



## **Social Media Policy**

The following policy was agreed at the Parochial Church Council (PCC) meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020 and will be reviewed annually.

Social media is a wonderful way of keeping in touch, spreading good news stories and creating new kinds of communities; this has been more important than ever at a time when church buildings have been forced to close. The sharing of words and images on social media can build people up and promote community cohesion and be a powerful way of communicating the Christian faith. However, it can also be destructive, ruin lives and exclude people from community; it can be violent and abusive and can cause emotional and spiritual harm. Christian practice, Christian values and ethics, remain as important online, as they are off-line. The use of social media requires prayerful discernment and discipline, and comes with great responsibility. The boundary between public and private is incredibly permeable. In just an instant, a comment or opinion can be communicated to millions of people all over the world and so care and consideration is needed by representative members of the church to ensure that their online identity is not at odds with their Christian faith, their ministry or the mission of the church to which they belong. Therefore, this policy aims to help public and representative Christians navigate the moral and social complexity of social media from a faith perspective, for the good of the whole Church community. It is an extension of the church's existing Safeguarding Policy, which seeks to protect children and vulnerable adults in our care, and is in keeping with the guidance given in the Parish Safeguarding Handbook 'Promoting a Safe Church'. We hope that all people will be able to use social media safely, kindly and with compassion.

1. The PCC must approve the use of any social media and mobile phones by the church.
2. Where there are Facebook or similar online groups or pages set up on the church's behalf, the PCC will ensure there is a named person to whom all workers are accountable. The named person will be a church officer and will be aware of all account names and passwords so that they can at any time log on to the account to monitor the communications. The named person will be proactive in fulfilling this role.
3. Communications must be shared with the named person but, as a Church Officer, they remain bound by professional rules of confidentiality. Where there is a 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.
4. Clergy, authorised ministers, employees and volunteers who use social media ('users') must always be vigilant, maintaining the upmost integrity – honesty, transparency, consistency and accountability are key. They are to treat online communication with children, young people and adults in the same way as face-to-face communication, maintaining the same level of confidentiality.
5. Any safeguarding concerns that arise on social media must be reported to the Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) and the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor (DSA) immediately.
6. Users must always think before posting and assume that everything that is written is permanent, may be viewed by anyone at any time, and can be traced back to them personally as well as to the church.
7. Clear boundaries must be made between personal social media usage and that for public ministry; church account(s) and profiles must be separate from personal accounts.
8. Personal accounts must not be used in work with children, young people or vulnerable adults. Children, young people and vulnerable adults must not be added as friends on personal accounts. In addition, personal accounts should have a high level of security so they cannot be accessed by those who are not listed as friends.

9. Written consent from parents/carers must be obtained in order to a) use and store photographs of children/young people on the church's social media and website, b) use telephone, text message, email and other messaging services to communicate with young people, c) allow young people to connect to the church's social media pages, d) meet with young people on a video conferencing platform.
10. Only approved church/ministry accounts will be used to communicate with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults. The named person will be able to access this and review conversations, and the account will be visible to young people and their parents. Young people will be made aware that any communication will be viewed by all users. Any messages and threads through social networking sites will be saved so that evidence can be provided, if required, of the exchange.
11. One-to-one communication with children and young people is to be avoided; visual media should not be used for one-to-one conversations with young people.
12. Clear and unambiguous language must be used in all communications, avoiding abbreviations, in order to minimise the risk of misinterpretation.
13. Any inappropriate material received through social networking sites of other electronic means must be saved and downloaded to hard copy and shown immediately to the named person, PSO, incumbent or, if appropriate, DSA.
14. Passwords will be used for all accounts and users will log off promptly after use to ensure that nobody else can use social media pretending to be them or the church.
15. Users must not 'facebook stalk' or say anything on social media that they would not be happy saying in a public meeting, to someone's face, writing in a local newspaper or on headed notepaper.
16. Users must not comment on photos or posts, or share content, unless appropriate to their church role.
17. Users must not allow content to contain or share links to other sites that contain a) libellous, defamatory, bullying or harrassing statements, b) breaches of copyright or data protection, c) material of an illegal nature, d) offensive sexual or abusive references, e) inappropriate language, f) 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.
18. For those clergy, authorised ministers, employees and volunteers who also have personal accounts, anything published on those is no different from making such information available in any public forum.
19. Joining instructions for any video conferencing meetings will not be publicly available; they will be shared with those who need to know and/or in private social media groups. Passwords and waiting rooms will always be used.
20. Video conferencing screen sharing options will only be available to the meeting host.
21. Video conferencing meetings will not be recorded by any participant without the agreement of the host and the consent of all those present.

#### **Video Conferencing with Children and Young People**

It may, at times, be appropriate to use video conferencing to meet with a group of children or young people. In doing so, these additional points apply:

22. PCC approval must first be given.
23. Written parental consent must be obtained. This may be electronic.
24. Meeting invitations and joining details will be emailed to parents/carers, rather than the young people themselves.

25. A parent/carer is required to be present at all times during the session, making themselves known at the beginning and end of the session and being around in the background at all times.
26. At least two people who have been safely recruited to work with children / young people should be present. These should both be live before any children or young people join the meeting.
27. All participants should be in a communal area of their home (not in bedrooms or bathrooms).
28. All participants should be fully dressed in daytime clothes.

This church appoints the Reverend Katy Cunliffe, Nic Duffy and Cat O’Gara as the named people for social media.

Signed



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Reverend Katy Cunliffe  
Vicar