



## **St Peter's Church Wolvercote and All Saints' Wytham Social Media Safeguarding Guidance 2023**

The St Peter's Wolvercote and All Saints' Wytham Parochial Church Councils (PCC) considered and adopted Church of England Use of Social Media Safeguarding Guidance on 17 and 24 January 2023, respectively.

**Social media sites** enable users to create and share content and keep in touch with other users. This includes maintaining a profile on a networking site such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat; writing or commenting on a blog, whether it is your own or that 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 churches also engage with their community and worshippers through these platforms.

However, this must be done safely to avoid the risk of:

- Forming inappropriate relationships.
- Saying things you should not, such as offensive, sexual or suggestive comments.
- Blurring the boundaries between public work/ministry and your private life.
- Grooming, and impersonation, bullying and harassment.

### **The role of the PCC**

The PCC must approve the use of social media accounts and provision of mobile phones by the church. Where there are Facebook or similar online groups set up on the church's behalf, the PCC must ensure there is a named person to whom all users are accountable.

In our case, this role will be held by the Communications Group, named members of which (currently Julia Goddard, Val Tate and Kate Tuckett) will be responsible for the account name and password so they can at any time log on to the account to monitor all communications. They should be proactive in fulfilling this role. Communications must be accessible to these people who will remain bound by professional rules of confidentiality.

Where there is concern that a young person or adult is at risk of abuse, or they themselves pose a risk of abuse to others, safeguarding procedures must always be followed.

### **Guidance for church officers**

#### **Do:**

- Have your eyes open and be vigilant.
- Maintain the upmost integrity – honesty, transparency, consistency, and accountability are key. Treat online communication with children, young people, and adults as you would communication that is face to face. Always maintain the same level of confidentiality.
- Report any safeguarding concerns that arise on social media to the Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) and the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser (DSA).
- Always assume that everything you write is permanent and may be viewed by anyone at any time; and can be traced back to you personally, your colleagues or the church. Always think before you post.
- Draw clear boundaries around your social media usage associated with your private life and your use of

different social media for public ministry. Keep church account/s and profiles separate from your personal social media account/s e.g. only use a Facebook page, Twitter or blogs for public ministry, while keeping a separate Facebook profile for private life.

Always ask parents/carers for written consent to:

- Use and store photographs of children/young people from activities or events in official church publications, or on the church's social media, website and displays.
- Use telephone, text message, email, and other messaging services to communicate with young people.
  - Allow young people to view the church's social media pages.

Only use an approved church/ministry account to communicate with children, young people, their families, /carers, and/or vulnerable adults. The named person should be able to access this and review conversations, and the account should be visible to young people and their parents. Young people must be made aware that any communication will be viewed by all users

### **Do:**

Save any messages and threads through social networking sites, so that you can provide evidence to the named person of your exchange when required.

.. Avoid separate one-to-one communication with a child or young person.

Use clear and unambiguous language in all communications and avoid abbreviations that could be misinterpreted.

.. Be aware that the border between inappropriate, libellous, and illegal material can be very difficult to determine. Unless you are sure material is only inappropriate, delete.

.. Any inappropriate material received through social networking sites or other electronic means, invited or otherwise should be shown immediately to the named person, PSO, incumbent or, if appropriate, DSA

Use passwords and log off promptly after use to ensure that nobody else can use social media pretending to be you.

### **Do not:**

Use a personal Facebook or any other social media account in your work with children, young people, or vulnerable adults.

.. Add children, young people or vulnerable adults from work with church as friends on your personal accounts, or accept friend requests from children, young people or vulnerable adults.

Facebook stalk (i.e. dig through people's Facebook pages to find out about them).

Say anything on social media that you would not be happy saying in a public meeting, to someone's face, writing in a local newspaper or on headed notepaper.

Comment on photos or posts, or share content, unless appropriate to your church role.

Use visual media (e.g. Skype, Facetime) for one-to-one conversations with young people – use only in group settings. In particular, do not allow content to contain or share links to other sites that contain:

- Libellous, defamatory, bullying or harassing statements.
- Breaches of copyright and data protection.
- Material of an illegal nature.
- Offensive sexual or abusive references.
- Inappropriate language.
- Anything which may be harmful to a child, young person, or vulnerable adult, or which may bring the church into disrepute or compromise its reputation.

Texts or conversations that raise concerns should be passed on to the named person or the Parish Safeguarding Officer, incumbent (or if unavailable the Deputy Safeguarding Officer).

References - Parish Safeguarding Handbook (2018) P.47.

Church of England <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019->