

Parish of St George's Jesmond

Social Media Policy and Guidelines

Approved By PCC 31 May 2022

Review: Annually

Foreword

Social Media is nowadays a part of life and has huge potential for the church's mission, outreach, and basic communication. It brings with it risks, dangers and inappropriate use. This policy encourages all members of the congregation to play a full and active part in church life, whilst being protected from the malevolent side of the internet.

It seeks to:

1. Provide a safe space for all people within the church
2. Face the reality of the internet
3. Minimise the risk of anyone being placed in a position where they might be trolled, groomed or photo shopped
4. Offers protection to all members of the congregation, including children and young people, which preserves their anonymity
5. Anonymises photographs where possible or necessary
6. Builds on advice from the national church, national children's organisations, and government, noting potential forthcoming legislation, it provides protective guidelines for all the congregation, clergy and staff.

This policy seeks to provide clear guidelines and protection for the use of the internet for everyone (members of the congregation, clergy, staff and volunteers)

It recommends that consent for photos of vulnerable people should be sought, and photos should be non-identifiable, as far as possible, and with no names attached.

It recommends that parents and young people are advised that some photos may be taken which are non-identifiable and that they may actively opt out if they do not want photos to be used. It assumes an annual signing in of consent from parents and young people.

Summary

Being online is an extension of church life and the expectations of the parishioner remain as high in this context as in any other. In general, those engaging online will conduct themselves in a Christian manner and demonstrate these values at all times.

In particular:

- **Be safe.** The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained. If you have any concerns, ask our safeguarding lead Sue Vernon
- **Be respectful.** Do not post or share content that is sexually explicit, inflammatory, hateful, abusive, threatening or otherwise disrespectful. Equity: unkind and inappropriate reference to someone's race, gender, disability, religion or similar demographic factor will not be tolerated.

- **Be kind.** Treat others as you would wish to be treated and assume the best in people. If you have a criticism or critique to make, consider not just whether you would say it in person, but the tone you would use.
- **Be honest.** Don't mislead people about who you are.
- **Take responsibility.** You are accountable for the things you do, say and write. Text and images shared can be public and permanent, even with privacy settings in place. If you're not sure, don't post it.
- **Be a good ambassador.** Personal and professional life can easily become blurred online so think before you post.
- **Disagree well.** Some conversations can be places of robust disagreement and it's important we apply our values in the way we express them. Individuals must not engage in online disputes and arguments contrary to group harmony or that may cause wider offence and distress.
- **Credit others.** Acknowledge the work of others. Respect copyright and always credit where it is due. Be careful not to release sensitive or confidential information and always question the source of any content you are considering amplifying.
- **Follow the rules.** Abide by the terms and conditions of the various social media platforms themselves. If you see a comment that you believe breaks their policies, then please report it.

A useful resource for parents can be found here

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/>

THE POLICY

1. Introduction

Social media and the internet have become an increasing influence on many people's lives, transforming the way we communicate both at work and personally. Communication can now be instant and can be shared around the world, often to those we do not know. This can have its benefits but there are also risks. Used responsibly, social media and the internet can be of benefit to the church, providing the opportunity for networking, getting to know people, gaining, and sharing information about church events, learning about the Christian Faith, and spreading the Gospel. Social media is faster, cheaper, and arguably more widely available than traditional media; however, our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility and Christian witness must remain the same. It is therefore important to ensure we balance the benefits with our duties to our congregation, the community, our legal responsibilities, and our reputation.

2. Aim

This policy aims to provide a framework so that all users of social media (whether at home or at work, on church or personal equipment) are using it safely and effectively:

- Providing clarity to the clergy team, employees, and church members on how they should conduct themselves when using social media
- Ensuring the reputation of the church, the clergy and the PCC are protected
- Protecting the church from legal risks
- Safeguarding all children, young people and vulnerable adults

3. Definition

‘Social media’ is the term commonly given to websites and online tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way by sharing information, opinions, knowledge, and interests. As the name implies, social media involves the building of communities or networks, encouraging participation and engagement.

Popular social media services include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Snapchat and blogs. There are many more examples of social media, and this is a constantly developing area. This also includes the use of email and online meeting platforms such as Zoom.

4. Scope

This policy applies to the clergy team, all employees, PCC members, and church members.

The policy’s principles should be adhered to by the PCC, external contractors providing services on behalf of the church, church members, unpaid workers, volunteers and any other individuals who work for or provide services on behalf of the church where practicable.

The PCC accepts that employees are entitled to a private life. However, the clergy team and all employees must exercise professional judgement when using social media. Employees cannot have a reasonable expectation of privacy if their use of social media impacts on the well-being of the parish.

