

Social Media-Acceptable Use Policy
St. Luke's Maidenhead

Policy Statement

The internet provides unique opportunities for the members of St. Luke's church paid staff and volunteers to promote activities and events, share information and participate in interactive discussions on particular topics using a wide variety of social media. St. Luke's particularly uses:

Facebook

WhatsApp

YouTube

Zoom

We actively encourage staff of St. Luke's church to use these mediums, but we also recognise that use of social media can potentially pose risks to St. Luke's church confidential information and reputation and can jeopardise its compliance with legal obligations.

To minimise these risks, to avoid loss of mission opportunities and to ensure that St. Luke's church Information and Communications Technology (ICT) systems are used only for appropriate purposes, we expect all church members to adhere to this policy both on the Church premises and in their own time.

This policy aims to ensure that our paid employees and volunteers are protected while using social media and feel empowered to contribute to wider online activity when it supports their role within the church. Virtual relationships should not take place in isolation but be an extension of real-life interaction.

Scope

Young people, for this purpose, are defined as those in school years 7 to 13 or equivalent. Where a young person reaches the age of 18 but remains in youth work provision it is good practice to adhere to this policy. Children in year 6 and below should not normally be communicated with by the church using social media or mobile phones.

Introduction

This policy should be read alongside St. Luke's church and Oxford Diocesan policies and procedures on Whistleblowing; Disciplinary action; Complaints; Anti-bullying; Inclusion and Equal Opportunities and the overarching Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

The policy and the procedures that it underpins apply to all church members, including Trustees (PCC members), paid staff, volunteers and anyone working and communicating on behalf of St. Luke's church.

"Social Media" is the broad term used for the set of online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other in various ways.

St. Luke's church wishes to ensure that use of social media does not expose the church to security risks or reputational damage and is respectful of all people.

Aims of the policy

The aim of the policy is to:

- Provide staff and volunteers with the overarching principles that guide to e-safety and so they do not put themselves in a vulnerable position when using social media
- Protect all people who receive the church's services and who make use of social media and information technology (such as mobile phones/devices, games consoles and the internet) as part of their involvement with us
- Ensure church information remains secure and is not compromised
- Ensure church's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected
- Ensure that all people are protected.

This policy applies to the use of social media for both official church business and personal purposes, whether during working hours or otherwise, and regardless of whether the social media is accessed using church equipment, public equipment or personal equipment.

Breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal for paid employees. Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of whether the breach is committed during working hours, and regardless of whether church equipment or facilities are used for the purpose of committing the breach. Any member of the church suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be required to cooperate with the PCC investigation, which may involve handing over relevant passwords and login details.

Anyone may be asked to remove internet and/or social media postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may result in disciplinary action.

Privacy

The lines between public and private can become blurred so church members must assume that everything they write is permanent and can be viewed by anyone at any time. Also, they must assume that everything can be traced back to them personally as well as to their colleagues or the church.

Use of social media for purely personal reasons does not need approval, but members should be aware that they are always in a position of trust, that they may be perceived as an ambassador for the church, and they are advised to exercise caution.

Responsibilities

Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy, making recommendations for change to minimise risks, and ensuring that the policy meets legal requirements and reflects best practice lies with the PCC.

The PCC will review and update the policy annually, and any significant changes will be communicated accordingly.

The PCC should approve the use of social media by the church and appoint two administrators. It may be appropriate to make more detailed requirements, e.g., about membership, postings, permissions.

The church's experience in using social media should be included in the annual safeguarding report to the PCC.

All members of the church are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it.

Any misuse of social media or breach of this policy should be reported to the incumbent or a churchwarden.

St. Luke's church will ensure this policy is accessible to all members of staff and volunteers and is incorporated in induction information.

Personal Obligations

Members should note the following requirements for **personal** internet presence:

- A personal email address and not a church email address should be used.
- Personal settings on social media sites should be set to ensure inappropriate information is not put into the public domain by mistake.
- Personal sites must not be used to attack or abuse colleagues, church members, young people/children or 3rd party organisations with whom church is actively engaged.
- The privacy and feelings of others should be respected. Making comments about certain personal characteristics could constitute harassment under the Equality Act 2010 and could result in prosecution under that or other legislation.
- Contact details or pictures etc. of other members of staff, church members or children/young people should not be included without their prior permission (or their parents in the case of children).
- If the law is broken on a personal site (for example by posting something defamatory), responsibility lies with the member, not the church.

