

Social networking sites are great for connecting and staying in touch and up-to date with friends – it is a free and easy way of communicating for responsible people. However there is often limited control on who, and what people can see, and it can easily generate uncensored advertising and dubious content.

Once information, notices, comments and/or photos are uploaded onto Social Networking sites, not only do all ‘friends’ see it almost immediately, it is also often very difficult, if not impossible to remove. As a parish, we must be aware of what we use social networking sites for, and how we are portrayed through our profiles. Of course, it is up to you how and why you use such sites, but in the interest of our parish, and all parishioners, please take the time to read the following advice, and adhere to the guidelines that have been set.

- o Assume that everything is public.
Do you know who can access your personal information? Opting for ‘private’ doesn’t always mean that only your friends can see your profile. Check your privacy settings, so you know which parts of your profile others can access – both by friends and on a general search.
- o Don’t post information that could be used to your disadvantage offline
Without intent, your status and personal information will make an impression on those who view it. Any comment, conversation, tag, status and/or photo will and can be read, and viewed very differently by different people. Only use mature, sensible and acceptable language if you don’t want to give the wrong impression. Ensure your comments are not inappropriate, too personal nor could insinuate any form of offence.
- o Be careful of posting photos
Due to the digital nature of uploading, photos can be easily copied, altered or even distorted by anyone who has access to your profile/page. Do not post any photos of other people without their permission, and do not post any photos of yourself that you wouldn’t want everyone you know to see. Please be confident in your knowledge of and relationship with anyone whose photos you may comment on, or allow to comment on yours.
- o Trust your instincts
If you feel uncomfortable with any Parish social networking, or with any parishioner’s possible misuse of the site, regarding young people or adults,

please inform someone in a position of Parish authority. You will not cause offence by doing so. Please be aware that it is also possible to report any public misuse of each site to the site provider.

All regulations as well as account and privacy settings are readily available on each social networking site for your information. Please take the time to ensure your profile and usage is secure. Please also make a point of ensuring that young people know of the risks involved in the use of such sites, and to be aware of who they are in contact with and why.

Please note:

When using social networking within the Parish, please be aware of who you are ‘friends’ with and why. Most social network sites are only available above a certain age (usually 13 years). For this reason, there should not be any Parish run ‘group pages’ created for anything that could involve young people. This is to ensure that there is no miscommunication, misuse or indeed, an opportunity for outside advertising to impose our Parish Groups.

Contact with young parishioners under the age of 18 is discouraged, unless you know them and their parents/family personally. If a young person should ‘add’ you, please do not immediately accept their invitation unless you are certain you know them and their parents. It is all well and good to see a young person at church every so often and to recognise them, but due to the nature of how some sites portray and allow access to personal information, all parishioners should be aware of who they befriend and what they can access as a result.

In all circumstances, you need to be aware that your contact and communication with any young parishioners through social network sites needs to be readily explained if any issue should arise. This is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our young people. Under rare circumstances, you may be advised to withhold personal contact with young parishioners. If this is the case, please do not be offended. It would only ever be for your safety as well as theirs.

Social networking can be fun and perfectly safe in the right, responsible hands. If you need any advice or have any concerns with Parish use of such sites, please contact us. **Cath White**, our parish safeguarding representative is available to help you, as is Joanna French our Children & Youth Co-ordinator. Please contact them via the Presbytery **(01727 853585)** if you have any queries or concerns.

Social Networking

General advice for Parishioners

Please note: In no way is the Parish responsible for any personal use of social networking sites. This leaflet is offered to provide guidelines so to ensure the safety and awareness of all parishioners. In no way is it to be held as an official document of the Archdiocese of Westminster.

Ss. Alban & Stephen Parish
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