The clergy team and employees must, therefore, be aware of this policy at all times, both during working time and during their own time, when using social media for both work and personal use, whether using the church’s equipment (computers, iPads, laptops, phones) or their own personal equipment.

Any information or comments relating to the church that are shared through social media applications, even if they are on private spaces, is still subject to:

- copyright legislation
- the Data Protection Act
- freedom of information legislation
- the diocesan Information Security Policy

- the diocesan Employee Code of Conduct
- Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy

This policy does not form part of an employee's contract of employment and is not intended to have contractual effect. The PCC reserves the right to amend its content at any time.

5. Responsibilities

The PCC will:

- promote high standards of professional conduct within the parish
- ensure the church has appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures
- consider requests for the creation of social media sites for church use
- abide by all relevant legislation and, in particular, will not discriminate on grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, belief, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, trade union membership or age
- have overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy and will ensure the policy is applied consistently and fairly
- ensure that all employees are aware of the standards of conduct expected of them
- be familiar with all safeguarding legislation, guidance, and procedures
- support any employees who have concerns within the parish
- nominate a suitable person/people to be responsible for the creation and management of social media sites for church use. See Appendix 1.

The clergy team, employees, and church members will:

- conduct themselves professionally at all times
- use their professional judgement to avoid any reputational damage to St Georges when using social media
- report any concerns regarding use and content of social media immediately to the Vicar or Parish Safeguarding Officer if appropriate
- conduct themselves in an honest and professional manner
- ensure that their conduct and activities do not bring the church into disrepute
- use their professional judgement when expressing views in order to avoid any reputational damage to the church
- be mindful of how their private interests may impact on their duty to the church and therefore not put themselves in a position where their duty and private interests conflict or appear to conflict
- not breach Data Protection or confidentiality by talking about, identifying or disclosing personally identifiable information about parishioners or colleagues
- act in a transparent manner when altering online sources of information including errors about the parish
- not post comments or photos which may be deemed offensive
- not use official church logos on personal web pages
- not use personal email accounts or mobile phones to make contact with members of the parish on church business, nor should any contact be accepted

- not use a church e-mail address to register on social media sites for personal use
- not place personal postings on social media sites using their own personal mobile or device during normal working time

6. Accessing personal social media

Employees must not access social media for personal use during working time, using either church or personal equipment (computers, iPads, laptops, phones). This also applies to volunteers working with children, young people, and vulnerable adults. Access is only permitted in an employee's own time, for example during their lunch break.

7. Use of Social Media Guidelines

- If you comment on any aspect of the work of the Church of England, Diocese of Newcastle, or Benefice of St George and St Hilda you must clearly identify yourself
- Users are personally responsible for the content they publish on-line, whether in a blog, social computing site or any other form of user generated media
- Be mindful that what you publish may be public for an indefinite period of time
- Protect your privacy and take care to understand a site's terms of service
- Respect copyright, libel and defamation laws
- Never provide details of confidential matters of groups such as the PCC or its sub committees
- Do not cite or reference individuals without their approval
- When you do make a reference, link back to the source. Don't publish anything that might allow inferences to be drawn that could embarrass or damage an individual
- Respect your audience. Don't use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in a Christian environment
- Don't use Church, Diocesan or Church of England logos or trademarks unless correct permissions have been sought.

8. Responsibilities when accessing social media

Members of the clergy team, employees and volunteers are personally responsible for the content they publish on social media both for the parish and personally using either church or personal equipment. It must be assumed that any comments may be visible to anyone in the world with an internet connection and are a permanent record and can be republished in other media.

The public must be able to trust the integrity of the parish. They need to be confident that the outside activities of employees do not undermine the church's reputation and that decisions regarding church matters are not perceived to be influenced by a member's commercial, political, or personal interests.

It is an individual's responsibility to read the Terms of Service of any social networking site accessed and to ensure that any confidentiality and privacy settings outlining to whom

information posted is available is understood. Clergy and employees are strongly advised to set all privacy settings to the highest possible levels on all personal social media accounts.

9. Church sanctioned use of social media

St George's has established accounts on several social media websites. These sites include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. The management of these accounts is outlined in Appendix 1.

Emails

Face to face communication is always preferred, please try to speak to people face to face or via the telephone. Use email as a last resort. When email is used, carefully check that you are representing what you are trying to say in the best manner, keeping within the above guidelines. Make sure you are sending it to the correct recipient and for the right reason. Only write what you are comfortable to say face to face. Only copy other recipients into an email when it is expedient to do so. When sending an email to multiple recipients, always consider using BCC, known as Blind Carbon Copy. This is to avoid disclosing other people's e-mail addresses. Only use CC (Carbon Copy) if you purposefully want recipients to see all other copied recipients email addresses and this has been agreed in line with GDPR guidance. Mass emails should have their origin in the Parish Office. When replying to an email with visible multiple recipients, only 'reply to all' when the sender has asked you to do so. Replies should be personal and not public. Never copy recipients into a thread of emails. This is a quick way to lose confidentiality and cause damage. Emails are to be precise and easy to read.

