

**Parish Policy for the Use of Social Media**

A framework for supporting best practice

with social media platforms

*To be read in conjunction with Safeguarding and Safer Recruitment policies*

1. **Preamble**

1.1 Social media sites refer to platforms that enable users to create and share content and keep in touch with other users. They may include maintaining a profile page on a networking site such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat; writing or commenting on a blog, whether our own or another person or organisation’s; taking part in online discussions on web forums or message boards.

1.2 This policy relates to:

Sites, Groups, profiles and pages that are set up in the name of a church or church group;

Individuals who post onto any social media platform as a representative of their church.

1.3 This policy does not relate to the individual behaviour of church members acting in a private capacity.

1.4 Increasingly, using social media platforms is an extension of physical face to face relationships. It is therefore important that churches also engage with our community and worshippers through these platforms.

However, this must be done safely to avoid the risk of:

* + Forming inappropriate relationships
  + Making offensive, sexual or suggestive comments
  + Blurring the boundaries between public representative work and ministry and our private lives
  + Grooming and impersonation
  + Bullying, stalking and harassment

1. **Positive Uses of Social Media**

Interaction with others using social media can be a very positive way of meeting people and promoting our churches’ missional values and activities:

Can involve everyone in:

* 1. Sharing of positive stories about church life
  2. Advertising of volunteer opportunities within the church
  3. Providing information on upcoming events and activities

Can encourage people to follow Jesus by:

* 1. Sharing positive stories about discipleship
  2. Providing bible reading resources
  3. Advertising church teaching and training events
  4. Uploading links to sermons and other teaching aids

Can help create community by:

* 1. Encouraging church members to contribute
  2. Responding to one another’s posts, stimulating discussion and interaction
  3. Advertising community building events
  4. Helping to make everyone feel welcome whether or not they attend on a Sunday morning
  5. Ensuring that all our social media groups are safe places

Can assist with outreach through:

* 1. Sharing faith stories
  2. Advertising church events
  3. Positively demonstrating what it is like to be a part of church
  4. Personally inviting people to join in with church activities

Can enable an encounter with God by:

* 1. Sharing posts which help people draw near to God

1. **Accountability**

All use of social media in the name of the church must be authorised by the relevant DCC or PCC. This should consist of a resolution passed by the DCC or PCC which approves the creation of an account in the name of the church for a specified platform and names the church member who will act as the account administrator and moderator. This person will be responsible for monitoring the account and ensuring that any breaches of confidentiality or safeguarding concerns are communicated to the appropriate Parish Safeguarding Officer.

1. **Good Practice Guidelines**
   1. Think before you post remembering that you are speaking on behalf of the church, that the post is permanent and may be shared widely.
   2. Ensure your postings are consistent with the Christian gospel and do not contradict existing church policy or practice.
   3. Use church social media accounts only to fundraise for the church or church-supported charities.
   4. Do not use any church social media accounts for personal commercial purposes.
   5. Draw clear boundaries around your social media usage, distinguishing between your private life and public ministry.
   6. Keep church accounts and profiles separate from your personal social media accounts.
   7. Use clear and unambiguous language in all communication and avoid abbreviations that could be misinterpreted.
   8. Save and download to hard copy any inappropriate material received through social networking sites or electronic means and show immediately to the account administrator, incumbent or Parish Safeguarding Officer.
   9. Use passwords and log off immediately after use to ensure that nobody else can use a social media account pretending to be you.
   10. Do not add children, young people or vulnerable adults as friends to your personal social media accounts.
   11. Do not say anything on social media that you would not be happy saying in a public meeting, to someone’s face, writing in a local newspaper or on headed notepaper.
   12. Comment on photos or posts or share content unless appropriate to your church role.
   13. Only use visual media (Skype, Facetime, Zoom etc) with young people in group settings.
   14. Do not allow content to contain or share links to other sites that contain:
       1. Libellous, defamatory, bullying or harassing statements;
       2. Breaches of copyright and data protection;
       3. Material of an illegal nature;
       4. Offensive sexual or abusive references;
       5. Inappropriate language;
       6. Anything that may be harmful to a child, young person or vulnerable adult or which may bring the church into disrepute or compromise its reputation.
2. **Social Media and Young People**

5.1Workers/leaders communicating with young people or vulnerable adults via the

internet, social networking or mobile phone must obtain a DBS certificate in

accordance with the safeguarding guidelines from the Diocese.

