

SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL

Edinburgh Northwest Kirk



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Introduction

This paper is for elders, employees and members of Edinburgh Northwest Kirk who use social media, and is intended to encourage and support ENK in its approach to social media.

Social media is the umbrella term used to describe websites and applications that allow users to share content (that is words, images and web links) with others and/or to participate in social networking. The best-known platforms at time of writing are Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and YouTube, but the term – and these guidelines – also cover online forums and blogs as well as any other platforms.

Social media should be regarded as an extension of Church.

This means that something you wouldn't feel comfortable saying or sharing in church is also not appropriate online. Everything posted in the name of 'Edinburgh Northwest Kirk' – by elders, employees or members - is seen as the voice of the Church.

When posting to, commenting on, or responding to social media posts of Edinburgh Northwest Kirk and/or other related pages such as the Church of Scotland, you do so in your capacity as elder, employee or member of the church. More information can be found here: [Social Media Guidelines | The Church of Scotland](#)

Basic principles

1. The golden rule: You are a representative of Edinburgh Northwest Kirk and The Church of Scotland – therefore you are a responsible ambassador for Christ, the Church and your part in it. In essence, if you wouldn't say it in a loud voice in your local pub on a Saturday night, wearing a very big badge saying: 'I'm a member of The Church of Scotland,' then don't say it online.
2. If you have **any** known public role within the Kirk (elder, employee) you post or comment on social media as a representative of the Kirk. This applies whether you're posting in an official capacity on a Church account, or on your personal account – you are still representing the Church. What you say will reflect on you and the wider Kirk.
3. Although it may appear that the internet has little or no regulation, all content is subject to the same laws that apply in the 'real' world. You are completely responsible for the things you post and so could fall foul of laws relating to libel, defamation and copyright.
4. There is an internet code of conduct. Although not an exclusive list, some specific examples of legally prohibited social media conduct include posting commentary, content or images that are defamatory, pornographic,

proprietary, harassing, libellous, or any material that could be seen to create a hostile environment.

5. Should any post attract wider media interest, then all enquiries, both positive and negative should be directed to the Minister, Kirk Office or Session Clerk.
6. Social media is fast-paced. Stay present and active – monitor output, keep it fresh and up-to-date and regularly review information about the Church. Aim to post/update content regularly to encourage people to engage with what you are posting, draw them in, and keep them coming back for more. On Facebook you can 'schedule' posts to appear throughout the week ahead.
7. When communicating via social media, Edinburgh Northwest Kirk aims to:
 - convey a sense of welcome and inclusiveness.
 - celebrate the contributions made by many people to the life and worship of the Kirk.
 - reflect the fellowship enjoyed through Kirk activities.

Standard Requirements

- At least two people should be appointed to manage all official social media accounts. These people are the 'voice' of ENK online.
- All social media accounts must be linked to the email office@cramondkirk.org.uk and **not** a personal email as they are church social accounts, not personal accounts.
- The Communications and Technology Team Leader, Session Clerk, Kirk Secretary and Minister make up the 'Monitoring Group' to ensure all social accounts are in keeping with the parameters of this account.
- Passwords for all social media accounts must be kept centrally by the Kirk Secretary who should also be able to manage the accounts if absolutely necessary.

Some Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Ensure people adhere to the code of conduct found under the 'About' banner on the Facebook Page.

- Be respectful of theological viewpoints you do not agree with. Public slanging matches between Christians are never a good thing.
- Respond to queries quickly –newcomers to your area may be looking for a place to worship and would welcome a prompt response. Be welcoming.
- Be credible, fair and honest.
- Respect the privacy of your congregation. The discussion of pastoral care in relation to individuals is NOT for a public forum.
- ONLY use first names on photographs/videos of children, to protect their privacy and security.
- Use social media to share good news of Church life.
- Post or share (on Facebook) and/or retweet (on X/Twitter) appropriate stories, reflections and prayers marking key events in the Christian calendar/ life of the denomination etc.
- Monitor the social media accounts to remove any posts and comments that are visibly offensive, threatening or indicative of bullying; the person who posted such content is either given a warning or blocked. *The 'Monitoring Group' have the final responsibility and say over this.*
- Stay within the legal framework and make yourself aware of safeguarding issues; respect copyright, libel and defamation and data protection laws.
- Bear in mind that what you post has the potential to be misinterpreted or misread: emotions and attitudes can be hard to convey in print – be careful how you phrase things.

Don't:

- React critically to every little remark just because you don't like it! Distinguish between someone who is expressing a view that you or Edinburgh Northwest Kirk doesn't hold and someone who is writing abusive comments.
- Never make any comments that could be considered racist, sexist, or homophobic, or engage in any other conduct that would be considered unacceptable within Edinburgh Northwest Kirk or The Church of Scotland.
- Never engage with people who are being deliberately hateful. Remove the post in keeping with the code of conduct and warn/block the user.
- Don't neglect the wider community who may be genuinely interested in Edinburgh Northwest Kirk, or new to the area and looking for their next place of worship.

