

# Social Media Policy

## PARISH OF HIGH DOWNS



### Use of Social Media Policy and Further Reflection

Social media can be a useful tool for engaging with the worshipping church and wider community. It is used freely by a wide range of age groups and might include, for example, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp. It also includes joining web page discussions and forums and any recorded youtube content on a dedicated church platform.

This policy is intended to be a living document that reflects both the current and future needs of High Downs Parish. To help facilitate safe spaces needed for conversation within High Downs Parish on social media outlets, the following policy will be observed in the management of user-generated content submitted to High Downs Parish social media platforms.

As a church it is right that we engage in using these platforms as appropriate. However, we have a responsibility to ensure that we safeguard against risks which may include: Forming inappropriate relationships, making offensive, sexual or suggestive comments; blurring the boundaries between public work/ministry and private life, grooming and impersonation; any form of bullying, harassment, offence or intimidation, including trolling, sexting or stalking.

### What is social media?

Social Media, in this policy, refers to all online communication in a public space, from Blogging, Zoom, Twitter, Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, e-mail. And many other social media platforms.

Engagement through a computer or smartphone screen should not change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility, good manners and Christian values and witness. Safeguarding and compliance with GDPR and data protection standards remains paramount and unconditional within the standards we are setting.

Software applications such as Snapchat that routinely delete information and files/attachments shared after they are seen **are not** permitted for use in church activities.

## Who is covered by this policy?

The Social Media Policy is designed to ensure that we communicate within the law and in a way consistent with our Christian character.

This Policy recognises that the Christian faith has communication (the word – written or spoken), at its heart and that electronic communications are now a central part and reality of everyday life. In this sense it has a vital role in updating, co-ordinating and improving the experiences of Christian groups (such as youth groups, community care groups, house groups, prayer ministry, and for social interaction). Whilst this brings so many positive benefits, it is also recognised that with this comes risk, and the following guidance and responsibilities section defines how risks are minimised and mitigated.

**High Downs Parish** recognises the following activities which are approved to use social media.

- List all known activities and associated social media (This is not exhaustive).
- e.g. Stalisfield Youth Group – FaceBook Page
- Eastling Home Bible Study Group - FaceBook Page
- Throwley 'Ping' - What's App
- Eastling What's App Group
- **Standards and responsibilities**  
**High Downs Parish** expects the users and use of social media to maintain the high standards set in the following guidance and responsibilities at **Appendix A**. Any breach of these standards will be considered as a breach of this policy and steps will be taken to address that behaviour as seen appropriate by the Priest-in-Charge, PCC or authorised person, such as the Parish Safeguarding Officer.  
**In summary:**  
Being online is an extension of church life and the expectations of the parishioner remain as high in this context as in any other. In general, those engaging online will conduct themselves in a Christian manner and demonstrate these values at all times. In particular:
  - **Be safe.** The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained. If you have any concerns, ask our Parish Safeguarding Officer, Mark Harlow for further guidance and support. He can be contacted at 07979864000 or [mark.harlow@kc-hd.org.uk](mailto:mark.harlow@kc-hd.org.uk)

- **Be respectful.** Do not post or share content that is sexually explicit, inflammatory, hateful, abusive, threatening or otherwise disrespectful, explicitly or implicitly stated. In regard to Equity: unkind and inappropriate reference to someone's race, gender, disability, sexual or lifestyle preference, religion or similar demographic factor will not be tolerated.
- **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 and manner you would use.
- **Be honest.** Don't mislead people about who you are or your intentions. Transparency is all important to build and convey trust.
- **Take responsibility.** You are accountable for the things you do, say and write. Text and images shared can be public and permanent, even with privacy settings in place. As a rule, if you're not sure with regard to any action you make, don't make or post it.
- **Be a good ambassador.** Personal and professional life and boundaries can easily become blurred online so think before you post online.
- **Disagree well.** Some conversations can be places of robust disagreement and it's important we apply our values in the way we express them. As individuals we will not engage in online disputes and arguments, contrary to, or that will affect group harmony, or that may cause wider offence and distress, involve slander or libel.
- **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 as being authentic.
- **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.

This guidance should be read alongside High Downs Parish Safeguarding Policy. Any online concerns with regard to safeguarding should be reported immediately and in line with the Safeguarding Policy.

- If you have any concerns, ask our Parish Safeguarding Officer, Mark Harlow for further guidance and support. He can be contacted at 07979864000 or [mark.harlow@kc-hd.org.uk](mailto:mark.harlow@kc-hd.org.uk) or the Canterbury Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor, Paul Brightwell, 07398009951

Approved by High Downs Parish on:.....

Signed on behalf of the PCC.....

## **Appendix A**

### **Guidance and responsibilities**

#### **1. Public Domain**

The law views anything shared online as being in the public domain. Sharing thoughts and reflections with friends using social media or email might feel personal and private; but if more than one person can access what we have written, it is highly likely that the law would class it as "published". It is subject to the law touching libel, copyright, freedom of information and data protection.

