

# Stoke Poges Church<sup>+</sup>

## St Giles' and St Andrew's

### **Use of Social Media Policy & Private Messaging**

#### **Introduction**

Social media are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking

Social media activities include:

- Maintaining a profile page on a networking site such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn
- Writing or commenting on a blog, whether it is your own or the blog of another person
- Taking part in discussions on web forums or message boards or instant messaging eg Whatsapp.

Social media are important components in how the church relates to the community and indeed how the community relates to the church. For young people, it is now a matter of course to use social media, and most adults, including older adults, do so also.

The widespread availability of social media means it is important to understand how to use it responsibly and requires extra care when dealing with young people and vulnerable adults. This policy aims to ensure that our paid employees and volunteers are protected while using social media and feel empowered to contribute to wider online activity when it supports their role within the church.

Virtual relationships should not take place in isolation but be an extension of real-life interaction.

#### **Scope**

Young people for this purpose are defined as those in school years 7 to 13 or equivalent. Where a young person reaches the age of 18 but remains in youth work provision it is good practice to adhere to this policy. Children in year 6 and below should not normally be communicated with by the church using social media or mobile phones.

#### **Consents**

Parents and guardians will be given the option to consent to the following:

- Photos will only be taken in accordance with our Data Protection Policy.
- Young people to have email contact with staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy.
- Young people to make and receive calls and texts to and from staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy.
- Young people to connect to their group's Facebook page or messaging app.

## **Timing**

Communication should not take place with young people after 9.00pm or before 9am. Note this does not mean staff and volunteers have to be available to young people at all other times. Young people should also note that, whilst staff and volunteers will exercise appropriate discretion in dealing with the substance of communication, they cannot promise confidentiality.

## **Privacy**

The lines between public and private can become blurred so assume that everything you write is permanent and can be viewed by anyone at any time. Also, assume that everything can be traced back to you personally as well as to your colleagues or the church.

Use of social media is for church related activities and fellowship only. You should be aware that you are at all times in a position of trust, that you may be perceived as an ambassador for the church and you are advised to exercise caution.

## **Forms of social networking**

The church will agree which forms of social networking will be used for church purposes. This decision should be reviewed at least once a year.

The use of visual media, including webcams and Skype is not permitted by Stoke Poges Church, as young people often use computers in their bedrooms.

## **Role of the PCC**

The PCC will approve the use of social media by the church and liaise with the Safeguarding Officer.

The church's experience in using social media should be included in the annual safeguarding report to the PCC.

## **Restrictions**

Employees and volunteers must ensure that their content or links to other content does not contain:

- Libellous, defamatory, bullying or harassing statements
- Breaches of copyright and data protection
- Material of an illegal nature
- Offensive sexual references
- Inappropriate language

or bring the church into disrepute or compromise its reputation.

## **Good practice**

When using any form of social networking, to communicate with children, young people or adults when they are vulnerable, the following controls, based on the Diocesan Safeguarding Policies, should be followed to ensure the protection of all those involved:

- Display only appropriate and necessary information about yourself.
- Ensure personal telephone numbers and email contacts are not visible on public display on social media;
- Only use instant messaging to further the aims of your church role and not for personal reasons.
- Do not delete any messages/ threads through social networking sites, so that you can provide evidence of your exchange should the necessity arise.
- Download to hard copy any inappropriate material received by electronic means and show to your group leader, line manager or the Incumbent.
- Carefully consider what apps display on your online activity.
- Be discerning about making public comments/rebuke and liking a post.
- Do not comment on photos or posts, unless appropriate to your church role.
- Never add a young person without parental consent. In the case of vulnerable adults consider carefully the potential vulnerability of that person before accepting them as a friend.
- Employee's cannot accept friend requests on personal social networks.
- Maintain the upmost integrity – remember that your profile only supplements the real person and is not an alter-ego.
- Review all posts and tags before being made public.
- Do not Facebook stalk (i.e. dig through people's Facebook pages to find out about them).
- Use passwords and log off promptly after use to ensure that nobody else can use social media pretending to be you.

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