



Archdiocese of Southwark

PARISH SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

May 2026

(Reviewed annually)

Prepared in reference to:

Archdiocese of Southwark – Safeguarding Policy & Procedures (2021)

Archdiocese of Southwark – Privacy Statement (May 2018)

Archdiocese of Southwark – Data Protection Policy (2018)

Purpose of this document

This document provides operational guidance for the use of parish social media platforms while a broader Parish Communications and Digital Engagement Policy is developed.

Respect for Volunteers

All parish volunteers involved in communications and social media ministry should be treated with dignity, respect and Christian charity at all times.

The Parish values the time, effort and talents freely offered by volunteers in support of evangelisation and parish life. Concerns or feedback relating to communications activity should be raised constructively and through the appropriate parish structures. Abusive, aggressive or inappropriate conduct towards volunteers is not acceptable and does not reflect the values of the Parish community.



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1. BACKGROUND, CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

This document sets out operational guidance for the use of social media platforms currently used by Our Lady Immaculate Parish, Tolworth.

The purpose of this guidance is to ensure that parish social media activity:

- Supports the mission and outreach of the parish.
- Operates in a responsible and transparent manner.
- Complies with safeguarding and data protection obligations.
- Aligns with the policies and guidance of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark.

This policy is based on the following Archdiocese of Southwark policies and guidance:

1. Safeguarding Policy & Procedures (2021)
2. Privacy Statement for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark (May 2018)
3. Data Protection Policy (2018)

In particular, this document reflects guidance within the Safeguarding Policy relating to Internet and Social Media Use (Section 5.2) and associated safeguarding principles regarding the protection of children, young people and adults at risk.

These diocesan policies remain the governing documents. This policy provides practical parish-level guidance for day-to-day use of social media platforms.



2. CURRENT PARISH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The parish currently operates two primary social media platforms to support communication and engagement within the parish community.

These platforms are intended to support communication, community engagement and evangelisation, while operating within safeguarding and data protection expectations.

2.1. Instagram

Instagram is a social media platform used for sharing photographs, short videos and parish updates.

The parish currently operates the following account:

Instagram:

@oliparishtolworth

This platform is used to:

- Promote parish events and activities.
- Highlight parish ministries.
- Support parish initiatives (including charitable initiatives such as the Lenten Project).
- Share moments of parish life and community participation.

Content is intended to be positive, respectful and reflective of the mission and life of the parish.

2.2. WhatsApp Community Space

The parish also operates an OLI Parish WhatsApp Community Space.

A WhatsApp Community is a structured messaging platform that allows multiple parish groups to be organised under one community umbrella.

Within this community space, a number of parish groups operate independently, each administered by the relevant ministry or group leaders.

Examples of groups currently within the community include:

- Bible Study
- Lenten Project
- Tolworth Trekkers
- OLI Tea Group Social



- OLI Youth Mass
- African Caribbean Community
- Evangelisation Reflection
- Eucharistic Ministers
- Young Disciples
- Church Cleaning Group
- Singing to the Elderly Mission
- Warm Welcome
- OLI Virtual Prayer Group
- OLI Foodbank
- St Killian's Stands
- Sunday 11am Hospitality
- Bereavement Group

Each group is administered independently by the relevant ministry leaders, and individuals may request to join groups through the relevant group administrator.

Within the community structure:

- Group Admins manage their own groups.
- Community Admins oversee the overall community structure.

Messages sent to the entire community are restricted to Community Admins and are used only for major parish announcements or important parish-wide information.

This structure helps maintain organised communication while preventing unnecessary message traffic across all parish members.

2.3. Social Media as a Positive Tool

The parish recognises that digital communication plays an increasingly important role in how communities connect.

Used responsibly, social media can support the Church's mission by:

- Strengthening communication within the parish community.
- Encouraging participation in parish activities.
- Promoting charitable initiatives.
- Supporting evangelisation and outreach.
- Engaging younger members of the parish community.

For these reasons, the parish encourages responsible use of digital platforms while maintaining appropriate safeguarding awareness.



2.4. Recognising Risks and Maintaining Vigilance

While social media offers many benefits, it also presents potential risks including:

- Unintended identification of individuals.
- Inappropriate sharing of images.
- Privacy concerns.
- Misunderstandings arising from online communication.

For this reason, the parish remains vigilant and applies appropriate operational controls to ensure social media activity remains aligned with diocesan safeguarding and data protection expectations.



3. ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PARISH LIFE

Social media platforms are used as communication tools supporting parish life, not as replacements for traditional parish communication channels such as the parish website, newsletter or parish office.

Their purpose is to:

- Complement existing parish communication channels.
- Increase visibility of parish life.
- Encourage participation in parish initiatives.
- Help connect parishioners with parish ministries and activities.



4. ADMINISTRATION AND OVERSIGHT

Parish social media platforms are administered by designated volunteers acting on behalf of the parish.

Administrative access to parish social media platforms is restricted and monitored to ensure responsible use.

Administrators are expected to act in accordance with:

- Diocesan safeguarding guidance.
- Diocesan data protection requirements.
- Parish operational guidance.



5. OPERATIONAL CONTROLS

To ensure responsible and safe use of parish social media platforms, the following operational controls are applied.

5.1. Restricted Administration

Posting rights for parish social media platforms are restricted to a small number of designated administrators.

At present:

- Administrative posting rights are limited to a maximum of four (4) individuals.
- Administrators are expected to have appropriate safeguarding awareness and comply with diocesan safeguarding expectations.

Restricting administrative access helps ensure that content published on parish platforms remains controlled, accountable and consistent with parish values.

5.2. Content Oversight

Posts are reviewed by administrators before publication.

This ensures that:

- Content is appropriate for parish communication.
- Safeguarding considerations have been respected.
- No personal data is unintentionally disclosed.

5.3. Parental Consent

Images or videos of children are only published where appropriate parental consent has been obtained.

In line with safeguarding guidance:

- Children should not normally be identified by full name in connection with images.
- Care should be taken to avoid unintended identification.

5.4. Appropriate Content

Posts published through parish social media platforms focus on:



- Parish life
- Parish ministries
- Charitable initiatives
- Community events
- Liturgical celebrations
- Parish announcements.

Content that is personal, controversial, political or unrelated to parish life should not be posted through official parish platforms.

5.5. Respect for Privacy

Administrators should avoid publishing information that could identify individuals in sensitive circumstances.

This includes:

- Personal contact details.
- Home addresses
- Sensitive personal information.

5.6. Reporting Concerns

If any safeguarding concern arises through parish social media activity, the matter should be reported to the Parish Safeguarding Representatives in accordance with diocesan safeguarding procedures.