St Martin's Church
London Road · Worcester
The Parish of St Martin with St Peter in the Worcester South East Team

Social Media Guidance

Introduction

Today social media and the internet have become an increasing influence on many people's lives. For many younger people it may have become a primary source for gaining information about the world around them and networking with friends and acquaintances. Used responsibly social media and the internet 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.

Social media is faster, cheaper and arguably more widely available than traditional media however our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility and Christian witness must remain the same. Social media needs to be used responsibly.

Guidance on the use of social media is set out in Section 12 of the Parish Safeguarding Handbook .
See: Parish Safeguarding Handbook

The PCC must nominate a "named person" to whom those with access to the church's social media account(s) are answerable. Communications must be shared with the named person, who will proactively monitor communications. *The PCC has nominated Rebecca Caskie as the "named person".*

General Guidance: *(The guidance below is based on the Diocese of Rochester Guidelines)*

• If you comment on any aspect of the work of the Church of England, Diocese of Worcester, or Parish of St Martin with St Peter, you must clearly identify yourself.

• Users are personally responsible for the content they publish on-line, whether in a blog, social computing site or any other form of usergenerated media. Be mindful that what you publish may be public for an indefinite period of time. Protect your privacy and take care to understand a site's terms of service.

• Respect copyright • Respect libel and defamation laws.

• Never provide details of confidential matters or the performance of groups such as the PCC or it's sub committees.

• Do not cite or reference individuals without their approval. If you are telling a story about a third party, ask yourself, "is this my story to tell?"

• When you do make a reference, link back to the source. Don't publish anything that might allow inferences to be drawn that could embarrass or damage an individual.

• Respect your audience. Don't use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in a Christian environment.

• Don't use Church, Diocesan or Church of England logos or trademarks unless approved to do so. If you do use them, please obtain the correct permissions and follow brand guidelines.

Confidentiality

The blurring of the boundary between public and private is probably more of a concern to older generations than the younger. Younger people have grownup in an environment of on-line sharing, where they may well publish moans and groans about teachers, parents, friends or the workplace on a social networking site. In the past, these things may have been restricted to a private conversation. Whilst one group may struggle to understand why private information is being shared so publicly, the other may regard it as normal. This may create tensions that will need understanding, especially with groups such as Youth Workers.

Respecting confidentiality should not be problematic in this new area. The existence of social media does not change the Church's understanding of confidentiality. Within the life of the Church, there are private or closed meetings, private conversations and confidential matters. All involved have a right to expect others will respect that confidentiality. Breaking confidentiality in social media is as wrong as it would be in any other context. If a confidence is broken, it can spread via social networking with alarming speed and will be impossible to retract. It may be prudent therefore, to ensure those attending sensitive meetings or briefings understand the restrictions placed upon the sharing of that information.

Friends and followers

Social networking sites are often based around the idea of "friends" or "followers". Depending on the privacy settings selected, postings can be viewed by a select audience or by the world! Some people have high friendship or follower figures as a goal, and they may therefore, befriend others who in real life would not be actual friends. Care should be taken to ensure the appropriate privacy settings are selected. If unsure it may be better to communicate more directly using media such as email.

Social Media Child Protection

Parishes must appreciate that we live in a constantly changing world of technology which is becoming more sophisticated and we therefore have to be aware of the implications this brings. Whilst children and young people may appear technologically competent, they do not necessarily have the maturity to understand the dangers they may be exposed to. It is important that children and young people understand and stay safe and the guidance should be followed:

• Ensure all electronic communications are appropriate and professional. If using e-technology as a group activity, ensure that an adult worker knows and understands what is happening within the group.

• Communication between children and adults by whatever method should always take place within clear and explicit boundaries. This includes face to face contact, mobile phones, text messaging, emails, digital cameras, videos, webcams, websites, social media sites, and blogs.

• No images or video footage should ever be permitted in an area of personal privacy e.g. toilet or sleeping quarters.