Web cameras and livestreaming videos

Recorded videos may not be posted unless authorised by the administrator, member of the clergy team or appropriate designated person. They must be relevant, appropriate, and Christian in appearance and content and must comply with copyright legislation.

Using 'Zoom' or live streaming platforms safely

- Meetings with under 18s should have at least two leaders present
- Express permission should be sought prior to recording Zoom meetings or taking any photograph/video of the screen
- Messaging ("Chat") should be used responsibly and with regards to safeguarding.
- Whilst we welcome all to our services and are keen for newcomers to join us at Sunday services/ prayer meetings/ other services, sharing of the links should be appropriate and with due regard to safeguarding

Mobile phones

Wherever possible, clergy and employees should be supplied with a mobile phone dedicated for work purposes or, if supported, use a dual sim card. This allows for the phone to be switched off outside working hours, and for usage to be accountable. This means that the work phone number is the only number that young people or adults are given, and the church

officer's personal number can remain private. Texts or conversations that raise concerns should be saved and passed on to the named person or the PSO/incumbent (or if unavailable the DSA).

10. Safeguarding

This guidance should be read alongside St George's Parish Church, Safeguarding Policy. Any online concerns about safeguarding should be reported immediately and in line with the Safeguarding Policy.

When using social media sites, clergy, employees, and volunteers must at all times be conscious of their responsibilities to children, young people and vulnerable adults. The church requires clergy, employees, and volunteers to always act in the best interests of these individuals and be alert to the risks they can be exposed to.

Children, young people, and vulnerable adults may post sensitive personal information about themselves, treat all online 'friends' as real friends, be targets for grooming or become victims of cyber bullying. If an individual discloses information, displays behaviour, or is exposed to information or behaviour that raises safeguarding or other concerns, the Parish Safeguarding Officer must be informed immediately.

Uploading photographs and videos.

- Permission from the clergy must be sought before photographs and video are taken during church services
- Permission must be obtained (from the person, and/or their parent or guardian) before photographs or videos are posted
- Photographs or videos of children and young people must follow the Protecting Children and Young People on Social Media guidelines below, appendix three
- Identifying features such as school logos or full names should not be included in or linked to photos or videos.

In addition, clergy and employees must report any communication which causes concern received on any social media site to the Parish Safeguarding Officer. Failure to report any safeguarding concerns could expose vulnerable young people to risk of harm.

Clergy and employees must not have any content or link to content on their personal social media sites which is abusive, obscene, sexually explicit, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory. Such content may be seen as committing a criminal offence. If this is found to be the case the church will have a duty to draw it to the attention of the Police.

This policy is not intended to prevent employees or volunteers from using social media sites but to make them aware of the risks they could face when sharing information about their professional and/or personal life. All parishioners are encouraged to report any concerns that they have regarding content placed on social media sites to the Parish Safeguarding Officer.

Recruitment

Care must be taken to ensure fairness in recruitment processes, and information posted on social media about individuals may not give an accurate representation of them as a person or their capabilities.

Role of PCC

The PCC must approve the use of social media and mobile phones by the church. Where there are Facebook or similar online groups set up on the church's behalf, the PCC must ensure there is a named person to whom all workers are accountable. The named person must be a church officer and should be aware of the account name and password so that they can at any time log on to the account to monitor the communications. The named person should be proactive in fulfilling this role.

Communications must be shared with the named person. Church officers remain bound by professional rules of confidentiality. Where there is concern that a young person or adult is at risk of abuse, or they themselves pose a risk of abuse to others, safeguarding procedures must always be followed.

Misuse of social media

Employees must be aware that the use of social media sites in a manner contrary to this policy, including if others implicate them in a breach of any of the terms listed above, may result in disciplinary action which could ultimately result in dismissal.

