***Guidance on the Use of Social Media***

***St. Columba Gaelic Church of Scotland, Glasgow***

***Connecting with others and having conversations on shared interests is a natural human desire. If we are a member of a group or organisation, we often want to use all means available to share our interest and publicise its work and activities.***

***Electronic communication, particularly social media, takes us into relatively new territory where we have to think differently and more carefully about what we say. Whether we manage a social media page or simply contribute comments occasionally, we share responsibility for its content. Unlike printed matter, social media is interactive, conversational and open-ended, and it always happens in a public space. These distinct features of social media should not change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility and in the case of the Church and its organisations, Christian witness.***

***The definition of Social Media includes sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Wikipedia, Instagram, Tumblr and all other social networking sites, internet postings and blogs.***

1.**Remember that the law views anything you share online as being in the public domain.** Sharing your thoughts and reflections with friends using social media or email might feel personal and private; but if more than one person can access what you have written it is highly likely that the law would class it as “published,” and therefore subject to numerous laws around defamation, copyright, Freedom of Information and data protection. So, if you wouldn’t say something in the local newspapers, in front of a meeting or in the parish magazine, you certainly shouldn’t say it online.

2.**Assume that what you say is permanent.** Even if you delete a comment you have made on a website, it could still have already been seen by other people and/or re-published on other, unconnected sites. It can be easy to say something in the heat of the moment that you will come to regret, but it could remain permanently online for all to see. So always think carefully and never make personal comments about someone that you wouldn’t also say in public or to them in person. Keep personal and family matters to your personal Social Media page unless they have a clear connection to the life of St. Columba Gaelic Church. Avoid reposting commercially produced material. Never contribute to a discussion if you are angry or upset; if you feel the need to have a rant, make a coffee date with a friend!

3. **Be sensitive about confidentiality and the risk of intrusion and do not assume anything electronic is secure.** You might be able to delete or recall a post (or an email) but there’s no guarantee the recipient will. Equally, your privacy settings on your social media tools might mean only your accepted “friends” or “followers” can see the things you say, but there is no guarantee that they will not pass them on outside your trusted circles. Social media does not change our fundamental understanding about confidentiality. When telling a story about a situation which involves someone else, always ask yourself *Is this my story to tell?* – would it cause distress, inconvenience, upset or embarrassment to others if they found out you had shared in this way? If in any doubt, do not share it online. Equally, be very careful when copying others into posts (or emails) which have gone backwards and forwards a couple of times – there may be confidential information earlier in the correspondence. You should refrain from posting photos of individuals — or identifying the individuals — on the church’s official social media pages without their prior written consent which may be given by email or text. Page Managers are responsible for disabling the tagging of individuals in photos posted on the church’s social media. If the photos include location information, this information will be removed as well.

**4. Do not assume you are speaking for the Church or any of its organisations.** If talking about a church matter, make it clear that these are your personal opinions and not those of the Church of Scotland or the local congregation or any of its organisations.  At the same time, remember that in the website or social media page of a church or any of its organisations, anything you do or say in the public domain may be interpreted by the public as being representative of the church – even if you are speaking in a personal capacity rather than an official one. Be aware that any controversial or sensitive comments you make may attract attention of the media. If in doubt, take advice, but please remember that you are responsible for your online activities. (See also 9 below).

**5. Safeguarding.** The informality that social media encourages can mean that it might be harder to maintain a professional distance that is required when working with children, young people and the vulnerable.  Communicating directly online with someone, for example with private messaging, is like meeting them in private. Have clear boundaries when communicating with children and young people. Remember that the law and Church of Scotland policies around safeguarding apply in your communications with children and young people. As an office bearer, youth leader or volunteer worker you should not exchange private messages with young people via social media, you should not initiate “friend requests” to young people and you should not accept “friend requests” from young people without due consideration. If it is appropriate in your own setting that your organisation’s activity includes an element of social media, try to keep all your communications public and only send messages to whole groups, rather than to individuals.

**6. Be mindful of your own security.** Be careful about the personal details you share online – again, assume anything you share about yourself is in the public domain.

**7. Remember the value of other forms of communication.** It can become very easy to hide behind an online persona and neglect other relationships – remember that while social media is an exciting forum which presents many new opportunities, the value of face-to-face relationships should never be forgotten.

**8. Unacceptable behaviours.** As much as we want to encourage interactions, there are certain behaviours that will not be allowed on our social media sites.  We reserve the right to delete posts that display inappropriate behaviours as described below, and to take appropriate action where necessary against those responsible:

* profanity and pornography
* malicious misinformation
* introducing spam and harmful leads that leave the site and its users open to web attack
* personal attacks, harassment, taunting or bullying
* unlawful discrimination
* promoting violence, illegal or questionable activities
* impersonating colleagues or third parties

**9. Various responsibilities**

* St. Columba Gaelic Church’s official social media participation is managed by the Minister / Int. Moderator and Kirk Session. They bear overall responsibility for information posted on the church’s behalf and for monitoring and responding to posts on official pages.
* Office bearers, leaders and volunteer workers posting comments share responsibility for the content they post.
* All Church of Scotland Acts and Regulations that deal with matters involving discipline, bullying, professional conduct and software use policies apply to the use of social media.
* Ministry employees, office bearers, leaders and volunteers who misuse social media resources in ways that violate the law or other Church policies are subject to disciplinary action in terms of the Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

In the event of a crisis, complaint or serious concern, contact the Interim Moderator or Session Clerk. They may, if necessary, seek advice from the Church of Scotland Law Department before responding to any posting or concerns related to the crisis.