

**Social Media-Acceptable Use Policy**  
**St. Luke's Maidenhead**

**1. Policy Statement**

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to provide rules and guidelines for using all forms of social media at St Luke's.
- 1.2. It is the responsibility of all church employees, staff and volunteers to use social media well as servants of Jesus Christ, communicating with integrity and accuracy. Each of us is a role model for our church and the Christian faith. Whatever is said on social media (messages and profile) is public and permanent: it could be passed on to thousands and remain in circulation for years.
- 1.3. Contributing to online communities is a good way to engage with both other Christians and non-Christians and provides unique opportunities for us to promote activities and events, share information and participate in interactive discussions on particular topics using a wide variety of social media.
- 1.4. We actively encourage staff of St. Luke's church to use these mediums, but we also recognise that use of social media can potentially pose risks to confidential information, St. Luke's church's reputation and can jeopardise its compliance with legal obligations. St. Luke's church wishes to ensure that use of social media does not expose the church to security risks or reputational damage and is respectful of all people.
- 1.5. To minimise these risks, to avoid loss of mission opportunities and to ensure that St. Luke's church Information and Communications Technology (ICT) systems are used only for appropriate purposes, we expect all church members to adhere to this policy both on the Church premises and in their own time.
- 1.6. 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.

**2. Aims of the policy**

2.1. The aim of the policy is to:

- Provide staff and volunteers with the overarching principles that guide to e-safety and so they do not put themselves in a vulnerable position when using social media

- Protect all people who receive the church's services and who make use of social media and information technology (such as mobile phones/devices, games consoles and the internet) as part of their involvement with us.
- Ensure church information remains secure and is not compromised
- Ensure church's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected
- Ensure that all people are protected

### 3. Scope

#### 3.1. What are 'social media'?

3.1.1. **"Social Media"** is the broad term used for the set of online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other in various ways. Social media posts can take many forms including text, images, audio, video and multimedia communications.

3.1.2. This policy applies to all social media, and for purposes of this policy, the following definition applies: **'Social media'** are social media sites that are generally public, including online blogs, forums, encyclopaedias (such as Wikipedia), social networking sites such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Nextdoor and LinkedIn, video and image sharing websites such as TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest, Flickr and YouTube, and any other public websites that allow users to post comments or content online. Access-restricted groups on public social media sites (e.g., private Facebook groups) are considered to be external social media for purposes of this policy.

3.1.3. St. Luke's currently uses Facebook, WhatsApp, and Zoom. Currently YouTube is only used with the sound system to show externally produced sound videos and not for other social media purposes.

#### 3.2. To whom does this Social Media Policy apply?

3.2.1. The policy and the procedures that it underpins apply to all church members, including Trustees (PCC members), employees (whether salaried by the PCC or diocese, unpaid volunteers, ministry trainees, contractors, and any person or third-party organisation authorised to communicating on behalf of St. Luke's church, for example, a youth work volunteer.

#### 3.3. How does this social media Policy apply to an individual's use of social media?

3.3.1. This policy applies to the use of social media for both official church business and personal use of all social media when mentioning or referring to St Luke's, or any of St Luke's activities. The guidelines in this policy apply to such use and also to personal uses of all social media, whether during working hours or otherwise, and regardless of whether the social media is accessed using church equipment, public equipment or personal equipment.

**3.3.2.** Personal responsibility must be taken for any social media content. Before using social media for professional or personal purposes, it is important to remember that everything posted is or could become public. It could be copied and re-used without knowledge or consent. Online content, comments and opinions posted now will most likely be available via social platforms or search engines long after they have been posted and have served their intended purpose. So, it is essential to use a high level of discretion and caution when generating online content or responding to the online content of others.

3.3.3. Anyone who can be identified as working for the church must make sure their profiles and anything they post are congruent with how the church expects them to present themselves to colleagues and other members. They must be mindful that even if they do not name the church as their employer, people who know them and where they work may still make an unwelcome association with the church. The church's interests must be protected, and nothing must be published that could directly or indirectly damage these or compromise the church's reputation.

**3.3.4.** The lines between public and private can become blurred so others may perceive someone as an ambassador of St Luke's, even when their online communications are in a personal capacity.

**4. Rules and Guidelines.** This Section provides the rules and guidelines that generally apply equally to all social media.

#### **4.1. Personal Obligations**

4.1.1. Rules for **personal** use of social media:

- A personal social media account must be associated with a personal email address.
- Personal settings on social media sites should be set to ensure inappropriate information is not put into the public domain by mistake.
- Comply with all laws, including those related to intellectual property, confidentiality, and privacy laws, as well as any applicable third-party terms of use (for example, Facebook or X (formerly known as Twitter) terms of use)
- If the law is broken on a personal site (for example by posting something defamatory), responsibility lies with the individual, not the church.

