Holy Trinity Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

29th April 2020 Version 2.0

Agreed by the PCC on:

To be reviewed by the PCC on:

Holy Trinity Church Parochial Church Council encourages the use of Social Media and Electronic Communication by Safer-Recruited officers as part of their roles at Holy Trinity in accordance with the following policy and our Social Media Guidelines:

1.0 General

1.1 Social media enable users to create and share content and keep in touch with other users. They include maintaining a profile on a networking site such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram; writing or commenting on a blog, whether it is your own or the blog of another person; and taking part in discussions on web forums or message boards. For many, especially young people, using social media is an extension of physical face-to-face relationships. It is therefore important that the church also engage with their community and worshippers through these platforms, and treat relationships in this context with at least the same care, kindness and sound judgement we would face-to-face interactions.

2.0 Key principles

2.1 Social media when used well will enable church to…

2.1.1 Be a spiritual family with healthy inter-generational relationships;

2.1.2 Engage in the ministry to which it is called;

2.1.3 Protect all people, whether vulnerable or not, from physical, emotional and spiritual harm.

2.2 These three principles should be used to guide and interpret our policy and use of social media.

3.0 Content

3.1   All content and use must be in accordance with our social media guidelines.

3.2   We will assume everything electronic is permanent.

> *Social media updates are immediate and will outdate quickly BUT they can have a more lasting impact and you should assume that anything you post is permanent and will be shared with others. Even if you delete it later on, it may have been seen and re-published or referred to elsewhere.*

3.3   We will be careful what we post.

> *The immediacy of social media is one of its benefits – we can respond quickly to questions, correct misunderstandings, give our perspective about a breaking story in the news media. Responding quickly does not mean doing so without due consideration*

3.4   We will not post anything contradictory to the ethos, beliefs or interests of Holy Trinity Church and PCC.

3.5   We will not refer to, link to, or tag other people without first obtaining their express permission. When we do refer to other people we will only use first names and not release any personal information.

4.0 Hardware and software

4.1   We will not promote any particular software or hardware.

4.2   We will take due care to ensure that the platforms we use are safe and fit for purpose.

4.3   Individuals are responsible for their own hardware, software and internet security and we encourage them to use these with due care and diligence.

5.0 Hours of use

5.1   We discourage electronic communication outside of normal sociable hours, understood to be 8:30am to 9pm. Messaging outside of these hours has the potential to be considered inappropriate.

5.2 With children, young people and vulnerable adults, we advise that communication is kept within the hours of 9am – 6pm. If a project or group takes place in the evening (after 5pm) then there should be no electronic communication after 9pm.

6.0 Electronic communication with children and young people

6.1 All communication with children and young people must be transparent, accessible to parents, approved by parents and in normal circumstances include other leaders, and not private and individual.

6.2 We will only use electronic communication for reasons relating to church with children and young people, not for general socialising.

6.3 The electronic communication will, in normal circumstances, be set up as part of a group communication and not by an individual.

6.4 Email will be used primarily to communicate specific information (times and dates of events). It will not primarily be used as a relationship building tool. Email histories should be kept and dated.

7.0 Mobile phones with children and young people

7.1 We recognise that it is hard to communicate electronically without leaders using their own device and number. However, unless very necessary, we discourage leaders giving out or making known their personal phone number to children, young people or vulnerable adults.

7.2 With children and young people, text messaging is usually not appropriate unless absolutely necessary (see key point 7.1 above). Where texts are used, another leader must be included, this made clear to the recipient, and a record kept.

7.3 Phone conversations and, where absolutely necessary, texts, should in normal circumstances only be used to communicate information. We discourage phone conversations which are not primarily communicating information.

7.4 When leaders have received or made a phone call or text to children or a young person that is not giving out information they must make a record of the conversation and report it the group leader and/or Parish Safeguarding Officer.

8.0 Electronic communication and phones with vulnerable adults

8.1 All communication with vulnerable adults must be transparent and above reproach. We recognise that we are all vulnerable at various times in our lives.

