

## Holy Trinity Tewkesbury Church Social Media Policy

*A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything or destroy it! James 3:5 (Message)*

Social media sites enable users to create and share content and keep in touch with other users. They include maintaining a profile page on a networking site such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat; 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. For many, especially young people, using social media is an extension of physical face-to-face relationships. It is therefore important that we as a church also engage with our community and worshippers 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.

### **I. Purpose**

At Holy Trinity Tewkesbury our social media presence is a way of meeting and promoting our church values:

- A. All Involved – we can encourage people to get more involved in the life of the church through our various social media platforms
  - Sharing of positive stories about church involvement
  - Advertising open volunteer roles within the church
  - Providing information on upcoming events and activities
- B. Becoming Disciples – Encouraging people to follow Jesus
  - Sharing of positive stories about our own discipleship
  - Daily / Weekly Bible Readings online
  - Advertising church teaching events
  - Uploading links to sermons
- C. Creating Community – giving opportunity for the church family in its widest sense to share its life beyond Sunday services
  - Encourage all members to contribute and be an active part of the any social media groups
  - Respond to each other's post, stimulating discussion and interaction
  - Post items that encourage discussion
  - Advertise community building events
  - Make all members feel welcome whether or not they attend on a Sunday morning

- Ensure that our social media groups are a safe place for members
  - Use social media to share our lives and resources
- D. Doing Evangelism – Reaching out to those who do not yet know Jesus
- Sharing of testimonies
  - Advertisement of church events
  - Positively demonstrating what it's like to be part of a church fellowship
  - Personally inviting people to church activities e.g. Alpha
- E. Encountering God – Enabling people to encounter God
- Sharing of testimonies
  - Share posts which help people draw near to God e.g. worship videos

## 2. Gloucester Diocese Guidance

The Diocese of Gloucester provides clear guidance on the use of social media within local churches as follows

### **The Role of the PCC**

The PCC must approve the use of social media and mobile phones by the church. Where there are Facebook or similar online groups set up on the church's behalf, the PCC must ensure there is at least one **named person** to whom all workers are accountable. **The named person must be a church officer**, who should be a colleague or supervisor, 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. Communications must be shared with the named person. Church officers remain bound by professional rules of confidentiality.

Where there is concern that a young person or adult is at risk of abuse, or they themselves pose a risk of abuse to others, safeguarding procedures, as per Holy Trinity children and adults at risk Policy's, must always be followed.

**The Diocese of Gloucester provides the following guidance for Church Officers** (This includes church staff, volunteers using social media on behalf of the church or who may be seen to represent the church and the Named Person)

### 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 Parish Safeguarding Officer and the Diocese Safeguarding Advisor.

- ✓ Always assume that everything you write is permanent and may be viewed by anyone at any time; 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, Twitter or blogs for public ministry, while keeping a separate Facebook profile for private life.
- ✓ Always ask parents/carers for written consent to:
  - 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. Use telephone, text message, email and other messaging services to communicate with young people.
  - Young people connecting 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, Parish Safeguarding Officer, 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.
- ✗ Facebook stalk (i.e. dig through people's Facebook pages to find out about them).
- ✗ Say anything on social media that you would not be happy saying in a public meeting, to someone's face, writing in a local newspaper or on headed notepaper.
- ✗ Comment on photos or posts, or share content, unless appropriate to your church role.

- ✘ Use visual media (e.g. Skype, Facetime) for one to one conversations with young people, use only in group settings.
- ✘ Allow content to contain or share links to other sites that contain:
  - Libellous, defamatory, bullying or harassing statements.
  - Breaches of copyright and data protection.
  - Material of an illegal nature.
  - Offensive sexual or abusive references.
  - Inappropriate language.
  - Anything which may be harmful to a child, young person or vulnerable adult, or which may bring the church into disrepute or compromise its reputation.

### **Mobile Phones**

Wherever possible, Church Officers should be supplied with a mobile phone dedicated for work purposes. This allows for the phone to be switched off outside working hours, and for usage to be accountable. This means that the work phone number is the only number that young people or adults are given, and the church officer's personal number can remain private. Texts or conversations that raise concerns should be saved and passed on to the named person or the Parish Safeguarding Officer / Incumbent (or if unavailable the Diocese Safeguarding Advisor).

### **3. Current Social Media Profile (January 2019)**

Holy Trinity has a number of Facebook pages / groups as well as a Twitter account. Membership to each of the Facebook groups / pages and Twitter feed is different by group. Groups / Pages may be closed or open access.

**Open access** indicates that anyone can access the page or feed content and post onto it

**Closed** indicates that an individual has to request to join the page or group before they can view content and post onto it and this request can be either accepted or declined by an Administrator. The Administrator also has the ability to remove someone from the group

A. Church Facebook Page, listed as Holy Trinity Church Tewkesbury - Open access

This is open to be viewed by anyone, much like a website would be. It is our official profile for the church on Facebook where we can advertise events to those who are not yet part of our community group. This is kept up to date by our Church Administrator

B. Church Twitter Feed – Open access

This is open to be viewed by anyone, much like a website would be. It is our official profile for the church on Twitter where we can advertise events and share sermon links. This is kept up to date by our Church Administrator.