• At camp or sleepovers, all mobile phones, cameras and video equipment will be collected by the group leader at a specified time prior sleep, stored in a secure place and given back to the young person in the morning. This is to prevent sleep disruption and inappropriate images being taken.

• Designated youth workers should be provided with a basic mobile phone supplied by the PCC.

• Adults should not give their personal contact details to children or young people, including their mobile telephone number and details of any blogs or personal websites.

• Do not make any relationship with a child (other than family members) through a social networking site. Only make contact with children for professional reasons, making sure that their parent/guardian has given permission.

• Maintain a log of any electronic contact with an individual regarding all matters or subjects that fall outside of the normal 'day to day' youth work contact.

• Any paid or unpaid worker will have a separate social media account (e.g. "Snapchat", 'Facebook', 'Instagram', 'Whatsapp' 'twitter') for their work with young people and should not give out any personal information about themselves.

• The minimum age for social networking must be observed.

• Privacy settings and use of strong passwords should be used to keep personal data private. Ensure that all shared computers have a different password for all users so that they cannot be accessed secretly.

Receipt of inappropriate material by electronic means

Receipt of any inappropriate material by electronic means should be downloaded in to hard copy if possible and any texts of such nature must not be deleted and should be shown to the leader and Incumbent who will follow Diocese of Worcester and The Parish of St Martin with St Peter safeguarding guidelines.

Photographs/Images and videos

Photographs and video should never be taken during church services without the permission of the clergy, and should never be uploaded without the permission of the individuals involved.

Photographs and video should never be uploaded which could misrepresent, embarrass, or compromise the individuals involved.

Guidance from the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS), cited by Diocese of Rochester (2015) is as follows:

Permission must be obtained of both children and adults before a photograph is taken or film footage recorded. However, it is perfectly acceptable to ask parents/carers to let the organisation know if they do NOT want their child photographed or filmed. The worker should write to parents or carers to explain what is happening and leave the onus on the parent/carer to contact them if they have any objections. In addition to this:

• It must be made clear why the image(s) or film is being used, what it will be used for and who might want to look at the pictures.

• When using photographs of children and young people, use group pictures and never identify them by name or other personal details. These details include email or postal addresses, telephone or fax numbers.

• Obtain written and specific consent from parents or carers before using photographs on a website. Apart from the Data Protection Act requirements, none of this advice is binding, but it would be good practice to endeavour to follow it as far as possible. The best way of addressing this is to ensure that the Parish obtains routine permission. This can be achieved as part of the Registration/Consent

Apart from the Data Protection Act requirements, none of this advice is binding, but it would be good practice to endeavour to follow it as far as possible. The best way of addressing this is to ensure that the Parish obtains routine permission. This can be achieved as part of the Registration/Consent 6 form allowing parents/guardians who need to refuse consent the opportunity to do so. These forms must be completed at least annually.

Publishing images of children brings good publicity and usually gives pleasure to children and their parents, but also raises some issues worth noting:

• Images count as personal data under the terms of the General Data Protection regulations (2018).

• There may be copyright issues.

• Images of children in media with a wide circulation may lead to children being traced by people who should not be able to find them. This affects children who have been involved in disputed custody matters, adoptions, abductions or other civil or criminal matters.

• Images of children may be used by paedophiles to target prospective victims, which is possible if identifying details are given.

• Images of children may be used or manipulated for the purposes of child pornography, which is a growing problem on the internet.

• Particular care is needed if children are lightly clad, e.g. in swimming costumes.

References

Diocese of Rochester Social Media Guidelines
http://www.rochester.anglican.org/communications/guidance/social-mediaguidlines/
Diocese of Rochester (2015) Protecting and Safeguarding of Children (5th Ed)

Incumbent : Peter Hart   **Parish Safeguarding Officer:**   Malcolm McMurray

Churchwardens: Elizabeth Yarker,   (vacant).

Guidance adopted at the Parochial Church Council meeting held on 13th February 2024.