8.2 Communication with vulnerable adults must respect GDPR laws, confidentiality and Safeguarding guidelines.

8.3 A record must be kept of communication with vulnerable adults respecting 9.2 above. This record must be fully accessible on request by relevant authorities including the PSO, Vicar and DSO.

9.0 Social networking

9.1 We allow social network pages (e.g. a Facebook group) to be set up for projects or groups.

9.2 As a church group, only registered and/or regular group members should be invited, all subject to our policy and guidelines.

9.3 The terms of service of the social network must be followed, including any age-limits. We will not set up social network groups for those below the legal age limits.

9.4 Only social networking accounts agreed with the PSO will be used for contact with children and young people. These should normally be an account set up specifically for this purpose on behalf of a group rather than an individual.

9.5 Children or young people under the age of 18 who are part of the children's and youth ministry should not be added to leader's or church members' personal social networking pages.

9.6 Personal social networking or instant messaging accounts should not be used for contact with children and young people.

10.0 Safeguarding

10.1 Use of social media with children, young people and vulnerable adults most be in accordance with safe-guarding guidelines and best-practice.

10.2   Parental consent for using electronic forms of communication is essential and should be included on annual consent forms or by letter with a return slip agreeing to the use of this form of communication. It should be outlined what means you will be using for communication and what information you will be communicating. It is important to explain this policy and practice to parents and carers.

10.3   Conference calling, chat rooms and social media must be considered similar to physical rooms (the "room"):

10.3.1   At least two safer-recruited PCC-authorised leaders must be actively present before the young people or vulnerable adults are admitted. If only two leaders, they must not live in the same household and must not be on the same device.

10.3.2   If at any time the number of said leaders actively present (i.e. engaging with the screen) drops below two, the "room" must be suspended or closed immediately. This would include for a leader leaving the screen for a few minutes, e.g. to answer the door or go to the toilet.

10.3.3   The said leaders must be the last to leave the room, once all the young people/vulnerable adults have left.

10.3.4   Only the authorised leaders can add people to the room.

10.3.5   There must be no way for unauthorised people to join the room.

10.3.6   Content in the room must always be within the control of the authorised leaders. Only they should be able to share the content of their screens, or allow others to do so if they are confident what will be shared is appropriate and edifying.

10.3.7   Video recording of sessions or taking screen shots is not permitted.

10.3.8   A record must be kept of who is in the room, and wherever possible, when they entered and when they left.

10.4   Conversations over social-media and text must be considered similar to physical conversations and subject to the same guidelines.

10.4.1 See 6.1. above.

10.5 Leaders must consider seriously how to minimise the possibility of abuse including cyber-bullying and spiritual abuse.

10.5.1 Children, young people and vulnerable adults should not be able to be on the "platform" or in the "room" without two authorised leaders present.

10.5.2 Comments in a group or platform or room must be able to be moderated by the leaders.

10.5.3 Leaders need to think very cautiously about contexts set up by church in which the young people could engage with one another without leaders present or quickly moderating the content. For instance, a WhatsApp group for young people could be inappropriate because authorised leaders are not able to monitor it over-night.

10.5.4 The children, young people and vulnerable adults must be able to leave at any point should they wish.

10.5.5 Leaders must be aware of imbalances of power and not be perceived to put pressure on other users of the room.

11.0 Legality

11.1 We will abide by the legal terms of service of the platforms and software we use and encourage our group members to do so also.

11.2 We recognise that content on social media is classed as published in the public domain and subject to legislation around libel, defamation, copyright and data protection. If we wouldn't say something in a public meeting or to someone's face or write it on headed paper, we will not say it online.

12.0 Misuse

12.1 Any misuse, abuse, or practice contrary to this policy or our Social Media Guidelines must in the first instance be reported to the Parish Safeguarding Officer or Vicar.

13.0 Questions and clarifications

13.1 Any queries or questions as to this policy must be directed in the first instance to the Parish Safeguarding Officer or Vicar.