pastoral matters that directly relate to individuals. Do not disguise gossip as 'prayer points'. If it's not your story to tell, then don't tell it! Remember that there are data protection and safeguarding

considerations, and that anything published online is subject to libel laws.

Sharing

It is important to share content from other sources on our social media accounts such as, but not limited to, the Church of Scotland as well as having original content. Orchardlea Community Church encourages the sharing of content from other sources as long as it is in keeping with the guidelines outlined in this paper.

Safeguarding

The Church of Scotland is committed to ‘Ensuring a Safe Church for All’ - The Church of Scotland Code of Good Safeguarding 2018. This of course translates into the online world as well. There are a few key things to bear in mind for social media.

Using images of people: Ensure that you ask the permission of the child/parent/carers before taking pictures/videos of children and/or protected adults and ensure that the parent/carers signs consent forms. It is advisable to use group photographs rather than individual. When captioning photos/videos, do not include any personal details and use only first names.

The policy of Orchardlea Community Church is **not** to include group photos without the express permission of all clearly visible faces, both adults and children, within any publications including online. As such large group photos should be avoided, unless taken from behind. Regardless of age, permission must be obtained from all present.

‘Friending’ children on social media: Social media is not the place to ‘befriend’ children, either via the official accounts or on our personal pages and Church accounts. If children do ‘like’ our accounts, then no private messaging should take place at any time. Think twice before

adding/following children under 16 or protected adults on social media and consider speaking to a parent/carer first.

Private message: Social media allows people to send instant private messages. This of course has many great advantages as well as disadvantages. Messages to and from the account must NOT be deleted and replies should not be made before 8am and after 9pm. After an initial response all further communications should take place via an official Church channel, either via email, letter, phone, or in person.

Cries for help: Take seriously any messages, comments or posts on safeguarding issues such as suicide, abuse, self-harm, intent to hurt, bullying, despair. Do not engage but respond to the message, comment or post sensitively, informing them that someone will be in contact soon. Contact the Safeguarding Co-ordinator or Minister **immediately**. One of them will get in contact with the person, following appropriate safeguarding guidelines.

See the appendix to this document for further guidance on social media including safeguarding.

Copyright

It is important that you do not use content that is subject to copyright. Please take great care in everything you publish – and never publish items that you do not have permission to publish (e.g. poems, prose extracts, songs/hymn lyrics). If you do want to publish something that is protected by copyright, please seek written (or emailed) permission from the copyright holder before you post it.

Do not download images from the web and assume it will be ok - it almost certainly won't be! A good place for free images with no or little copyright stipulations is www.pixabay.com or www.unsplash.com for example. Of course, you can always use your own photos.

Never download a picture you have seen on social media and repost it as something Orchardlea Community Church has made.

Whenever images are 'created' by a representative of Orchardlea Community Church (such as prayers and Bible quotes), using Canva or other appropriate software, it is good practice to include the following image to signpost people back to our page:



Finally

- KEEP IT UPDATED! Three or four posts per week is the **minimum**. Keep an eye on your "Insights" on the page and see what works for you.
-
- If you want to publicise things wider do not be ashamed to tag the Presbytery or national Church of Scotland accounts.
- Occasionally the 'delete post' option is your friend.
- Block people if you need to.
- Always read posts before you share them.
- Make sure there is a good line of communication among your team and also with the Monitoring Group.
- Ensure there are the appropriate social media feed(s) on the website so those not on social media can see the content.

- Likewise, the Orchardlea Community News should not be the only source of important news and announcements, and neither should social media. It should all work together to create a cohesive whole.
- When someone likes a post but hasn't liked the page, use the 'Tools' to invite them to 'like' the page. Do this without shame.
- If in doubt about ANYTHING, contact a member of the Monitoring Group for clarification before acting.
- And finally, the world is no longer either online or offline; it moves seamlessly between the two, and as a Church we need to strive to do the same.

