



# Stoke Poges Church

St Giles' and St Andrew's

## Use of Social Media Policy & Private Messaging

### Introduction

Social media are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

### Social media activities include:

- Maintaining a profile page on a networking site such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn
- Writing or commenting on a blog, whether it is the church's own or the blog of another person
- Taking part in discussions on web forums or message boards

Social media are important components in how the church relates to the community and indeed how the community relates to the church. For young people, it is now a matter of course to use social media, and most adults, including older adults, do so also.

The widespread availability of social media means it is important to understand how to use it responsibly and requires extra care when dealing with young people and vulnerable adults.

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.

### Consents

Parents and guardians will be given the option to consent to the following:

- Photos to be taken by a designated photographer at youth events and then used in official church publications, the church's Facebook group, the church website and displays. Bear in mind that traditional media, such as printed newspapers, expect to be able to use images they have been sent in their social media outlets as well, so parental consents must be obtained and refusals clearly communicated.
- Young people to have email contact with staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy.
- Young people to make and receive calls and texts to and from staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy.
- Young people to connect to their group's Facebook page.

### Timing

Communication should not take place with young people after 9.30pm or on staff members' days off. Note this does not mean staff and volunteers have to be available to young people at all other times. Young people should also note that, whilst staff and volunteers will exercise appropriate discretion in dealing with the substance of communication, they cannot promise confidentiality.

## **Privacy**

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

Use of social media for purely personal reasons does not need approval but even here, church staff and volunteers should be aware that they are at all times in a position of trust, that they may be perceived as an ambassador for the church and they are advised to exercise caution and to consider following the controls set out under “Restrictions” and “Good practice”, below.

## **Forms of social networking**

The church should agree which forms of social networking will be used for church purposes. This decision should be reviewed at least once a year.

Care should be taken when using visual media, including webcams, Zoom and Skype, as young people often use computers in their bedrooms.

## **Role of the PCC**

The PCC will 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 and permissions.

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

## **Restrictions**

Staff and volunteers must ensure that their content or links to other content does not contain:

- Libellous, defamatory, bullying or harassing statements
- Breaches of copyright and data protection
- Material of an illegal nature
- Offensive sexual references
- Inappropriate language

or bring the church into disrepute or compromise its reputation.

## **Good practice**

When using any form of social networking to communicate with children, young people or adults when they are vulnerable, the following controls, based on the Diocesan Safeguarding Policies, should be followed to ensure the protection of all those involved:

- Display only appropriate and necessary information about yourself.
- Ensure personal telephone numbers and email contacts are not visible on public display on social media;
- Only use instant messaging to further the aims of your church role and not for personal reasons.
- Do not delete any messages/ threads through social networking sites, so that you can provide evidence of your exchange should the necessity arise.
- Download to hard copy any inappropriate material received by electronic means and show to your group leader, line manager or the Incumbent.
- Carefully consider what apps display on your online activity.
- Be discerning about making public comments/rebuke and liking a post.
- Do not comment on photos or posts, unless appropriate to your church role.
- Never add a young person or adult when they are vulnerable as a friend, unless they request this. It is at your discretion as to whether the request is accepted. Consider carefully the potential vulnerability of that person before accepting them as a friend, especially if the accompanied relationship is not strong or well established.
- Do not accept friend requests out of social network terms (i.e. under 13 years of age for Facebook)

- Maintain the upmost integrity – remember that your profile only supplements the real person and is not an alter-ego.
- Review all posts and tags before being made public to friends.
- Do not Facebook stalk (i.e. dig through people’s Facebook pages to find out about them).
- Use passwords and log off promptly after use to ensure that nobody else can use social media pretending to be you.

**Compliance**

Breaching the conditions set out in this policy will result in the offending content being removed and may lead to the employee or volunteer being suspended from using social media as a representative of the church. A note of the incident will be kept and in the case of a safeguarding issue will be reported to the Diocesan Safeguarding team or the police if appropriate. For staff, more serious violations will also be pursued through the provisions of the Disciplinary Procedure and could include dismissal.

**Any questions or queries contact:**  
**Rev Natasha Brady - 01753 645389 / [vicar@stokepogeschurch.org](mailto:vicar@stokepogeschurch.org)**

For further advice on safeguarding contact the Oxford Diocese Safeguarding team:

**During office hours:**

Call 01865 208 295 or email [safeguardingreferrals@oxford.anglican.org](mailto:safeguardingreferrals@oxford.anglican.org) for urgent safeguarding concerns Mon-Thurs 9am-5pm and Fri 9am-4.30pm.

All phone or email referrals to the safeguarding team must be followed up by completing the Safeguarding referral form and returning it to [safeguardingreferrals@oxford.anglican.org](mailto:safeguardingreferrals@oxford.anglican.org)

**At other times:**

For urgent safeguarding enquiries outside of operational hours, please call our partners Thirtyone:eight on +44 (0) 303 003 1111 for confidential advice, guidance and support.

Vicar: \_\_\_\_\_ Date approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Churchwarden: \_\_\_\_\_ Churchwarden: \_\_\_\_\_