

Trentham Parish Church, Diocese of Lichfield

Safeguarding Policy and Procedures

Policy on Social Media

(based upon The Diocese of Lichfield 'Section 08: Conduct and performance' policy for clergy found in the Diocesan Staff Employment Handbook www.lichfield.anglican.org/section-08-conduct-and-performance.php).

Amended August 2024

Introduction

Social media is a wonderful tool that can be used for the good of God's Kingdom. However, as with any medium, using it has its risks and therefore the following policy aims to provide guidance and boundaries to ensure safe and fruitful use of Social media. The Social Media Policy is designed to ensure that we communicate within the law and in a way consistent with our Christian character. Engagement with social media, whether it be through a computer or smartphone screen, should not change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility, good manners and Christian witness.

What is social media? Social Media, in this policy, refers to all online communication in a public space, from blogging to Twitter and particularly for us posting on Facebook. It may also cover involvement in large scale messaging such as WhatsApp chats with large numbers of people involved.

Guidelines for safe use

Social media is 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 newspaper, we shouldn't say it online.

Social media is permanent: 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.

Social media is vulnerable: 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.

Social media is not confidential: 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 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.

Social media represents us, our church and God's Kingdom: As church members and leaders within Trentham Parish Church, anything we do or say online could be interpreted by the public as representative of attitudes and behaviour in the Church. Controversial, hasty or insensitive comments can quickly spread and cause unnecessary harm. 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.

Social media blurs professional and personal lives: For those using social media on the church's behalf, it is crucial to keep a clear separation between our personal and Church account. If you post online from an account representing the church, then make sure you avoid expressing personal opinions.

Social media and the vulnerable: Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world (See Parish Safeguarding Policy for details). Very clear boundaries must be maintained when communicating with children and young people. The law and diocesan 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.