Excerpts from Safeguarding Handbook 4, The Church of Scotland,
version: October 2018, Page 9-11, 14-15

https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/13283/Safeguarding_handbook_4.pdf

GUIDANCE FOR PAID STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS ABOUT THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Introduction

The following guidance is written from a safeguarding perspective and seeks to identify good practice with a view to preventing harm or abuse to children and adults at risk or minimising the likelihood of it happening. The guidance supplements more detailed information about keeping children, young people, adults at risk and paid staff and volunteers in churches safe. It identifies a number of underpinning principles (things that are important or right to do) and these have been used to generate a set of questions that workers and volunteers should ask themselves. It is not possible to produce a definitive list of ‘dos and don’ts.

Consequently the questions are designed to be used as a checklist to be used before any type of social media is used or to review its ongoing use. This checklist should be considered as a generic safeguard for using mobile phones, Facebook and other social networking sites, weblogs, mobile ‘phone text messaging, the taking of digital photographs or recording videos etc. and it should be a spur to staff and volunteers to make a judgement about keeping themselves (as workers) and those they are working with (children and adults at risk) safe. Ideally the checklist should be used in safeguarding training and this would enable it to be used with a variety of different scenarios involving the use of different types of social media.

The use of social media is open to different interpretations and perceptions of what is appropriate and what is not. It can involve the

transmission of words, sounds, moving and still images, all of which have the potential to be harmful in a safeguarding sense, hence the importance about making joint decisions and seeking advice.

Types of Social Media

Email and messenger services.

Facebook, Google + and other social networking sites, YouTube. Mobile phone text messaging.

Twitter and weblogs (commonly known as ‘blogs’).

Digital photography (cameras, video, camera phones).

Instagram and similar photo sharing sites.

Common Principles of Good Practice

Transparency/openness – tell others what it is you want to communicate and why

Keeping people safe: the worker (paid and volunteers) and the child/adults at risk or service users

Consent: get permission from all involved (or their parents/carers) if their words or images are to be transmitted and made public or shared with a selected group of people. Refer to the Photography and Video Good Practice Guidelines and the Media Consent form on the Key Publications section of the Safeguarding Service website.
http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about_us/safeguarding_service/key-publications

Privacy – respect for individuals’ personal information

Separate the private (home) from the professional (paid or voluntary work): explicitly maintain boundaries. Often the perceived problem is that of the ‘suggestion’ of or actual blurring of boundaries and the risk of actions being viewed as harmful rather than actual harmful conduct from a safeguarding point of view

Christian principles – respect, dignity, truthfulness etc.

Checklist before using Social Media Questions

WHAT information do you want to capture, store, transmit, communicate or use?

WHY did you choose this particular type of media?

WHAT is the purpose of using this social media?

WHAT privacy settings and controls have you set for the media?

WHO is the target audience? (a defined group of people or everyone?)

WHO can see the information posted – anyone or have safeguards or tools been used to set limits e.g. Facebook group rather than Facebook page?

WHO is identified (images/words/sounds) in the communication?

WHOSE consent is required? (if any).

HOW will you get their consent?

HOW may others interpret the information? Can the information you want to share be easily misunderstood or misinterpreted. If in doubt check with the Monitoring Group and get a second opinion. Re-read before sending/ posting.

Checks

1. Is the information you are about to share personal/confidential? Can the person be identified (by words or images)? If yes – get permission. Consent must be provided.
2. Do the people you work with have access to personal information about you? e.g. via Facebook?
3. What type of personal information is available and how may that affect perceptions about you in your ‘professional’ (work) role? Could this be perceived to be damaging to you personally or in your work role?
4. As a worker, make sure the Monitoring Group is fully aware of what media you use in work. If in doubt discuss it with them first.

5. Whatever social media you are using in work: Is it clear that you are representing the church?
6. Generally you should not use your personal mobile phone, email address or Facebook account, or similar, to communicate with children, young people or adults at risk.
7. Any photographs/videos taken while carrying out your professional role should not be posted on your personal Facebook account or any other social media site.
8. What is your gut feeling about the communication? If you feel even slightly uneasy about something you are about to publish, then you probably shouldn't publish it. If in doubt, discuss it with the Monitoring Group first.

