



# ST PETER'S CHURCH - Social Media Policy and Guidelines

## Introduction

Social media offers exciting possibilities to share the Gospel and to interact with people we might not otherwise connect with. We can communicate with people faster and more cheaply than ever before. However, social media takes us into territory where we need to think carefully. It is interactive, conversational and open-ended and happens in a public space.

As Christians, the same principles that guide our offline conversations should apply to those that take place online. Interacting through social media does not change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility and Christian witness. Remember: the reputation of the Church is always at risk.

### Colossians 4:6

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

### Exodus 20: 16

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

### 2 Cor 5: 19-21

God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

### Galatians 5:22-26

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

## General guidelines

The StPA DCC agrees to adopt the following guidelines based on the Church of England social media community guidelines:

- **Be safe.** The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained. If you have any concerns, please contact the Church or Parish Safeguarding Officer. Always check before posting any images that include children. If you are sharing material about events and activities at church on your own social networks be extra vigilant about the images that you are posting, especially of children. Parental or Guardian permission to share images should **always** be sought.
- **Be respectful.** Do not post or share content that is sexually explicit, inflammatory, hateful, abusive, threatening or otherwise disrespectful.

- **Be kind.** Treat others how you would wish to be treated and assume the best in people. If you have a criticism or critique to make, consider not just *whether* you would say it in person, but the tone you would use.
- **Be honest.** Don't mislead people about who you are.
- **Take responsibility.** You are accountable for the things you do, say and write. Text and shared images can be public and permanent, even with privacy settings in place. If you're not sure, don't post it.
- **Be a good ambassador.** Personal and professional life can easily become blurred online so think before you post.
- **Disagree well.** Some conversations can be places of robust disagreement and it's important we apply our values in the way we express them.
- **Credit others.** Acknowledge the work of others. Respect copyright and always credit where it is due. Be careful not to release sensitive or confidential information and always question the source of any content you are considering amplifying.
- **Follow the rules.** Abide by the terms and conditions of the various social media platforms themselves. If you see a comment that you believe breaks their policies, then please report it to the respective company.

## Policy

### 1. Legal considerations

Remember that the law views anything you share online as being in the public domain. Sharing your thoughts and reflections with friends using social media or email might feel personal and private, but if more than one person can read what you have written the law would class it as "published", and therefore subject to numerous laws around libel, slander, copyright, Freedom of Information and data protection. So, if you wouldn't say something to the local newspaper or in a meeting, you shouldn't say it online.

### 2. Honesty and transparency

Truth matters. Don't repeat unsubstantiated claims without finding out if they are true. Make sure you've got the facts right; if in doubt, check. Repeating an untruth does not make it true, and you are opening yourself up to the charge of libel and/or slander if you do so. Be clear about who you are. When discussing topics relevant to the Church of England, the Diocese of Oxford, the DCC or St Peter's Church use your real name. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, point it out. It may be appropriate to use a disclaimer to the effect that views expressed are your own.

### 3. Tone

As with any other communication, think about the tone you use. Without visual cues, humour can easily be misinterpreted online. Make sure you are not attempting to pass off offensive comments

through attempts at humour. Treat your colleagues with respect and do not sound off online. As a rule of thumb, ask yourself:

- Would I be happy for my closest family to read this?
- Would I be happy for God to read this?
- Would I be happy with this appearing on the front page of a national newspaper?

#### **4. Permanence**

Assume what you say or post is permanent. Even if you delete an online comment or video, it could already have been seen by other people and/or re-published on other, unconnected sites. It can be easy to say something in the heat of the moment that you will come to regret, and it could remain online permanently for all to see. So always think carefully and never make personal comments about someone that you wouldn't also say in public or to them in person.

#### **5. Security**

Do not assume anything electronic is secure. You might be able to delete or recall an email but there's no guarantee the recipient will. Equally, your privacy settings on your social media tools might mean only your accepted "friends" or "followers" can see the things you say, but there is *no guarantee* that they will not pass them on outside your trusted circles. Equally, be careful about any personal details you share online – again, assume anything you share about yourself is in the public domain.

#### **6. Confidentiality**

Social media does not change our fundamental understanding about confidentiality across the whole life of the Church. When telling a story about a situation that involves someone else, always ask yourself, "Is this my story to tell?" Would it cause distress, inconvenience, upset or embarrassment to others if they found out you had shared in this way? If in any doubt, do not share it online. Equally, be careful when copying others into an email which has gone backwards and forwards a couple of times – there may be confidential information earlier in the correspondence.

#### **7. Public v Private**

Remember that the distinction between public and private lives is increasingly blurred. As a member of the Church family, anything you do or say in the public domain will likely be interpreted by others as being representative of the Church – even if you feel you are speaking in a personal capacity rather than an official one. A good name is easily lost, and the reputational damage caused may be widespread. Be aware that controversial or sensitive comments you make may attract attention of the media. If in doubt, take advice, but please remember that you are responsible for your online activities.

#### **8. Children and young people**

Maintain clear boundaries. Remember that the law and our Safeguarding Policy apply in your communications, particularly with vulnerable adults and children / young people – you should not exchange private messages with young people via social media and should not accept "friend requests" from any person under the age of 18. Where Youth Work includes an element of social media, try to keep all your communications public and only send messages to whole groups, rather than to individuals. (The StPA Youth Team has its own additional policies concerning best practice).

Please be aware that sharing photographs of children and young people online can put them at risk of harm. If in doubt, don't.

### 9. **Courtesy and respect**

Increasingly people use Twitter and other social media to comment live as events unfold. While this can enhance participation in a debate or conference, consider whether it is courteous to those around you to be commenting on the contributions of others. Are you treating the speaker with courtesy and respect? Are you giving the meeting or event your full attention? Might you be distracting those around you? Are you acting with grace?

### 10. **Social media is a tool, not an end in itself**

Ask yourself: what am I trying to achieve here? Is this the best tool to use for that end? If you start something, do you have the resources to monitor and manage it? Remember the value of other forms of communication! It can become easy to hide behind an online persona and neglect other relationships – remember that while social media is an exciting forum and presents opportunities, the value of face-to-face relationships should never be forgotten.

### **Disciplinary Action For Employees**

Church Employees who fail to adhere to the guidelines and terms of this policy, will render themselves liable to disciplinary action.

For and on behalf of the StPA DCC

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_