



## **INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES (& NORMS) FOR CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF LANCASTER**

### **PRINCIPLES:**

- 1.** The Second Vatican Council in its Decree *Inter mirifica* on the means of Social Communication said that "the Church believes that its task involves employing the means of social communication to announce the good news of salvation, and to teach men how to use them properly."<sup>1</sup>
- 2.** Among these means are those relating to the "new evangelisation and the traditional missionary work *ad gentes*, catechesis and other kinds of education, news and information, apologetics, governance and administration, and some forms of pastoral counselling and spiritual direction."<sup>2</sup>
- 3.** Nevertheless, "the spread of the Internet also raises several other ethical questions about matters like privacy, the security and confidentiality of data, copyright and intellectual property law, pornography, hate sites, the dissemination of rumour and character assassination under the guise of news, and much else."<sup>3</sup> There is a danger that some users can become "addicts of the Internet, neglecting contact with their peers and with nature itself."<sup>4</sup>
- 4.** As a member of the clergy – permanent deacons and priests, we are public individuals. The conduct of clergy in what we do or say can create an impression on others. Moreover, the opinions expressed by clergy will often be interpreted by some as a presentation of authentic Catholic teaching. Care must therefore be taken, to avoid people being misinformed or scandalized, even unintentionally, and the reputation of the Diocese and the Church at large possibly being tarnished. This applies particularly in the case of the Internet, which is essentially public. Often instruments such as social media give the impression of a degree of privacy.
- 5.** The amount of time we spend using the Internet should be allocated proportionately and prudently, which is not always easy given the almost infinite amount of content available. This consideration particularly applies to the use of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, which allow for endless possibilities of interaction.

---

<sup>1</sup> VATICAN II, Decree *Inter mirifica* On the Means of Social Communication, n.3

<sup>2</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, n.5.

<sup>3</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in Internet*, n.6.

<sup>4</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, n.11.



## **INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES (& NORMS) FOR CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF LANCASTER**

6. Moreover, care should be taken lest the time spent using the Internet leads to a neglect of ‘real’ relationships and interaction with the ‘real’ world. No amount of interaction via social media can substitute for face-to-face communication. After all, from a purely religious perspective, “there are no sacraments on the Internet; and even the religious experiences possible there by the grace of God<sup>5</sup> are insufficient apart from the real-world interaction with other persons of faith.”<sup>6</sup> An indispensable aspect of our clerical role is “the capacity to relate to others. This is truly fundamental for a person who is called to be responsible for a community and to be a “man of communion”.”<sup>7</sup> Social media cannot be a substitute for our need to relate to people in a real and human way. In addition, on a practical level, many parishioners, such as the elderly and infirm, will not have access to the Internet. Other more usual means of communication and interaction with these people will, of course, remain essential.
7. We are all aware of the capacity of the Internet to disseminate immediate, hasty and knee-jerk responses which are sometimes uncharitable, imprudent and defamatory. Blog posts and subsequent comments can be a pertinent example. Such behaviour can be attributed, at least in part, to an unwillingness to listen to and reflect on the opinions of others. It could be good practice to spend time away from the Internet in silence and reflection before making decisions/comments.
8. When using the internet care should be exercised to avoid possible temptations and occasions of sin. As well as the opportunities presented for rash comment, some content can be salacious or pornographic, and some material which is freely available can be subject to copyright restrictions.
9. Clergy are reminded of their canonical responsibility firstly, to recognise the integrity of the Church’s teaching on faith and morals, secondly to respect the dignity of persons, thirdly to acknowledge the special role of their Pastors in faith and finally to promote the common good of the Church applies always and everywhere including on personal media sites. <sup>8</sup>
10. Despite the dangers presented by the Internet, it is worth reiterating that it “also offers unique opportunities for proclaiming the saving truth of Christ

---

<sup>5</sup> PIUS X, *Miranda Prorsus*

<sup>6</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, n.9.

<sup>7</sup> JOHN PAUL II, post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, on the formation of priests and the circumstances of the present day, n.43.

<sup>8</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, Canons 273, 275 §1, 276 §1, 277 §2, 278 §3, 282 §1, 285, 287, 823, and 831.



## **INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES (& NORMS) FOR CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF LANCASTER**

to the whole human family. Consider...the positive capacities of the Internet to carry religious information and teaching beyond all barriers and frontiers. Such a wide audience would have been beyond the wildest imaginings of those who preached the Gospel before us.”<sup>9</sup>

- 11.** Moreover, it is precisely because of the importance of this communication in the life of the Church that “the Church’s practice of communication should be exemplary, reflecting the highest standards of truthfulness, accountability, sensitivity to human rights, and other relevant principles and norms.”<sup>10</sup> Consequently, it is necessary for the Diocese to propose some specific norms to encourage proper and fruitful use of the internet in its own setting.

### **NORMS:**

- a)** Clergy should acknowledge that their use of the Internet and social media has a public side (even if their privacy settings are carefully controlled), because of the possibility of personal materials being seen or copied or forwarded by others. Clergy should not upload material or content, or engage in activity, including on social media, e.g. Twitter and Facebook, or on blogs which could cause embarrassment to themselves, the Diocese or the Church at large, or misinform or scandalize others in regards to the faith.
- b)** Interactions with others on the Internet, particularly via social media, e.g. Facebook or Twitter, or blogs should be conducted in accordance with natural justice and charity. *Ad hominem* attacks should always be avoided.
- c)** Users should ensure that the appropriate privacy settings are in place for their own publicly available content on the Internet, for example regarding Facebook.
- d)** Care should be taken to ensure an appropriate balance is kept in the way the Internet is used in one’s life. Please reflect on your use of the Internet in the light of these *General Principles and Norms on the Use of the Internet*, and relevant Church documents such as *The Church and the Internet* by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 22 February 2002 and the *Message for the 46<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day* by Pope Benedict XVI, 24

---

<sup>9</sup> John Paul II, *Message for the 35<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day*.

<sup>10</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *The Church and Internet*, n.3.



## **INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES (& NORMS) FOR CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF LANCASTER**

*January 2012.* One's general use of the Internet, as with other issues to do with one's use of the media and free time, may be a legitimate topic for exploration in formation meetings.

- e) Clergy should not use the Internet to upload, download or disseminate copyrighted material outside the legal copyright terms. In posting photos or images on the Internet they will be sensitive to concerns about whether the images should properly be considered private or public and the usual express permission sought from individuals where appropriate. Such postings should always respect the Church's National Safeguarding Policy<sup>11</sup>.

Approved:

+ *Michael Campbell OSA*

✘ Michael G Campbell OSA  
Bishop of Lancaster

Date: 21 January 2017



Notary:

*Robert P Billing*

Rev R Billing,  
*Bishop's Secretary*

---

<sup>11</sup> See [www.csasprocedures.uk.net/chapters/g\\_photo\\_display.html](http://www.csasprocedures.uk.net/chapters/g_photo_display.html)