4.2. **Communication:** At its core, social media is a way of communicating, and the way we treat each other and those outside of St Luke's, including our high standard of professionalism as reflected in our HR policies, remains unchanged whether communicating in person, by

email, or in social media. Always use good judgment and be thoughtful in what is said to and about others in social media posts. Anything communicated online can affect impressions of St Luke's and the individual. In some circumstances, outside parties are able to pursue legal action against individuals personally and/or St Luke's based on online postings.

**4.2.1. Rules** To comply with Section 4.2 of this policy:

**4.2.1.1.** Follow St. Luke's church and Oxford Diocesan policies and procedures on Whistleblowing; Disciplinary action; Complaints; Anti-bullying; Inclusion and Equal Opportunities. HR and IT policies and the overarching Safeguarding Policy and Procedures in your use of social media.

**4.3. Respect** must always be shown to others when using social media.

**4.3.1. Rules** To comply with Section 4.3 of this policy:

**4.3.1.1.** Always use good judgment when mentioning the names of people, companies or organisations in social media. Criticism or defamatory comments about the church, young people/children, colleagues, members of the church or anybody else must never be made.

**4.3.1.2.** Making comments about certain personal characteristics could constitute harassment under the Equality Act 2010 and could result in prosecution under that or other legislation. Never make comments that could be considered discriminatory against, bullying or harassment of any individual, for example by:

- making offensive or derogatory comments relating to age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or partnership status, race, religion/belief or non-belief, sex or sexual orientation, or any other distinction
- using social media to bully another individual
- posting images that are discriminatory or offensive, or links to such content.

**4.4. Be transparent** Transparency means being honest online about who you are, including using only your true identity and disclosing your affiliations that others may view as affecting the opinions and information shared

**4.4.1. Rules** To comply with Section 4.4 of this policy:

- Disclose your role with St Luke's if you post anything on social media related to St Luke's, including discussions or endorsements of St Luke's. If you disclose your employment relationship in your profile on a social media site, you generally do not need to disclose it again in your specific posts on that same site.
- Avoid creating or using an alternate screen name or account to hide your identity or your affiliation with St Luke's if posts directly or indirectly relate to St Luke's

- Include a disclaimer (e.g., “my postings reflect my own views and do not necessarily represent the views of my employer, St Luke’s Church, Maidenhead”) if posts directly or indirectly relate to St Luke’s or if you are identifiable as a St Luke’s employee in your online communications
- Be careful to avoid the perception that an official St Luke’s position is being provided. Others may see posts as a reflection on St Luke’s, even when the online communications are in a personal context.

#### **4.5. Be Honest**

##### **4.5.1. Rules To comply with Section 4.5 of this policy:**

- Only make statements on social media about St Luke’s if such statements are true and can be verified. Failure to do so can result in potentially harsh scrutiny of both individuals and St Luke’s. If misrepresentations are made through online communications, legal liability may result for the individual and potentially even for St Luke’s.
- Correct errors in social media posts that relate to St Luke’s as quickly and accurately as possible. In general, you should not alter your previous posts without indicating that you have done so.

#### **4.6. Respect Privacy**

##### **4.6.1. Rules To comply with Section 4.6 of this policy:**

- 4.6.1.1. All emails to more than one person should usually be blind copied - but the body of the email MUST be clear about who is included in the email.
- 4.6.1.2. Review the privacy policies of social media sites before disclosing personal information on them.
- 4.6.1.3. Information chosen to share about themselves, their family, or their personal interests may be useful in establishing a relationship with others, but it is entirely an individual choice whether to share this information. It is important to be mindful of how others may use or perceive this information.
- 4.6.1.4. Always consider and respect the privacy rights and concerns of people whose information are shared in social media posts. Others might not be comfortable if personal information is posted about them. Exercise caution in how you use others’ data, to ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations, when using and handling personal information in connection with social media.
- 4.6.1.5. Contact details or pictures etc. of other members of staff, church members or children/young people should not be included without their prior permission (or their parents in the case of children).
- 4.6.1.6. Confidential information about the church, its staff, members or its intellectual property must not be revealed. This might include aspects of church policy or details of internal discussions. If something on a social media site gives

rise to concerns about a conflict of interest or confidentiality, this must be discussed with the incumbent in the first instance, or churchwardens.

4.6.1.7. Care must be taken to ensure that copyright material, including images, is not used in church social media without consent.

**4.7. Permission to post on behalf of St Luke's** Only designated spokespersons who have received prior authorisation may speak on behalf of St Luke's, including on social media.