Facebook

Having a Facebook page that advertises the work being done by your Congregation is a good initiative. The page could provide details such as, what the youth group does, when it meets and who it is for.

The following advice is offered, not to discourage the use of social media, but to ensure that children are kept safe:

1. Facebook privacy controls should be set up so that only children and their families have access to any videos and photographs.
2. What parental/carers permissions have been sought? e.g. do all parents know that images/videos appear on the page and are they content with this – most are likely to be but not all. Those who are not need to be able to have their children opt out of appearing on the page.
3. Explore setting up a Facebook Group rather than a Facebook Page which would enable more control over who sees and can download information and images.
4. Reassess what the purpose of the Facebook page/group is. It is useful to consider the following when setting up a web page or a Facebook page/group: what personal or group information do you want to share and with whom and why? Is it everyone, just

the children, just the Church or just the children and their families or friends?

5. Facebook privacy controls enable information to be shared with defined groups: friends, friends of friends or everyone.
6. As a general rule, do not allow children to give out personal information such as school, home address, phone number, photos, etc. in chat rooms, on bulletin boards and especially not to strangers.

Conclusion

There may be exceptions to the advice contained in this guidance. If you have unanswered questions (or if in doubt) get advice from the Monitoring Group and/or The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service. Most importantly keep a dated and signed written record of any decisions made by you and the Monitoring Group about the use of social media where there may be room for misunderstandings or misinterpretation. In short keep an audit trail of all communications, e.g. don't delete records of phone and email communication. Finally in relation to the use of any type of social media: if in doubt don't use it.

Photography and Video Guidelines

Congregations should ensure that good practice is adhered to when photographing or videoing children and adults at risk during church activities and may find the good practice guidelines produced by the Safeguarding Service helpful. Photography and video includes that recorded on mobile phones and devices.

As an agency committed to caring for and protecting all vulnerable groups, we must ensure our actions and those of our congregation are appropriate. These guidelines provide only a framework for good practice and might be interpreted in slightly different ways depending on the situation.

No video or photographic footage should be publicly displayed (i.e. notice-board, local press or internet) without prior notice being given by the group and an opportunity for objection to be received.

Neither names nor any personal information should be displayed alongside any photographs.

Mobile phones can be used to take photographs and videos which can be immediately uploaded onto the internet or social networking sites without permission. Therefore, group leaders should discourage the use of mobile phones during church activities. Group leaders must also not post photographs or videos taken while carrying their professional role on their personal social media site etc. The group may wish to produce a mobile phone code of conduct to ensure safe usage. The safeguarding service also produced social media guidelines.

During large events, arrangements can be made by the host to provide video or photographic stills of the participants in action. This allows the performance to go ahead with limited interruption, and allows the participants who are not to be photographed to take part.

An open “photo shoot” can be held at the end of the performance (sensitively distracting any children not to be photographed) to allow families to take their own private shots.

Special consideration should be given where taking photographs or video footage might be misinterpreted, or the images could be seen as provocative (e.g. beach trip or gymnastics display etc.). It is not to say, however, that with the right planning, these events cannot be recorded and enjoyed.

Responsibility of storage and destruction of photographic material should be taken at sessional level and written agreement should be made for this purpose.

Photography and video recording are important methods of recording social activity and providing an historic record – illustrating and validating important moments in people’s lives. This process is a powerful and personal one, and therefore, we must respect the rights of everyone to make the choice whether to be photographed or not.

It is always good practice to seek written permission from a parent or carer before taking any photographs or video footage of children or adults at risk. The Safeguarding Service has produced a Media Consent form (SG19), which can be downloaded from the Key Publications section of the Safeguarding Service website.

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about_us/safeguarding_service/key-publications

Please refer to the Law Department Circulars website for the ‘Live Streaming’ and online publication of worship and other events document. www.churchofscotland.org.uk/resources/law_circulars