

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Ham Hill Villages Benefice, Somerset

Introduction

Social media sites enable users to create and share content and keep in touch with other users. They include maintaining a profile on a networking site such as Facebook, X, Instagram, Snapchat and others; writing or commenting on a blog, whether it is your own or the blog of another person; and 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 churches also engage with their 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

The Parish Safeguarding Handbook, published in 2008 by the Church of England requires that the PCC must approve the use of social media and mobile phones by the church.

Facebook Pages/WhatsApp Groups and similar

Where there are Facebook or similar online groups set up on the church's behalf, the PCC must ensure there is a named person responsible for the page/group to whom all workers are accountable.

The named person must be a church officer, 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 must always be followed.

Mobile Phones

It is recognised as good practice that the incumbent and associate priests 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 Diocesan Safeguarding Manager).

Is Social Media a Mystery to you?

Further advice can be found in the Safeguarding Guidance for the use of Facebook and other Social Media published by the Diocese of Bath & Wells in July 2018 available online at

<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/content/pages/documents/safeguarding-guidance-for-use-of-facebook-and-other-social-media.docx>