

## Use of Social Media

### St John's and St Andrew's Churches, Yeovil

Social Media can be a useful tool for engaging with the worshipping church and wider community. It is used freely by a wide range of age groups and might include, for example, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp. It also includes joining web page discussions and forums.

This policy is intended to be a living document that reflects the current needs of **St John's and St Andrew's**. To help facilitate safe spaces for conversation, community and dialogue within **St John's and St Andrew's** on social media outlets, the following policy will be observed in the management of user-generated content submitted to **St John's and St Andrew's** social media platforms.

Any reference to children or young people refers to those under 18 years of age.

As a church it is right that we engage in using these platforms as appropriate. However, we have a responsibility to ensure that we safeguard against risks which may include:

- Forming inappropriate relationships
- Making offensive, sexual or suggestive comments
- Blurring the boundaries between public work/ministry and private life
- Grooming and impersonation
- Bullying and harassment

#### What is social media?

Social Media, in this policy, refers to all online communication in a public space, from Blogging, Zoom, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, email, Instagram, YouTube and other social media platforms.

Engagement through a computer or smartphone screen should not change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility, good manners and Christian witness. Safeguarding and compliance with GDPR and data protection standards remains paramount.

Software applications such as Snapchat that routinely delete information and files/attachments shared after they are seen **are not** permitted for use in church activities.

#### Who is covered by this policy?

The Social Media Policy is designed to ensure that we communicate within the law and in a way consistent with our Christian character. This Policy recognises that the Christian faith has communication (the word – written or spoken), at its heart and that electronic communications are now a central part of everyday life. In this sense it has a vital role in updating, co-ordinating and improving the experiences of Christian groups (such as youth groups, community care groups, house groups and prayer ministry). It is also recognised that with this comes risk, and the following guidance and responsibilities section defines how risks are minimised and mitigated.

**St John's and St Andrew's** recognises the following activities which are approved to use social media.

- Prayer chain WhatsApp Groups
- Fellowship groups WhatsApp Groups
- Children and youth work WhatsApp Groups
- Holiday club planning team WhatsApp Group
- Church Facebook, Instagram and Messenger

Once a WhatsApp group has been set up, if additional members are to be added, their permission should be sought before doing so.

If a new group is to be set up, the Church Administrator is to be informed so that this policy can be current and confirmation that this policy has been read by all involved must be given at that time.

### **Standards and responsibilities**

**St John's and St Andrew's** expect the use of social media to maintain the high standards set in the following guidance and responsibilities at Appendix A. Any breach of these standards will be considered as a breach of this policy and steps will be taken to address that behaviour as appropriate.

#### **In 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 Parish Safeguarding officer.
- 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 how 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 is important we apply our values in the way we express them. Individuals will 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 give 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.

This guidance should be read alongside St John's and St Andrew's Safeguarding Policy. Any online concerns with regard to safeguarding should be reported immediately and in line with the Safeguarding Policy.

## **Appendix A**

### **Guidance and responsibilities**

#### **1. Public Domain**

The law views anything shared online as being in the public domain. Sharing thoughts and reflections with friends using social media or email might feel personal and private; but if more than one person can access what we have written, it is highly likely that the law would class it as "published". It is subject to the law touching libel, copyright, freedom of information and data protection.

If we wouldn't say something in the local newspapers, we shouldn't say it online.

There must be no swearing or offensive language.

#### **2. Permanence**

Anything said on the Web can be assumed to be permanent. Even if we delete a comment made on a website, it could still have already been seen by other people, re-published, or had a screenshot picture taken. It is easy to say something in the heat of the moment that we regret later, but it could remain permanently online for all to see.

#### **3. Security**

It is absolutely not safe to assume anything electronic is secure. Privacy settings on social media tools might mean comments going only to accepted "friends" or "followers" but there is no guarantee that they will not pass (repost) them outside trusted circles.

#### **4. Gossip**

Social media can pose a risk to confidentiality and be intrusive. Social media does not change our fundamental understanding about confidentiality in the life of the Church. When telling a story about a situation which involves someone else, it is always useful to pose the question "Is this my story to tell?"

Furthermore, we should ask if the story is likely to cause distress, inconvenience, upset or embarrassment to others if they discovered it had been shared in this way. If in any doubt at all, it should not be shared online.

#### **5. Representatives**

If we are church members a leader or helper in any type of group or a church employee, anything we do or say in the public domain will be interpreted by the public as representative of attitudes and behaviour in the Church. Controversial, hasty or insensitive comments can quickly attract the attention of the media. In the web environment, the person pressing the keys is ultimately responsible for their own online activities, but they can tar a lot of others with their own brush in the eyes of the media.

#### **6. Separation**

Keep a clear separation between personal and corporate accounts. If you tweet/message as yourself, mark the account clearly as "my own views" so there is no suggestion your opinions represent a wider church or organisation. If you tweet/message from an account representing the church, then make sure you avoid expressing personal opinions. Any account which carries the logo, address or website of the church should be seen as a corporate account and only speak for the church.

#### **7. Recommendations**

Take care with external links. When you link to material, check out the website you are linking to – is its overall focus one you are happy to publicise and promote and is in line with our church's teaching.

## **8. Real-time Relationships**

Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent. Healthy boundaries and practices must be adhered to just as they should be in the physical world. In the virtual world, “friend” or “follower” can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate through that medium. In the physical world, friend can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self-disclosure, mutuality and expectations for relationship.

## **9. Web cameras and livestreaming videos**

Recorded Videos may not be posted by members unless authorised by the administrator, member of the ministry team or appropriate designated person.

They must be relevant, appropriate and Christian in appearance and content and must comply with copyright legislation.

## **10. Safeguarding**

Laws regarding the reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world. Very clear boundaries must be maintained when communicating with children and young people. The law and policies on Safeguarding apply in communications with children and young people by whatever means, and Safeguarding guidelines apply fully online.

Communications should be public and in the view of whole groups, not individuals. Private messages should not be exchanged with young people via social media.

## **11. Emails**

When email is used, carefully check that you are representing what you 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 e-mail addresses. 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.

## **13. Pictures**

Photos, files and attachments will not be posted by members unless first vetted and authorised or unless written consent is given. Pictures of children should be discouraged, and prior permission needs to be obtained from authorised personnel by the administrator, member of the ministry team or appropriate designated person for any photographing of children.

The list below provides a simple point of reference for gaining consent regarding the use of images of children

- Children under the age of 13: consent should be gained from their parents;
- Children aged between 13 and 16: consent should be gained from parents and the children themselves;
- Children aged 17: consent should be gained from the children themselves.

When taking photos of vulnerable adults for use in presentations, verbal consent should be obtained.

## **14. Personal accounts**

Personal social media accounts should be kept distinct from accounts relating to church roles and responsibilities and should be clearly labelled so that the views expressed cannot be taken to represent those of the Parish. Nonetheless, church members administering online duties for the church should ensure that their personal social media use is conducted in a manner consistent with their Christian character and this policy.

**This guidance should be read alongside St John's and St Andrews's Safeguarding Policy. Any online concerns with regard to safeguarding should be reported immediately and in line with the Safeguarding Policy.**

**Other sources of useful guidance:**

“Safe Environment and Activities Guidance”

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Safer%20Environment%20and%20Activities%20Oct19.pdf>

“Using Zoom for video meetings with young people”

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Being%20connected%20with%20ZOOM%20safely.pdf>