C. Church Facebook Group, listed as Holy Trinity Church Community - Closed group

Anyone aged 18 and over can be a member upon request, which will be approved by one of our FB Group Administrators. Exceptions this will be those who are clearly looking to join the group in order to exploit other members or who do not live in the local area and have absolutely no links to the church.

Members include current church members, past church members and those linked to the local area who may or may not have contact with Holy Trinity activities such as Smarties, Older peoples outreach, local partners.

Where the FB Administrator cannot tell by the requesters' profile how they are linked to the church and therefore has concerns about their motive for joining the group, they should contact the person and ask why they are interested in becoming a member.

D. Holy Trinity Tewkesbury Youth Facebook Group– Closed group

For young people aged 13-18 (up to the end of year 13) and the Youth Leaders all of whom have current DBS. Members are approved by the FB Group Administrator.

Youth Leaders, both paid and volunteers, are expected to follow the Diocese guidance detailed above for Church Officers. In doing so they are safeguarding both themselves and our young people.

E. XACT Drama Group Facebook Group - Closed group

For those over the age of 18 interested in being part of drama productions at Holy Trinity. Members are approved by the FB Group Administrator.

#### **4. Expectations for use of Holy Trinity Church social media by church members and wider community**

All are based on principles of common sense and good judgement. Essentially, you should participate online in the same way as you would in any other public forum. Your actions should be consistent with Christian values and you are responsible for the things you do, say or write.

##### DO

- ✓ Read this policy before posting to one of our social media platforms
- ✓ Always follow the guidelines below. If you do not comply with the guidelines then you will be given a warning. Multiple offences will mean you are removed from any closed group or blocked from posting comments on open groups

##### DO NOT

- ✗ Post anything which could be deemed offensive to other readers

A. Think before you post

The immediacy of social media is one of its benefits – we can immediately respond to another users post or share what is on our minds, but before we post we should take a moment to consider:

- Is this my story to share?

- Could this be 'Fake News'?
- Would I want God to read this?

B. Transient yet permanent

Social media updates are immediate and will outdate quickly BUT they can have a more lasting impact and you should assume that anything you post is permanent.

Even if you delete it later on, it may have been seen and re-published or referred to elsewhere.

C. You represent the church

Our social media platforms have a wide range of members and followers including those who have yet to join our church fellowship in person and those who no longer attend.

When we post as a church member we give an impression of what the church fellowship is like. Think about the portrayal you are giving and consider whether what you post:

- Is in line with church values
- Is helpful to past, current and future members of the church fellowship

D. Be mindful of your own security

Don't overshare personal information. Never publish detailed personal information such as your address or telephone number, unless in a private message to someone you know and trust.

E. Safeguarding

We are committed to safeguarding and recognise that social media can increase vulnerability for some people. It is important to be clear that we all have a duty to safeguard and report any concerns that we have in regard to Holy Trinity social media activity to either the social media Named Person, the Parish Safeguarding Officer or the Incumbent immediately to enable action to reduce risk.

F. Sharing photos

There's nothing wrong with sharing your photos online, but please make sure you have documented permission from anybody who features in the image before sharing, especially parental permission for children. Be ready to remove an image as quickly as possible if requested.

G. Advertising

It is a great use of our platforms, in particular our Facebook Community Group, to advertise GLOOT items which are items offered free to anyone who responds to the advert and to advertise church or other Christian events. However do always consider whether your adverts should also or instead be included in the Church Notice Sheet which is available in paper form to those who do not have internet access.

None of our platforms should be used to advertise your business or for any commercial gain.

H. Stay within the legal framework

Whilst sharing thoughts and reflections within our community on Facebook can seem personal and private, it is not. By law, if one or more people can access it, content is subject to legislation around libel, defamation, copyright and data protection.

If you wouldn't say something in a public meeting or to someone's face don't say it online!

I. Confidentiality

Use of social media does not change the Church's understanding of confidentiality. Within the life of the Church there are private meetings and conversations, particularly in terms of pastoral work.

Breaking confidentiality is as wrong as it would be in any other context. Arguably, it is worse as via social media a broken confidence could spread rapidly and be impossible to retract.

Remember: Is this story mine to share? If in doubt, don't.

**5. Responsibility of Holy Trinity Church in cases of misuse of Social Media**

Holy Trinity Named Person will respond to any complaints or breaches to our social media Policy, which may include the following

- Contacting the source of the complaint / breach to discuss issue and advise on expectations
- Removal / blocking an individual from social media
- Making a safeguarding report where a concern has been identified

This policy has been approved by the PCC on (date) \_\_4 March 2019\_\_

The Named Person is \_\_Louise Woodward\_\_

Secondary Named Person (if required) is \_\_Rachel Hargreave/Lucy Betts – staff members\_\_