**4.7.1. Rules** To comply with Section 4.7 of this policy:

- Obtain approval from the vicar to provide an official St Luke's position.
- Refrain from making statements on social media that will be perceived by others as stating an official St Luke's position without first obtaining approval. To avoid that perception:
  - Avoid creating posts that use the St Luke's name, in a way that creates the impression that personal posts are endorsed by St Luke's
  - Avoid using language that creates the perception that an individual is speaking on St Luke's behalf, such as "St Luke's believes..." or "We don't see it that way" when speaking about topics related to St Luke's
  - Consider how a role at St Luke's might affect how their communications on social media are perceived by others. In particular, people in positions of authority, such as clergy, must take special care when posting on social media.
- Contact the Vicar for guidance before accepting an invitation to participate in any social media as an official representative of St Luke's, e.g., as a guest blogger. The Vicar's permission is required to speak on behalf of St Luke's.
- Consult the incumbent, in the first instance, or churchwarden if an offer of payment is made for site content as this could constitute a conflict of interest.
- Discuss with the incumbent in the first instance, or churchwardens if someone from the media or press makes contact about posts on a church or personal site which relate to the church.

## **5. Specific social media used by St Luke's**

**5.1. Facebook** St Luke's has an official Facebook page, which should be used for creation of any official Facebook events or official sharing of other content. Currently the vicar, the church administrators and the children and family's worker are authorised to add content to our page.

**5.2. WhatsApp.** St Luke's has five WhatsApp groups

- parents and staff of the Baby and Toddler Group,
- parents and staff of Messy Church
- ministry team
- Churchwardens and vicar
- PCC

5.3. When using WhatsApp group chats, adding people to the group discloses their mobile numbers to the rest of the group. Care should be taken to respect all phone numbers

5.4. WhatsApp allows a backup of chats, and this will be done periodically to enable the church to have a local copy.

#### **5.5. Use of Virtual Platforms, e.g., Zoom**

**5.5.1.** When using Zoom or other platforms care should be taken to ensure the confidentiality of those who prefer not to turn on cameras. Participants whose identity cannot be verified could be removed by the Zoom leader.

**5.5.2.** No participant should ask an unidentified / camera off person to 'identify' themselves.

### **6. Responsibilities**

6.1. Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy, making recommendations for change to minimise risks, and ensuring that the policy meets legal requirements and reflects best practice lies with the PCC.

6.2. The PCC will review and update the policy annually, and any significant changes will be communicated accordingly.

6.3. The PCC will approve the use of social media by the church. It may be appropriate to make more detailed requirements, e.g., about membership, postings, permissions.

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

6.5. All members of the church are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it.

6.6. Any misuse of social media or breach of this policy should be reported to the incumbent or a churchwarden.

6.7. St. Luke's church will ensure this policy is accessible to all members of staff, volunteers and parents of young people taking part in church activities.

### **7. Social Media and Young People/Children**

7.1. As an organisation working with young people, St. Luke's church acknowledges the impact and involvement that social networking & messenger sites/apps such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram and WhatsApp have on the lives of young people, and their role in the ways which young people interact with each other. There is huge potential for these tools to be used by youth workers to communicate activities with young people, to encourage them in their faith and to play a part in the discipleship of young people beyond face-to-face groups.

7.2. At the same time, we acknowledge the dangers and potential risks that these sites can pose to both young people and youth workers and that they have the potential to be abused as ways of interacting with young people. Therefore, as an organisation any youth worker

using social networking as part of their ongoing work with young people must abide by the following guidelines, to safeguard both workers and young people involved.

- 7.3. Young people, for this purpose, are defined as those in school years 7 to 13 or equivalent (ages 11 to 18). Where a young person reaches the age of 18 but remains in youth work provision it is good practice to adhere to this policy.
- 7.4. Most of the popular social media services require users to be at least 13 years of age before they can register. The age requirements are there because of data protection laws. Young people usually have their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday while in school year 8.
- 7.5. On 11 April 2024, WhatsApp updated their UK Terms of Service and their Privacy Policy to reflect their change of the minimum age to use WhatsApp from 16 to 13 to bring them in line with other social media sites.