Staff Member / Volunteers

- Personal responsibility must be taken for any social media content. Anyone who can be identified as working for the church must make sure their profiles and anything they post are congruent with how the church expects them to present themselves to colleagues and other members. They must be mindful that even if they do not name the church as their employer, people who know them and where they work may still make an unwelcome association with the church. If they are in any doubt about what is and is not acceptable, they must discuss this with the incumbent or churchwarden.
- The church's interests must be protected, and nothing must be published that could directly or indirectly damage these or compromise the church's reputation.
- Respect must always be shown to others when using social media. Criticism or defamatory comments about the church, young people/children, colleagues, members of the church or anybody else must never be made.
- Staff or volunteers must not do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, bullying or harassment of any individual, for example by:
 - making offensive or derogatory comments relating to age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or partnership status, race, religion/belief or non-belief, sex or sexual orientation, or any other distinction
 - using social media to bully another individual
 - posting images that are discriminatory or offensive, or links to such content.
- If a staff member or volunteer thinks something on their site gives rise to concerns about a conflict of interest and, in particular, concerns about impartiality or confidentiality, this must be discussed with the incumbent in the first instance, or churchwardens.
- Confidential information about the church, its staff, members or its intellectual property must not be revealed. This might include aspects of church policy or details of internal discussions. The incumbent, in the first instance, or churchwarden should be consulted if a staff member or volunteer is unclear about what might be confidential.
- If an offer of payment is made for site content this could constitute a conflict of interest and the incumbent, in the first instance, or churchwarden should be consulted.
- If someone from the media or press contacts about posts on a church or personal site which relate to the church, this must be discussed with the incumbent in the first instance, or churchwardens.

Social Media and Young People/Children

As an organisation working with young people, St. Luke's church acknowledges the impact and involvement that social networking & messenger sites/apps such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp have on the lives of young people, and their role in the ways which young people interact with each other. There is huge potential for these tools to be

used by youth workers to communicate activities with young people, to encourage them in their faith and to play a part in the discipleship of young people beyond face-to-face groups.

At the same time, we acknowledge the dangers and potential risks that these sites can pose to both young people and youth workers and that they have the potential to be abused as ways of interacting with young people. Therefore, as an organisation any youth worker using social networking as part of their ongoing work with young people must abide by the following guidelines, to safeguard both workers and young people involved.

Guidelines For Using Social Networking With Young People

Use of Messages & Communication with Individuals

All social networks allow private messaging to take place between 'friends'. There are times when one-to-one communication is appropriate, however the church would strongly advise that any one-to-one communication using social media is kept to a minimum and that it is done via a platform that keeps a record of these messages (i.e., Facebook Messenger), preferably using a specific work account.

In all communication with young people using social networking sites, it is advisable to not use abbreviations (for example: LOL) as these can often be misinterpreted by parents.

If a member is concerned about a young person from their posts on a social media network, then the church Safeguarding Policy should be consulted, and further advice sought from the incumbent or Parish Safeguarding Officer.

When using social networks to communicate with young people the church staff will:

- Use a separate, designated social media account for the purposes of the youth organisation. This account may be examined by the incumbent or churchwardens and should be used for youth purposes only, not as a worker's personal account.
- Keep public or keep logged any communication using the Social Media accounts. Messages will be saved and kept (both incoming and outgoing).
- Keep appropriate all contact with young people using social media and will not use abbreviations/language that could be misunderstood by a parent or guardian (e.g., LOL, IDK (I don't know) and emojis).
- Not use these accounts after 8pm, in order to maintain a safe boundary between work and personal life.
- Ensure all communications with young people on social media are made with parental consent and will not have direct personal contact with children under the age of 16. This should be via parents.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp can be a great tool for creating group messages between young people. The following guidelines will apply:

- Parental permission will be sought first.
- At least two youth workers will be part of a WhatsApp group chat.
- When using WhatsApp group chats, adding people to the group discloses their mobile numbers to the rest of the group. Parents/carers will be notified of this.
- WhatsApp allows a backup of chats, and this will be done periodically to enable the church to have a local copy.

All the above also relates to adults and care should be taken to respect all phone numbers.

Use of Virtual Platforms, e.g., Zoom

When using Zoom or other platforms care should be taken to ensure the confidentiality of those who prefer not to turn on cameras. Participants whose identity cannot be verified shall be removed by the Zoom leader.

Parish application of this policy

Section 12 of the Parish Safeguarding Handbook requires the PCC to appoint a named person to whom all social media users are accountable. This PCC appoints the incumbent, the Revd. Sally Lynch, as that person.

For advice on Safeguarding contact:

The Parish Safeguarding Officer or

The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser

safeguarding@oxfordanglican.org

Tel: 01865 208267

Adopted by St. Luke's PCC on 09th March 2021

Amended March 2023

This review: March 2024

Next review: March 2025