ST. AUGUSTINE'S CHURCH
SCAYNES HILL

Social Media Policy

Introduction

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Parish of St Augustine's E-Safety Policy and alongside the policies on Safeguarding, Whistleblowing, Anti-Bullying and Reporting Concerns about a Child.

This policy applies to all paid staff, including clergy, church officers and PCC members, volunteers including those involved in children's and youth work, those involved in leading or coordinating music and worship and anyone else involved in working or volunteering on behalf of St Augustine's Church. The church in the parish/benefice of St Augustine's Church, Scaynes Hill have pledged to abide by the Social Media Community Guidelines of the Church of England.

This policy, which sets out how this parish Church uses social media, will be agreed by the PCC and will be shared among the congregation and wider community through the church website, noticeboard, and other regular communication.

Purpose of Policy

- To provide our staff and volunteers with a set of underpinning principles that guide our approach to the use of social media.
- To protect children, young people, adults and paid staff and volunteers from the risks associated with the use of social media.

What is Social Media?

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

- Email and messenger services
- Facebook, Google and other social networking sites e.g. YouTube
- Mobile phone text messages
- Twitter and "blogs"
- Digital photography
- Instagram and similar photo sharing sites
- Video conferencing/ chatting platforms such as Zoom, BlueJeans and Skype
- Websites

Social media has become an increasing influence on people's lives. For many, especially young people, using social media is an extension of face-to-face relationships. The use of social media can be of benefit to the Church providing the opportunity for networking, getting to know people, gaining and sharing information about church events, learning about the Christian faith and spreading the Gospel. As a church it is important that St Augustine's engages with its worshippers and the community through these platforms. However, this must be done safely to avoid risk to users.

Our use of Social Media

St Augustine's Church has official accounts on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Our social media accounts are the responsibility of the Vicar and managed by the Communications Team.

We do not use automation to post content, such as tools that generate tweets from RSS feeds. If you follow us, you can generally expect no more than 3 posts a day at this time, usually much less, covering the following:

- alerts about new content relating to the Church (news, events, publicity campaigns, etc)
- alerts about new content/resources relating to the wider Church/diocese or partner charities/charitable concerns supported by the Parish.

We follow organisations and public individuals which share in or represent the ministry of the Church in the Diocese of Chichester. They include (but are not exclusively limited to) other parishes, Christians, the local church community and charitable organisations which they support. We do not automatically follow back new followers. Due to resource of time, we infrequently review our follower list. Being followed back does not imply endorsement of any kind.

We welcome feedback from all our followers and endeavour to join the conversation where possible. However, we are not able to reply individually to all the messages we receive.

The Vicar or representative reads all posts, comments, @replies and Direct Messages. We do not engage on issues of party politics or answer questions which may infringe personal privacy.

Communicating directly online is not encouraged. We may send messages to groups, rather than individuals, or share them publicly. If content relating to the parish or individuals is unwelcome or offensive it may be **removed and reported**. Social media users should be aware that the Parish Office is the point of contact for all enquiries relating to the Parish. The usual ways of contacting the office are detailed in the contact section of our website (link here): www.sash.org.uk.

Risks

- Forming inappropriate relationships
- Saying things you should not – with increased impact
- Blurring of public ministry/private life boundaries
- Grooming and impersonation
- Bullying and harassment

Good Practice Guidelines

These guidelines are based on principles of common sense and good judgement. Essentially you should participate in any online activity in the same way as you would in any other public forum.

Be safe. The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained. If you have any concerns speak to the Parish Safeguarding Officer.

Be respectful. Do not post or share content which could be deemed offensive to other readers.

Be kind. Treat others in the way that you would wish to be treated. If you have a criticism to make, consider not just whether you would say it in person, but the tone you would use.

Be honest. Don't mislead people about who you are or hide behind anonymity.

Take responsibility. You are responsible for the things you do, say and write. You should assume that anything you post is permanent. Even if you delete it later on, it may have been seen and re-published or referred to elsewhere. If you are not sure, don't post it.

Be a good ambassador. Personal and professional life can easily become blurred online so think before you post. Consider whether it is in line with church values and if it is helpful to past, current or future members of the church.

Disagree well. Some conversations can be places of robust disagreement and it is important that we apply our values in the way we express them.

Stay within the legal framework. If one or more people can access content online it is classed as published, in the public domain and subject to legislation around copyright, data protection, libel and defamation. If you wouldn't say something in a public meeting or to someone's face or write it in a newspaper or on headed paper – don't say it online.

Be careful to maintain confidentiality. Do not release sensitive or confidential information.

Be mindful of your own security. Don't overshare personal information.

Follow the rules. Abide by the terms and conditions of the various social media platforms and if you see a comment that you believe breaches their policies report it to the respective company.

Safeguarding

In addition to our Good Practice Guidelines, specific guidance on safeguarding to be found in the Parish Safeguarding Handbook, Section 12. will be followed in order to keep children, young people, vulnerable adults, paid staff and volunteers safe when using social media.

The role of the PCC –

The PCC must approve the use of social media and mobile phones by the church and which social media should be used. Where there are Facebook or similar online groups set up on the church's behalf, the PCC must ensure that there is a *named person* to whom all workers are accountable.
The named person must be a church officer, who should be aware of the account name and password so that they can at any time log onto the account to monitor the communications. The named person should be proactive in fulfilling this role.

Communications should be shared with the named person. Church officers 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

(A church officer is anyone appointed /elected by or on behalf of the Church to a post or role, whether they are ordained or lay, paid or unpaid.)

Do:

Be vigilant.

Maintain the utmost integrity – honesty, transparency, consistency and accountability. Treat online communication with children, young people and adults as you would communication that is face to face. Maintain the same level of confidentiality.

Report any safeguarding concerns that arise on social media to the PSO and the DSA.

Assume that what you write is permanent and may be viewed by anyone at any time.

Draw clear boundaries between personal social media usage and that associated with public ministry. Always ask parents/carers for 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 connect to the church's social media pages.

Use an approved church/ministry account to communicate with children, young people and vulnerable adults. The named person should be able to access this and review conversations. Ensure young people and their carers can easily find out who is responsible for the content.

Avoid 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.

Save and download to hard copy any inappropriate material received through social networking sites or other electronic means and show immediately to the named person, PSO, incumbent or, if appropriate, DSA.

Follow best practice on connecting safely to video conferencing platforms.

Do not:

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

Add children, young people or vulnerable adults as friends on your personal accounts.

Say anything on social media that you would not say in a public meeting, to someone's face, write 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 (eg Skype, Facetime, Zoom) for one-to-one conversations with young people – use only in group settings.

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.

Mobile phones

If possible, church officers should be supplied with a mobile phone dedicated for work purposes.

Further References:

(Church of England Policy and Practice Guidance)
Parish Safeguarding Handbook
Safer Environments and Activities
The Code of Safer Working Practice
(Church of England Safeguarding and Covid-19)
Advice for using video conferencing for youth work during Covid -19
Being connected with Zoom safely

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March 2023

Updated By David Smith
April 2024