

SAFEGUARDING

Catholic Diocese of Auckland Ten Commandments of Social Media



The Catholic Diocese of Auckland (CDA) recognizes that in today's environment, the use of social media and other networking, communication technologies and applications assist in the pastoral and evangelical mission of our church.

Parishes are encouraged to use social media and technologies to accomplish their ministry. The Diocese also has an obligation to ensure responsible and safe use of these technologies, reflective of the teaching and mission of the Catholic Church. Online engagement with others should facilitate a growing relationship with Christ.

1. Do not 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 does not 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 if 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, it may have been seen and re-published or referred to elsewhere.

3. You are a Role Model

Like it or not, if you are ordained, are a leader, a volunteer or are employed by the parish or CDA, others will see you in your public role as a representative of the parish or CDA. If talking about a parish or CDA matter, make it clear that these are your personal opinions and not those of the parish or CDA.

4. Be transparent

Anonymity and 'hiding' behind aliases when using social media is frowned upon. It is 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 public statements, a volunteer's, parish staff, clergy'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 are 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 would not 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 CDA's understanding of confidentiality. Within the life of the parish 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. Publication of images

Procedures around the use of Social Media should be similar to that of a publication when it comes to images or video of parishioners. Consent must be obtained from those photographed or recorded. When organizing or facilitating programs or activities where photographs or video footage of children (those under 16 years of age) or vulnerable adults are to be taken, privacy concerns should be considered. This includes gaining the written consent of the parent or caregiver of the child and for a vulnerable adult, the adult can give their consent if they are able to do this, or the consent of their caregiver.

In the use of photographs, particularly of youth, the subjects should not be identified by more than a first name and parishioners and minors should not be tagged in the posts.

10. 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.

Please note

Some of the information in this document has been kindly shared by The Church of England Diocese of Gloucester and the Privacy policy from the Catholic Diocese of Auckland.

The 'Code of Conduct for Employees and Volunteers' in the Catholic Church of Aotearoa New Zealand also provides a reminder of our responsibility in Safeguarding when using social media.