

Social Networking Guidelines for staff and students

Introduction

In recent years there has been a rapid increase in the use of new media, particularly with regard to social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), personal blogs and file/photo sharing websites. Theological college should be a safe space where people are able to enjoy freedom of expression and to be creative as part of their formation; at the same time it is important to remember that information and images posted in the public domain can rapidly get out of our personal control, and can be misinterpreted by those outside St Michael's College, both inside and outside the Church. As a result, the College has produced guidelines to help with the use of new media in a responsible manner.

These guidelines are written specifically for staff and students at St Michael's College; however, in addition to these guidelines both staff and students are subject to the guidelines produced by their employer / sponsoring church and as such should familiarize themselves with the appropriate policies.

Church in Wales

<http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/resources/clerics/docs/C20.pdf>

Methodist Church

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=churchlife.content&cmid=3140>

Church of England

No guidelines at present.

Scope

These guidelines cover the Social Networking sites (Facebook, MySpace etc.), Photo and file-sharing websites, News Media outlets, Blogs and other public domain methods.

Guidelines

It is important to remember who has access to information which you publish in print form, post on the internet, or send digitally by computer, mobile telephone, etc. and how easy it is for digital information and pictures in particular to be forwarded beyond the original circulation list.

Access to information

- Please remember the distinction between restricted access and the public domain. If no password is needed to access information which you publish, then assume that anyone on the internet will be able to see it. As a general rule, any publicly posted pictures or text must take into account the rights of the people to whom such information relates. If you are responsible for placing pictures or stories about other members of the College in the public domain without their permission, not only can it cause a great deal of distress and embarrassment, but you might also face disciplinary action or be liable to prosecution under privacy or libel laws.
- Please remember that information, opinion and photos which you post in the public domain (or even privately if in an electronic format) can be transmitted onwards, and are likely to come to the attention of people outside your immediate circle of friends. In particular, think about whether you would be happy for your home or placement congregations or clergy or

College lecturers to see the pictures or text in question, because the likelihood is that one or all of them will be able to access items which you post. Please remember also that many senior clergy and future ministerial training candidates will be numbered amongst your “friends of friends” on the internet.

Personal Privacy

- We recommend setting your profiles on social networking sites so that only those individuals to whom you have provided access may see your personal information.
- We recommend evaluating photos of yourself that are posted to these sites and “untagging” photos that depict you in what could possibly be construed as compromising situations.
- Be sure you are aware of the security and privacy options available to you at any sites where you post personal information. Keep in mind that privacy settings are not impervious, and information can be shared willingly or unwillingly with others, even with “Friends Only” access.

Protection of Information on Others

- Comments made on social networking sites should be considered the same as if they were made a public place (e.g. in a church gathering).
- Remember that simply removing the name of a fellow student, faculty member or congregation members does not make them anonymous. Family members or friends of that person may be able to determine to whom you are referring based on the context.

Professionalism

- Use of these sites can have legal ramifications. Comments made that portray you or a colleague in an unprofessional manner can be used in court or other disciplinary proceedings. Statements made under your profile are attributable to you and are treated as if you verbally made that statement in a public place.
- Offensive posts about specific placements, lectures, modules, and speakers are disrespectful and inappropriate. These comments can be seen by many, including faculty, other students and future applicants.
- We recommend using discretion when choosing to log onto a social networking site when at college. Keep in mind that the use of these sites, for example via smartphone, during lectures is discourteous and may distract other students around you.
- Keep in mind that photographs and statements made are potentially viewable by clergy and congregations you are yet to meet. They may develop an impression of you and St Michael’s College based on comments and photos posted on your site.
- Please be aware that students may be subject to disciplinary actions within the College for comments that are either unprofessional or violate privacy.
- Relationships online with college staff and other students are all governed by our policy on bullying and harassment.
- Please recall that you are representing the Church in Wales/Church of England/Methodist Church St Michael’s College, when you log on to a site and make a comment or post a photograph.