

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 and/or photos are uploaded, not only do all ‘friends’ see it almost immediately, it is also often very difficult, if not impossible to remove. We must be aware of our responsibility as safeguarding adults to our young people, all vulnerable adults as well as the parish community as a whole, both through what we post, how/what we communicate and what we can access. For this reason, adults must be aware of the importance of the nature and reason behind the material they post. They must ensure their profiles are secured, and recognise how publishing any unsuitable material may affect their status/role in the parish.

For this reason, those of us using Facebook and other social network sites within and for the parish must be aware of the following guidelines:

- o Assume that everything is public. Do 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 public search.
- o Don’t post information that could be used to your disadvantage offline – without meaning to, your status, personal information and general contact will make an impression on those you communicate with.
- o Be careful of posting photos – due to the digital nature of uploading, photos can be easily copied, altered or even distorted. Do not post any photos that you wouldn’t want everyone you know to see. Please do not write comments on photos of young people, unless you are related to them.
- o Be responsible in making comments on another person’s (including adult friends) status or writing on any walls – if you are ‘friends’ with a young person, (or any parishioner) they will see your input on another’s profile. Ensure your comments are not inappropriate, too personal nor insinuate any form of offence or insulting behaviour – remember you are in a position of influence and responsibility.

- o Personal contact should not be made with young people or vulnerable adults through any social networking site. All communication must be known and easily seen by another person. If communication is necessary please ensure it is through public walls/notifications. Don’t reply to private/inbox messages from young people or vulnerable adults on a one-to-one basis; should any such communication be necessary, it should be done through email and be copied to another adult of parish authority and to the parent. If you are in contact with any young people (under 18) please inform Joanna French (Youth Co-ordinator) and copy her into any emails sent.
- o Trust your instincts – if you feel uncomfortable with social networking within the Parish, or with any person’s possible misuse of the site, regarding young people or not, inform someone in a position of authority. You will not cause offence by doing so.

If for any reason you are concerned, need assurance or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact **Cath White**, our parish safeguarding representative or Joanna French, our Children & Youth Co-ordinator, via the **Presbytery (01727 853585)**. Any immediate issues or concerns will be passed on without delay.

Please note:

Any network contact with parishioners under the age of 18 (for parish purposes) **must not take place**. If you are a ‘friend’ of any young parishioner under the age of 18, you must have a legitimate connection to them (relative or close and regular family contact). It is acknowledged and understood that young people add adult members of the parish because they know of them, but please, in such circumstances, be sensitive in responding. Please be aware of your position within the parish and adhere to the guidelines above.

In all circumstances, you must be willing to explain your contact, relationship and communication with any young parishioners through any site whenever Joanna French or a safeguarding representative asks you. Please do not be offended if you are asked to stop any further communication with parishioners under the age of 18. It is for your safety as well as theirs.

Please remember: you are in a position of responsibility and care in the Parish - please be aware of your own social networking use, ensuring all communication and content reflects that fact.

Social Networking: Guidelines & advice for those involved in all Parish Ministries

Ss. Alban & Stephen Parish
March 2011

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.