5.2 It is recommended that:

If a worker/leader expects to communicate with young people in the group via

email, messenger, social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) or texting, written

permission from the young person’s parents/guardians should be given.

One-to-one communication between a worker/leader and a young person

should normally be avoided, all communication should be in a page or

group context.

If it is necessary for a worker/leader to communicate with a young

person individually, it should be through an approved account that a line

manager/supervisor or approved third party can also access and review

the conversations. Young people must be made aware that any one-to-one

communication will be shared in this way.

Communication should be from a specific account/address known to the

young people, parents and line manager/supervisor.

Clear and unambiguous language should be used in all communications.

Avoid abbreviations that could be misinterpreted.

Do not use any comment or picture of a young person without written

parental permission. Church/Diocesan guidelines on the taking of images

must be followed.

5.3 Mobile Phones:

Employed workers should be supplied with a mobile phone dedicated for work

purposes. This allows for the phone to be switched off outside working hours,

and for any usage to be accountable.

The work phone number should be the only number that young people are

given; a worker’s personal number should remain private.

Texts that raise concerns should be saved and passed on to a line manager/

supervisor or approved third party within the organisation. Conversations

should be discussed as soon as possible.

5.4 Email and Instant Messenger:

Be aware of who has access to computers, or other devices, used for

communication between workers/leaders and young people.

There should be a ‘curfew’ on instant messenger communication and this

should only take place during normal working hours.

Workers/leaders need to log and save all conversations and regularly review

these with their line manager/supervisor before they are deleted.

Make sure that young people know that line managers/supervisors have access

to the conversations.

Video or Voice messenger should be done in public so that other people are

aware of what the worker/leader is doing and to whom they are speaking.

5.5 Facebook & Social Networking Sites:

The best advice is that it is not appropriate to use a personal Facebook account

and profile for work with young people, so workers/leaders should create a

professional account to manage communications with young people.

To create a professional or ‘work’ account and profile, enter a work email

in the sign up box, adding ‘Work’ or another suitable term after the last

name to distinguish the professional from the personal profile

Line managers/supervisors should be aware of the account name and

password so that they can at any time log onto the account to monitor the

communications. Young people should be made aware that information is

shared in this way.

Ensure the church/organisation name is entered onto the profile created.

Also make sure that work contact details and web address is publicised.

Adding interests makes profiles more interesting, but only share information

appropriate to the young people.

Any photos used should be in an official/work setting.

Consideration should be given to including an ‘expectations’ statement in the

profile somewhere such as:

“I am a youth worker with a keen interest in social media which I use

to share about the groups and events we run through [St ?] Church. I

also post lots of links that I think young people who come to our groups

would find interesting. I generally only log in to Facebook a few times a

week during my work hours. If you need to contact someone from [St ?]

urgently then please call [contact number] or visit www.???”

Any communication or content that raises concerns should be saved or

printed, shared and discussed with line managers/supervisors.

Workers/leaders should only accept friend requests for this profile from young

people known to them that they have met offline.

Communication should normally be in the public domain wherever possible

(by using group mailings or public wall posts).

Where groups are set up, they should be closed, and not open to the general

public. Anyone with administrative rights should regularly moderate the

group, only sharing those rights with their line manager/supervisor and other

trusted workers/leaders.

Workers/leaders with personal social networking accounts should customise

their privacy settings in order to maintain the boundaries between their

personal and professional lives. They should avoid uploading inappropriate

personal information.

1. **Breaches of Social Media Policy**

In the first instance the account administrator will respond to any complaints or breaches of this policy. This may include:

* 1. Contacting the source of the complaint or breach to discuss the issue and advise on expectations
  2. Removal or blocking of an individual from the social media account
  3. In collaboration with the relevant Parish Safeguarding Officer complete a safeguarding report where a concern has been identified.

1. **Current Social Media Profile**

Below is a list of existing social media accounts held by churches, and the appointed administrators for each account:

All Saints - WhatsApp Group: Emily Davis

Christ Church – Facebook: Jess Parry

St Andrew’s – *none known*

St Godwald’s – Facebook: Kerstin MacDonald

St John the Baptist – Facebook: Ray Khan

St John the Baptist – YouTube: Ray Khan

Holy Trinity and St Mary, Dodford – *none known*

United Benefice – Facebook: Paula Honniball

1. **Policy Approval**

This policy is to be revised and approved annually each November.

This Policy was approved at the PCC meeting held on 9th November 2022

Signed (Incumbent) Date