



The following policy was agreed at the Parochial Church Council (PCC) meeting held on:

Use of Social Media policy

Summary

1. The church of St Michael and All Angels, Hughenden uses social media to engage with its congregation and other members of the local parish. This policy defines the procedures and guidelines for that use of social media. It should be read alongside the church's Safeguarding Policy, with any concerns regarding Safeguarding reported immediately.

Introduction

2. 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..
3. This policy is a living document that reflects the current needs of the St Michael and All Angels. To help facilitate safe spaces for conversation, community and dialogue within our church, the PCC will observe this policy in its management of user-generated content submitted to social media platforms.
4. As a church it is right that we engage in using these platforms as appropriate to our need. However, we have a responsibility to ensure that we safeguard against risks which may include:
 - a) forming inappropriate relationships
 - b) making offensive, sexual, or suggestive comments
 - c) blurring boundaries between public work/ministry and private life
 - d) grooming and impersonation
 - e) bullying and harassment.
 - f) victimization.
5. Social Media, in this policy, refers to all online communication in a public space, from Blogging, Zoom, Teams, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, e-mail and other recognised social media platforms.

6. 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 remain paramount.

Policy

7. This policy is designed to ensure that we communicate within the law and in a way consistent with our Christian character. It 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 'guidance and responsibilities' section below describes how risks are minimised and mitigated.
8. The PCC recognises the following activities may involve the use of social media:
 - a. Advertising services and events.
 - b. Offering support to the parish and local community.
 - c. Providing updates on matters affecting the congregation, such as short notice changes to service times.
 - d. Offering collective prayers or scripture passages relevant to local, national or international events.
9. The PCC will ensure the use of social media maintains the high standards set in the following below guidance and the additional guidance and responsibilities at Annex A. Any breach of these standards will be considered a breach of this policy and appropriate steps will be taken to address the matter.
10. Applications such as Snapchat, that routinely delete information and files/attachments shared after they are seen, are not permitted for use in church activities.

Guidelines

11. 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:

- a) Be safe- the safety of children, young people and adults at risk must be maintained at all times. If you have any concerns, ask our safeguarding lead (Parish Safeguarding Officer).
- b) 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.

- c) **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.
- d) **Be honest**- don't mislead people about who you are.
- e) **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.
- f) **Be a good ambassador for Christ's church**- personal and professional life can easily become blurred online so think before you post.
- g) **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 will not engage in online disputes and arguments contrary to group harmony or that may cause wider offence and distress.
- h) **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.
- i) **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.

Annex A: Social media policy 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 ourselves 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, youth leaders or church employees, 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?

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. Using 'Zoom' or live streaming platforms safely. More detailed guidance on Safeguarding guidance for churches using video conferencing as part of their ministry can be found at:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Guidance-on-safeguarding-whilst-using-videoconferencing-platforms-for-ministry-v1-1.docx>

11. Safeguarding. Laws regarding the reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of . 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.

12. Emails. Face to face communication is always preferred, please try to speak to people face to face or via the telephone. Use e-mail as a last resort. 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. 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.

13. Pictures. Photos, files, attachments and/or embedded content 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, i.e. authorised by the administrator, member of the ministry team or appropriate designated person for any photographing of children.

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.

Guidelines for using your personal social media:

- Always use a public group to communicate where possible.
- The material you put on social media should reflect your beliefs and values and not undermine those of the church.
- You should not post any content on your profiles which would be professionally inappropriate for young people to know or see, or you should use the privacy settings of a site to ensure this content is not accessible to young people

- You should lead by example, and ensure you are engaging with social media safely and appropriately.
- No photos of young people are to be posted on personal social media pages.
- No invitations to become a 'friend' should be sent to young people through your personal page – if you are happy to be friends with young people over the age of 16 and it is appropriate you should wait for their request
- Avoid any private chats or messages from young people - make sure your conversations are kept public and can be seen by other appropriate adults.
- Always manage your privacy settings to avoid people from trying to log in to your social media pages.
- Avoid Relay Chat (IRC) from your personal page e.g. Facebook messenger, SnapChat, etc.
- Ensure that this mode of social media is not going to result in sharing someone's personal details with others, without their permission.

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>

“Guidance on Safeguarding whilst using video conferencing platforms for Ministry”

<https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Guidance-on-safeguarding-whilst-using-videoconferencing-platforms-for-ministry-v1-1.docx>

“Using Zoom for video meetings with young people”

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