PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL OF CROSSLACON PARISH

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES AND POLICY

Social media is a very public way of enabling us as Christians to live out our calling to share the good news of Jesus Christ. One of its many joys is that it is immediate, interactive, conversational, and open-ended. This opportunity comes with several downsides if users do not apply the same common sense, kindness, and sound judgement that we would use in a face-to-face encounter.

In Crosslacon Parish we agree to the following social media guidelines:

- Be a good ambassador for Christ, the Church, and your part in it.

- Know and follow the existing Crosslacon Parish Child Protection Policy. This includes the transmission and publication of images of young people.

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

- Identify yourself by name and, when relevant, role in the Crosslacon Parish. If you discuss Crosslacon Parish or the wider Church of England, you must make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of The Church of England, or The Parish of Crosslacon.

- If you publish content online relevant to the Parish of Crosslacon or the Church of England in your personal capacity, use a disclaimer like: 'The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent the views of the Parish of Cirencester or the Church of England.'

- Respect copyright.

- Respect libel and defamation laws.

- Never provide details of confidential matters.

- Do not cite or reference individuals without their approval.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 which 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 or Church of England workplace.

- Don't pick fights.

- Be the first to correct your own mistakes.

- Try to add value. Provide worthwhile information and perspective. The Church of England is best represented by its people and what you publish may reflect on not only the Church but also Christianity.

- Don't use Parish 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.

- Blogs may carry a title referring to the individual posting on the site for example, Jenny Wren, Vicar of St Mary's but they may not carry a title utilising the name of the parish Church, for example, 'The St Mary's, little non-such blog'. The former makes it clear that the opinions belong to one individual whilst the latter sounds as though this is the official position of the entire congregation.

- Social media entries may well attract wider media interest in you as an individual. Proceed with caution and remember that you are responsible for your on-line activities.

- A duty of care must be exercised when communicating or interacting with any minor, under 18 or vulnerable adult. All clergy, staff and volunteers will exercise strict professionalism and refer to the Parish's Child Protection policy to ensure a safe, transparent, and accountable online experience.

Crosslacon Parish have the following Social Media accounts: a Facebook page and a website.

Only the present incumbents, clergy with PTO in the parish, and our administrator currently have access to our social media accounts.

We use good, strong passwords to secure your social media accounts.

We encourage all to sign the Church of England's digital charter.

There are several ways we can make the digital world as loving and generous as we would when speaking face to face:

- Truth – we should hold ourselves to high ideals of checking that what we post online is fair and factual.

- Kindness – we are all different and that makes the world an interesting place – and at times a challenging one. Think the best of people, whether they share our views or are speaking against them and aim to be constructive in the way we engage.

- Welcome – in the language we use and the way we interact. It's easy for Christians to speak in another language using words that those outside the Church might not relate to.

- Inspiration – we are called to be witnesses of our faith and to use social media in a way that genuinely engages others.

- Togetherness – we are one Church and other members of this Church are our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is crucial we treat those around us in this way.

- Safeguarding – if you have any concerns about the wellbeing of children, young people, and vulnerable adults, please contact the relevant diocesan safeguarding adviser.

Agree to the Church's and Archbishops' social media guidelines: https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/digital-charter.

Social Media and working with children, young people, and vulnerable adults

Best Practice. Sensible precautions should be taken in the use of social media within a Church context. In many ways, these precautions are simply online versions of safe practice in the offline world:

- Avoid 'lone working' in the online world: Practically, this means avoiding one-to-one online chat (e.g., direct messaging) between adults and young people.

- Maintain appropriate boundaries in the online world: Just as in the offline world, it is important to keep a distinction between our private lives and our work within church, and to pay particular attention to the dynamics of power and influence.

- Do not use personal social media accounts to contact children: The simplest way to observe the above two precautions is to avoid having leaders and young people as 'friends' on social media (e.g., Facebook). It is far preferable to have an official account for the group in question (such as 'St Andrew's Anywhere Youth Group'), and to ask young people to 'like' that page. Any news about group events or anything else can be posted on that page. More than one leader should have access to this page, thus providing for accountability and transparency. Conversations between leaders and young people should happen in the public section of these pages (such as the 'wall' or in comments under posts) where everyone can see them, rather than via direct messages.

- Behave in the online world as you would offline: Simply put, if you would not say it offline, do not say it online! This includes posting links to offensive or otherwise inappropriate content, making comments about someone's appearance that could be interpreted as either sexual or offensive, or 'liking' inappropriate content on social media.

- Treat online 'consent' the same as offline 'consent': You will need the consent of the individual and/or their parents to use and store photographs, to retain any information relating to them online, and so on. (See the next Section for further guidance regarding the use of images.) It is a good idea to make their parents aware of the social media that your church uses and ensure that you have their consent to their child's usage (depending on the age of the child – older children can consent in their own right).

Clarifying these terms

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 grown-up 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, and best practice demands that complaints about the workplace be managed by line-managers. 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, which 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.

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. It is very important for users to consider the capacity in which they respond. If the response is a professional one, responding via the social networking site may not be the most appropriate course of action. It may be better to arrange a professional interview to deal with the issue. Any "friends" or "followers" made in a professional capacity are not to be transferred to a personal account neither during nor after employment. In such an instance disciplinary or civil action may be taken.

Use a disclaimer

Whenever you publish content to any form of digital media, make it clear that what you say there is representative of your views and opinions and not necessarily the views and opinions of the Church of England or the Parish of Crosslacon.

Copyright and the law

Respect copyright. For the protection of others and well as yourself, it is critical that you show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others, including the Church of England's own copyrights and brands. This includes material from other Diocesan websites. You should never quote more than short excerpts of someone else's work. It is good general blogging practice to link to others' work.

Defamation

Defamation is a civil matter and the law in England currently states that each time a web page is viewed, it becomes a published entity. Anyone defamed has 12 months from that point to bring an action.

Libel

In libel cases, the defendant must prove that their comments were justified. The plaintiff only must prove that their reputation was damaged.

Good humour

Humour can be a very important part of any conversation. Face to face, visual clues help determine the humour, but online, these cues are missing, and a joke may be easily mis-interpreted. Make sure it is clear if you are joking and remember that it is not acceptable to pass off intentionally offensive remarks as, 'only a joke'. Humour is great but may not be used to exclude, bully, or offend.

Use your best judgment

Remember that there are always consequences to what you publish. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, review the suggestions above and think about why that is. If you're still unsure, and it is related to Church matters, please discuss it with your line manager or the Vicar. Ultimately, however, you have sole responsibility for what you post on your blog or publish in any form of online social media.

Don't forget your day job

You should make sure that your online activities do not interfere with your job or commitments to the wider Church community.

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