

# Social media guidance for clergy and clerics

## Introduction

There is no getting away from it, social media is a big part of today's reality. It affects more or less every aspect of life: to whom we speak, how we speak with them, how we express our beliefs, how we choose to present ourselves to others, and how they see us.

There is also no getting away from the fact that the companies who provide social media platforms are not doing so for the common good, they are in it to make money for themselves and their shareholders, and they do this by generating, and rewarding, outrage and division, because that means clicks, and clicks means cash.

When Christ sent his disciples out into the first-century world to share the Good News, they used the tools of their day. Two millennia later, we are called to do the same in our twenty-first-century world, and especially so in our case as a dispersed church that "travels light" in this world, without buildings, working directly with people wherever they are, and welcoming everyone. But we are called to do so in a way that builds up Christ within: Christ within *us*, and Christ within *everyone* we encounter along the way.

This guidance provides a framework, and a set of expectations, for how we as clergy and clerics can use social media in the service of Christ.

## Identity, privilege, and responsibility

When we were ordained, whether in major or minor orders, we were set apart for service, to God and to others. We became ambassadors, or champions, for Christ. And, whether we like it or not, we became public figures. Now, as clergy and clerics of the Old Catholic Apostolic Church, we represent Christ. Not just at the altar when we say Mass, or when we have our collars on in the hospitals, care homes, streets, shelters, or workplaces where we minister, but in whatever we do, or say, however we act, in our daily lives.

This is a tremendous privilege, but all privilege comes with responsibility. We no longer act, or speak, only for ourselves. We face constant scrutiny now because we are not only responsible for our own words and actions but for their wider consequences, and particularly for the impact that has on others.

Every word we speak or write, especially that throwaway line, or that bad-tempered snap, that careless insult, that superior tone of voice, that criticism of someone, that dismissive putting down of a viewpoint with which we don't agree: all of those have consequences, and whether those consequences for ourselves and others are positive or negative is very much in *our* gift.

They have consequences for each of us, of course, as God:

*"Judges people according to their deeds."*<sup>1</sup>

But they also have consequences for others. Every time we interact with people, whether in person or online, we affect them. We might hurt them, or make them feel devalued, or insulted, or belittled. It does not matter if we feel that we have been insulted first. We must respect and love *all* God's children unconditionally.

As ambassadors for Christ, the identity, the privilege, and the responsibility that we have taken on are

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<sup>1</sup>Sirach 16.12

intertwined and inseparable. The Apostle Paul tells the church in Galatia:

*“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”*<sup>2</sup>

At our baptism, confirmation, and at our ordinations, when we were anointed with the oil of chrism we clothed ourselves with Christ. More than that, through anointing we ourselves *become* Christs!

What an identity. What a privilege. And what a heavy responsibility.

## Being ambassadors for Christ

As bishops, priests, deacons, and clerics, we are under constant scrutiny. One careless word from us can turn away someone who was looking for Christ, set back healing, or cause untold, or unseen, damage. Whether we like it or not, we are “brand ambassadors” for Jesus, and we must think very carefully about every single word we say, every interaction we have.

Whatever the perceived provocation, we must *never* engage in any behaviour, comments, or remarks that amount to harassment, threats, intimidation, ethnic slurs, personal insults, or obscenity.

We must *never* engage in personal attacks against anyone at all based on any of their characteristics, for example race, gender, appearance, disability, religious or political affiliation, immigration status, or whatever.

When we are in discussion with other Christians who are not from our tradition, or with non-Christians from other religions, or with those who are not religious at all, we must be careful not to disrespect them. We must *always* treat everyone with love and tolerance, as we are all made in the likeness of God.

We must avoid all gossip, ridicule, defamation, or insult. We must not judge. We must behave humbly, free from pride. If we are attacked for any reason, we must never retaliate. The Apostle Peter says of Jesus that:

*“When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten.”*<sup>3</sup>

We must treat everyone with respect, and if that is not going to be possible in a particular situation we must control our tongue and walk away, metaphorically just as much as physically. As the Apostle Paul tells us:

*“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is good for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.”*<sup>4</sup>

It is our responsibility, and ours alone, to ensure that when we are representing Christ, the people who see, hear, and interact with us are encountering Christ.

## Being mindful of the damage

In Shakespeare’s famous tragedy, the following are among Lady Macbeth’s last few words as she

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<sup>2</sup>Galatians 3.27

<sup>3</sup>1 Peter 2.23a

<sup>4</sup>Ephesians 4.29

sleepwalks around Glamis Castle, her subconscious mind giving the game away about the horrible murders she and her husband have committed in the pursuit of power, ambition, and influence:

*“What’s done cannot be undone.”<sup>5</sup>*

These imaginary words of a made up character in a Shakespeare play have a very real significance for us.

We can delete an intemperate social media comment and hope it never sees the light of day again, but nothing is ever guaranteed to be deleted on the internet. No matter how many times we press that delete key, we can never be confident that every trace of what we have said, but wish we hadn’t, is actually gone and will not come back later like Banquo’s ghost to haunt us.

Neither our words and actions, nor the consequences of our words and actions, can, once done, be undone. If we hurt or offend someone, we can try to apologise, but we can never be sure that our apology has had the effect we may wish, if it is even, indeed, a meaningful apology at all and not just an evasion of responsibility.

The thoughtless damage we do today and have forgotten about by tomorrow may stay with someone else for a lifetime.

## Conclusion

This guidance is not designed to prevent us from using social media. It is meant to make us think very carefully about the consequences of that use, about what we say, and how we interact with, and consequently affect, others.

It is not meant to curtail anyone’s “right to free speech”, but to remember that just because we have the right to say something does not make that something right to say.

As the Apostle James reminds us:

*“Every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*

*With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse people made in the likeness of God.*

*From the same mouth comes a blessing and a curse. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.”<sup>6</sup>*

We are called to be ambassadors, so let us be sure *always* to use social media positively: to bear witness to the Gospel with humility and respect and love, and, through our words and our conduct, to invite everyone with whom we engage to encounter the fullness of life in Christ.

*Written by Father David Goode OHS, and promulgated by Bishop Adrian, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2026.*

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<sup>5</sup>*Macbeth*, Act V, scene 1

<sup>6</sup>James 3.7-10