#### **7.6. Rules for communicating with young people:**

- 7.6.1. There will be no direct personal contact with children under the age of 16. Any communication with children should be via parents or carers.
- 7.6.2. Ensure all communications with young people on social media are made with parental consent.
- 7.6.3. Staff and volunteer leaders should only use electronic communication for reasons relating to work with young people, not for general socialising
- 7.6.4. Private messaging should be avoided when communicating with young people. Where private messaging is unavoidable, another leader (not spouse) must be copied in and it should use a platform that keeps a record of these messages (i.e., Facebook Messenger).
- 7.6.5. Always use a separate, designated social media account for the purposes of the specific youth activities only, not someone's personal account. If using a social media platform for group communication, ensure that the Vicar is included as a group member so as to be able to act as a moderator. Do refer to other guidance in 5.5 when using zoom for an activity or meeting including young people.
- 7.6.6. Keep public or keep logged any communication using the Social Media accounts. History, email archives, texts should not be deleted (both incoming and outgoing).
- 7.6.7. The tone of communication should be friendly but not over-familiar or personal; they should not suggest or offer a special relationship
- 7.6.8. Do not use abbreviations/language that could be misunderstood by a parent or guardian (e.g., LOL, IDK (I don't know) and emojis).
- 7.6.9. Only use these accounts between the hours of 9am and 9pm, in order to maintain a safe boundary between work and personal life.
- 7.6.10. All messages and posts should be within a closed group



- 7.6.11. No young person should be identified in the public domain e.g. Facebook timeline, X (formerly known as Twitter)
- 7.6.12. Do not upload or distribute photographs of any young people
- 7.6.13. If a potential safeguarding issue is disclosed or if a member is concerned about a young person from their posts on a social media network, then further advice must be sought from the incumbent and the Parish Safeguarding Officer. Do not make promises of confidentiality or ask questions relating to the disclosure.

## **7.7. Email communication**

**7.7.1.** Email is generally not an effective way to communicate to young people and is more effective with parents as a good way to keep them informed of what is happening. If and when email is used to communicate to young people it should be used within the following parameters:

- Used only to communicate specific information (e.g., times and dates of events)
- Recruiting or encouraging young people to be involved in youth activity
- Bcc for all email addresses and always include leaders and/or parents
- Not to be used for private communication

## **7.8. WhatsApp**

7.8.1. WhatsApp can be a great tool for creating group messages between young people.

7.8.2. In addition to the general guidance given in 5.3 above, the following guidelines apply:

- Parental permission will be sought first.
- At least two youth workers and/ or the vicar or church wardens will be part of a WhatsApp group chat.
- When using WhatsApp group chats, adding people to the group discloses their mobile numbers to the rest of the group. Parents/carers will be notified of this.

## **7.9. Facebook**

**7.9.1.** This is a popular social media network platform. However, it is now used more by adults than the young people.

**7.9.2.** Whilst it is relatively easy to supervise the St Luke's account, it is almost impossible to monitor individual accounts. The following are guidelines and good practice principles when engaging with young people on Facebook:

- No leader should, without formal authorisation, be friends with an under 18-year-old with whom they work or for whom they are responsible within their leadership role
- There should be no hidden communication through private messaging; only allow young people with whom you are friends to post on your timeline
- Leaders should not intentionally view or go through profiles or photos of young people who have requested them as a 'friend'

- Leaders should not download, share or communicate any information from a young person's profile

#### 7.10. **X formerly known as Twitter)**

- 7.10.1. No individual should, without formal authorisation, follow an under-18-year-old with whom they work or for whom they are responsible within a leadership role, although young people may follow adults.
- 7.10.2. There should be no hidden communication with young people through direct messaging (DM).
- 7.10.3. Leaders who tweet must be aware that their tweets may be monitored if they are visible publicly.

#### 7.11. **Text messages**

- 7.11.1. Traditional text messaging services are private by nature and generally not a good way to communicate with young people.
- 7.11.2. If unavoidable, save messages as text files to ensure an open record exists.

#### 7.12. **Other**

- 7.12.1. No church adult should connect with young people on Snapchat or TikTok.
- 7.12.2. No church adult should subscribe to any young person's YouTube channel.

### 8. **Breach of this policy**

- 8.1. Breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal for paid employees. Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of whether the breach is committed during working hours, and regardless of whether church equipment or facilities are used for the purpose of committing the breach. Any member of the church suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be required to cooperate with the PCC investigation, which may involve handing over relevant passwords and login details.
- 8.2. Anyone may be asked to remove internet and/or social media postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may result in disciplinary action.

### 9. **Parish application of this policy**

- 9.1. Section 12 of the Parish Safeguarding Handbook requires the PCC to appoint a named person to whom all social media users are accountable. This PCC appoints the incumbent, the Revd. Sally Lynch, as that person.
- 9.2. For advice on Safeguarding contact:  
The Parish Safeguarding Officer, Barbara Essam, or  
The Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser

[safeguarding@oxfordanglican.org](mailto:safeguarding@oxfordanglican.org)

Tel: 01865 208267

Adopted by St. Luke's PCC on 09<sup>th</sup> March 2021

This review: Amended 9 October 2024

Next review: September 2025