Appendix One

Social Media Platforms St. George's currently uses

NOTE: Highlighted names are tbc

Platform	Assigned Owners	Who else monitors/ may post	Public or Restricted
Website, incl. the Lance	Parish Office/ other?	No one?	Public
FaceBook	Vicar & Parish Office (Admin)	Family & Youth Leader	Public
Instagram	Family & Youth Leader/ other?		Public
Twitter	Izzy McDonaldBooth	Family & Youth Leader	Public
YouTube	TBC	TBC	Public
Email	Parish Office/ other?	No one	Restricted
WhatsApp for Bellringers	Lorna Taylor/ other?	Everyone in the group	Restricted
WhatsApp for Young People	Lorna Taylor/ Family & Youth Leader	Everyone in the group	Restricted
WhatsApp for Parents of Young People (above)	Lorna Taylor/ Family & Youth Leader	Everyone in the group	Restricted

Appendix Two

St George's livestreaming guidelines

We recognise that sharing services online is an exciting opportunity to reach out, however, it should be balanced with continuing to provide a safe and secure environment for all. Some members of our church community may not feel comfortable appearing in video, and for others it may compromise their safety. Therefore, we adopt the following guidelines:

- Members of the congregation will not be identifiable; only the backs of heads of the first couple of rows in the nave will be seen.
- None the less, the side aisles to be nominated as safe, no-go areas for the cameras.
- During the distribution of Communion an image of the church building, or a 'safe' (high) camera pre-set position of the church, is to be broadcast.
- Permissions to be sought from those who lead intercessions and read the readings and psalms. When children and young people undertake this role, an image of the church to be broadcast.
- Tight camera angles mean that children and young people in the choirstalls are not visible.
- Notices to be displayed informing worshippers that livestreaming is happening.

- Recorded Videos may not be posted unless authorised by the administrator, member of the clergy team or appropriate designated person. They must be relevant, appropriate, and Christian in appearance and content and must comply with copyright legislation.

Appendix three

Protecting Children and Young People on Social Media guidelines

- Photographs or images of children and young people will be posted or published in the Lance only with parents' and the individual child's or young person's signed consent**
- Identifiable logos (e.g., school uniform badge) and full names will not be used
- We will not store images of children and young people
- Wherever possible the church camera, or church phones, will be used
- The PCC will appoint a DBS checked Social Media Moderator
- WhatsApp, Messenger, and Instagram will be used between adults and children, young people, and vulnerable people only for the sharing of information e.g., dates, times, places of meeting
- Clergy and employees will have separate mobile phones or, if supported, use a dual sim card for work and personal use

** Consent for this will be explicit about risks and ownership of images

Appendix four (From the Parish Safeguarding Handbook)

Guidance for church officers

Do:

- Have your eyes open and be vigilant
- Maintain the utmost integrity – honesty, transparency, consistency and accountability are key.
- Treat online communication between adults and children and young people as you would communication that is face to face. Always maintain the same level of confidentiality.
- Report any safeguarding concerns that arise on social media to the PSO and the DSA.
- Always assume that everything you write is permanent and may be viewed by anyone at any time; and that everything can be traced back to you personally as well as to your colleagues or the church. Always think before you post.
- Draw clear boundaries around your social media usage associated with your private life and your use of different social media for public ministry. Keep church accounts and profiles separate from your personal social media accounts e.g. only use a Facebook page, Twitter or blogs for public ministry, while keeping a separate Facebook profile for private life.
- Always ask parents/carers for written consent to:
 - Use and store photographs of children/young people from activities or events in official church publications, or on the church's social media, website and displays.

- Use telephone, text message, email and other messaging services to communicate with young people.
 - Allow young people to connect to the church's social media pages.
- Only use an approved church/ministry account to communicate with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults. The named person should be able to access this and review conversations, and the account should be visible to young people and their parents.
 - Young people must be made aware that any communication will be viewed by all users. Save any messages and threads through social networking sites, so that you can provide evidence to the named person of your exchange when required.
 - Avoid one-to-one communication with a child or young person.
 - Use clear and unambiguous language in all communications and avoid abbreviations that could be misinterpreted.
 - Save and download to hard copy any inappropriate material received through social networking sites or other electronic means and show immediately to the named person, PSO, incumbent or, if appropriate, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.
 - Use passwords and log off promptly after use to ensure that nobody else can use social media pretending to be you.

Do not:

- Use a personal Facebook or any other social media account in your work with children, young people or vulnerable adults.
- Add children, young people or vulnerable adults as friends on your personal accounts.
- Facebook stalk (i.e. dig through people's Facebook pages to find out about them).
- 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.
- Comment on photos or posts, or share content, unless appropriate to your church role.
- Use visual media (e.g. Skype, Facetime) for one-to-one conversations with young people – use only in group settings.
- In particular, do not allow content to contain or share links to other sites that contain:
 - Libellous, defamatory, bullying or harassing statements.
 - Breaches of copyright and data protection.
 - Material of an illegal nature.
 - Offensive sexual or abusive references.
 - Inappropriate language.
 - Anything which may be harmful to a child, young person or vulnerable adult, or which may bring the church into disrepute or compromise its reputation.