

## **St Mary's Eastrop – Social Media Policy**

### **Background and purpose**

The use of social media has become more common and is a useful tool to publicise and promote events and activities at St Mary's. However, it is important that the use of social media by St Mary's is properly regulated to ensure that there are appropriate measures in place for safeguarding of individuals and to protect St Mary's against misuse of social media and potential breach of third-party intellectual property rights. This policy has been formulated to put in place such measures.

It is recognised that the term "Social Media" is used for both broadcast channels such as Facebook and Instagram and closed channels such as WhatsApp groups. This policy will make this differentiation as appropriate.

The terms child, children, young person or young people in this policy refer to under 18s. If someone turns 18 while he or she is in a youth group for under 18s he or she will still be treated as a child whilst he or she remains a member of that group.

### **Scope and Risks**

Social media sites 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, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Snapchat; 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. This is regarded by this Policy as broadcast social media.

For many, especially young people, using social media is an extension of physical face-to-face relationships. Therefore, it is important that St Mary's also engage with our community and church family 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.

### **Who does the policy apply to?**

This policy applies to staff members and volunteers. More detailed provisions are contained in the relevant Staff or Volunteer Handbook.

## **The Policy**

### **Approval of use of Social Media**

The PCC must have oversight of the use of broadcast social media by St Mary's. 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 staff and volunteers are accountable.

The named person must be a church office holder (e.g. PCC member, Churchwarden, Parish Safeguarding Officer) or a named member of staff, and should be aware of the account name and password so that they can at any time log on to the account to monitor the communications. The named person should be proactive in fulfilling this role.

It is not necessary to get approval of proposed communication in advance from the named person, provided that the communication complies with the principles set out in this Policy. In addition, Church officers remain bound by professional rules of confidentiality and it is of paramount importance that Safeguarding procedures are always followed; use of social media may enhance concerns that a young person or adult is at risk of abuse, or they themselves pose a risk of abuse to others.

### **Principles for use of Social Media**

1. Social media should never be used in a way that breaches any of our other policies. If a communication would not be appropriate outside social media, using social media does not make it appropriate.
2. Social media must not be used to debate, challenge, promote or support any political/social/cultural ideology, movement, message or campaign other than matters that are consistent with and advance our Christian ethos or mission.
3. Unless it advances our Christian ethos and mission, an individual should not use their own social media account in a way that St Mary's can be identified or that you could be perceived as speaking or acting on our behalf.
4. If you see social media content that disparages or reflects poorly on us, you should inform a Church Warden, a PCC Member, the Rector or another staff member.

### **Safeguarding**

Leaders and helpers should not have children or young people that they or others supervise as contacts/friends on social media and refuse invitations from children or young people if they are received (unless they are family members). They must also not tag photos with any children or young people from St Mary's in them.

We would expect that leaders and helpers do not communicate with children or young people that they or others supervise by email, social media, text, messaging or chat groups (unless they are family members or have close family ties with the parents) unless this has been previously discussed

with your ministry leader. Only nominated leaders will contact young people in their respective groups. All nominated leaders will adhere to the social media policy.

Leaders and helpers should be mindful of their personal use of social media, including ensuring that all content displayed on their profile or page is appropriate at all times (whether generated by them or by others) and appropriate for someone with responsibility for the supervision of children or young people.

Should an issue of a pastoral nature be raised, an appropriate meeting to discuss with the ministry leader or Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) should be arranged.

### **Guidance for the named person and for nominated group leaders who are preparing posts for social media**

#### **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 PSO or Rector.
- Always assume that everything you write is permanent and may be viewed by anyone at any time; and that everything can be traced back to you personally as well as to 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, X (formerly Twitter) or blogs for public ministry, while keeping a separate Facebook profile for private life.
- Always ask parents/carers for written consent to:
  - o 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.
  - o Use telephone, text message, email, WhatsApp and other messaging services to communicate with young people.
  - o Allow young people to connect to the church's social media pages.
- Only use an approved church/ministry account to communicate with children, young people 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.

- 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 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, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.
- 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 as friends on your personal accounts.
- “Face-stalk” (i.e. dig through people’s social media pages to find out about them).

**Use of third party content (e.g. photos, images)**

Do not use images in St Mary’s social media content without checking that they do not belong to a third party and are therefore protected by copyright. If you use an image that belongs to someone else without their consent, you open St Mary’s to the risk of a claim for payment and possible legal action.

Do not rely on the concept of ‘fair dealing’, which allows use of copyrighted photos for non-commercial purposes. This is a grey area and, in most instances, you won’t be able to use copyrighted material without permission.

Free stock photo sites such as Unsplash, Wikipedia, Flickr and Pixabay offer a wide selection of good-quality, royalty-free images and these should be used.

If you wish to use a specific image that is not on a free site, before you use it, you must seek approval to purchase it from the Rector or the Operations Director.