- Don't gossip or engage in conversations about personal/pastoral matters that directly relate to individuals. Do not disguise gossip as 'prayer points.' If it's not your story to tell, then don't tell it! There are data protection and safeguarding considerations, and that anything published online is subject to libel laws.
- Don't engage in verbal aggression via social media; it has no place on a social media site run by a Church. Correct wrong information but do so with grace. Remember, people are entitled to their opinions, but they are not entitled to share abusive or derogatory opinions and comments on our social media channels.

Sharing

It is important to share content from other sources on our social media accounts such as the Church of Scotland, as well as having original content. Edinburgh Northwest Kirk encourages the sharing of content from other denominations as long as it is in keeping with the guidelines outlined in this paper.

Permission

Before posting any photos and or videos online, permission must be given by the participants. For children, make sure you have the child's agreement AND the written permission of parents/guardians. If photos are to be sent to other external organisations, written permission must be given for this. However, the sharing of Edinburgh Northwest Kirk posts IS encouraged.

If written consent is not available for an adult, verbal consent is acceptable. When verbal consent is received, the person receiving it should record this in writing - i.e. name of person, nature of consent and purpose for which photo or whatever is to be used.

Safeguarding ¹

The Church of Scotland Code of Good Safeguarding 2018 says;

1. The Church of Scotland is committed to 'Ensuring a Safe Church for All'. Use and display The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Policy Statement agreed by the General Assembly, May 2010.
2. Paid staff and volunteers, through the provision of safe and appropriate standards of care, will minimise the likelihood of harmful situations occurring.

¹ See the appendix of this document, for the Church of Scotland guidance for all paid and volunteer staff on the use of social media.

3. The Church will respond to the needs of victims of harm or abuse as appropriate and ensure, as far as possible, that the person feels safe in the Church community.²

This of course translates into the online world as well. There are a few key things to bear in mind for social media.

Using images of people: It is advisable to use group photographs of children rather than individuals. When captioning photos/videos of children, do not include any personal details about them, and use only first names.

The policy of Edinburgh Northwest Kirk is **not** to include group photos without the express permission of all clearly visible faces, both adults and children, within any publications including online. As such, large group photos should be avoided, unless taken from behind. Regardless of age, permission must be obtained from all present.

‘Friending’ children on social media: Social media is not the place to ‘befriend’ children, either via the official accounts or on our personal pages and Kirk accounts. If children do ‘like’ our accounts, no private messaging should take place at any time.

Private message: Social media allows people to send instant private messages. This of course has many great advantages, as well as disadvantages. Messages to and from the account must NOT be deleted and replies should not be made before 8am and after 9pm. After an initial response all further communications should take place via an official Church channel, either via email, letter, phone, or in person.

Cries for help: Take seriously any messages, comments or posts on safeguarding issues such as suicide, abuse, self-harm, intent to hurt. Respond to the message, comment or post sensitively, informing them that the ministry team will be in contact soon. Contact the Ministry Team **immediately**. One of them will get in contact with the person, following appropriate safeguarding guidelines.

Copyright

It is important that you do not use content that is subject to copyright. Take great care in everything you publish – and never publish items that you do not have permission to publish (e.g. poems, prose extracts, songs/hymn lyrics). If you do want to publish something that is protected by copyright, seek written (or emailed) permission from the copyright holder before you post it.

Do not download images from the web and assume it will be ok, it almost certainly won't be! A good place for free images with no or little copyright stipulations is www.pixabay.com or www.unsplash.com for example. Of course, you can always use your own photos.

² Churchofscotland.org.uk. 2018. *SAFEGUARDING HANDBOOK 1*. [online] Available at: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/safeguarding-service/safeguarding-handbook>

Never download a picture you have seen on social media and repost it as something Edinburgh Northwest Kirk has made.

Whenever images are 'created' by a representative of Edinburgh Northwest Kirk, using Canva or other appropriate software, it is good practice to signpost people back to our social media channels.

Finally

- KEEP IT UPDATED! Three or four posts per week is the **minimum**
- Keep an eye on your "Insights" on the page and see what works for you.
- If you want to publicise things wider, tag the Presbytery or national Church of Scotland accounts.
- Occasionally the 'delete post' option is your friend.
- Block people if you need to.
- Always read posts before you share them.
- Make sure there is a good line of communication between the entire team.
- Ensure there are the appropriate social media feed(s) on the website so "the not on social media" can see the content.
- The Grapevine magazine and social media accounts should complement one another as sources of news and announcements.
- When someone likes a post but hasn't liked the page, use the 'Tools' to invite them to 'like' the page.
- If in doubt, contact a member of the monitoring team for clarification before acting.

Appendix³

[Safeguarding handbook | The Church of Scotland](#)

[Social media information and guidelines | The Church of Scotland](#)