If we wouldn't say something in the local newspapers, we shouldn't say it online. There must be no swearing or offensive language.

#### **2. Permanence**

Anything said on the Web can be assumed to be permanent. Even if we delete a comment made on a website, it could still have already been seen by other people, re-published, or had a screenshot picture taken. It is easy to say something in the heat of the moment that we regret later, but it could remain permanently online for all to see.

#### **3. Security**

It is absolutely not safe to assume anything electronic is secure. Privacy settings on social media tools might mean comments going only to accepted "friends" or "followers" but there is no guarantee that they will not pass (repost) them outside trusted circles.

#### **4. Gossip**

Social media can pose a risk to confidentiality and be intrusive. Social media does not change our fundamental understanding about confidentiality in the life of the Church. When telling a story about a situation which involves someone else, it is always useful to pose the question "Is this my story to tell?" "How would I feel if this were me?"

Furthermore, we should ask if the story is likely to cause distress, inconvenience, upset or embarrassment to others if they discovered it had

been shared in this way. If in any doubt at all, it should not be shared online.

## **5. Representatives**

If we are church members, youth leaders or church employees, anything we do or say in the public domain will be interpreted by the public as representative of attitudes and behaviour in the Church. Controversial, hasty or insensitive comments can quickly attract the attention of the media. In the web environment, the person pressing the keys is ultimately responsible for their own online activities, but they can tar a lot of others with their own brush in the eyes of the media.

## **6. Separation**

Keep a clear separation between personal and corporate accounts. If you tweet/message as yourself, mark the account clearly as “my own views” so there is no suggestion your opinions represent a wider church or organisation. If you tweet/message from an account representing the church, then make sure you avoid expressing personal opinions. Any account which carries the logo, address or website of the church should be seen as a corporate account and only speak for the church.

## **7. Recommendations**

Take care with external links. When you link to material, check out the website you are linking to – is its overall focus one you are happy to publicise and promote?

## **8. Real-time Relationships**

Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent. Healthy boundaries and practices must be adhered to just as they should be in the physical world. In the virtual world, “friend” or “follower” can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate through that medium. In the physical world, friend can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self-disclosure, mutuality and expectations for relationship.

## **9. Web cameras and live-streaming videos**

Recorded Videos may not be posted by members unless authorised by the administrator, member of the ministry team or appropriate designated person.

They must be relevant, appropriate and Christian in appearance and content and must comply with copyright legislation.

## **10. Using 'Zoom' or live streaming platforms safely**

More detailed guidance on Safeguarding guidance for churches using video conferencing as part of their ministry can be found at:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Guidance-on-safeguarding-while-using-videoconferencing-platforms-for-ministry-v1-1.docx>

## **11. Safeguarding**

Laws regarding the reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world. Very clear boundaries must be maintained when communicating with children and young people. The law and policies on Safeguarding apply in communications with children and young people by whatever means, and Safeguarding guidelines apply fully online.

Communications should be public and in the view of whole groups, not individuals. Private messages should not be exchanged with young people via social media.

## **12. Emails**

Face to face communication is always preferred, please try to speak to people face to face or via the telephone. Use e-mail as a last resort. When email is used, carefully check that you are representing what you trying to say in the best manner, keeping within the above guidelines. Make sure you are sending it to the correct recipient and for the right reason. Only write what you are comfortable to say face to face. Only copy other recipients into an email when it is expedient to do so. When sending an email to multiple recipients, always consider using BCC, known as Blind Carbon Copy. This is to avoid disclosing other people's e-mail addresses. Only use CC (Carbon Copy) if you purposefully want recipients to see all other copied recipients e-mail addresses. When replying to an email with visible multiple recipients, only 'reply to all' when the sender has asked you to do so. Replies should be personal and not public. Never copy recipients into a thread of emails. This is a quick way to lose confidentiality and cause damage. Emails are to be precise and easy to read.

## **13. Pictures**

Photos, files and attachments will not be posted by members unless first vetted and authorised or unless appropriate and written consent is given.

Pictures of children should be discouraged, and prior permission needs to be obtained from and authorised by the administrator, member of the ministry team or appropriate designated person for any photographing of children.

#### **14. Personal accounts**

Personal social media accounts should be kept distinct from accounts relating to church roles and responsibilities and should be clearly labelled so that the views expressed cannot be taken to represent those of the Parish. Nonetheless, church members administering online duties for the church should ensure that their personal social media use is conducted in a manner consistent with their Christian character and this policy.

**This guidance should be read alongside the Church of England's: 'Promoting a Safer Church Policy' and High Downs Parish Safeguarding Policy. Any online concerns with regard to safeguarding should be reported immediately and in line with the Safeguarding Policy protocol.**

#### **Other sources of useful guidance:**

"Safe Environment and Activities Guidance"

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Safer%20Environment%20and%20Activities%20Oct19.pdf>

"Guidance on Safeguarding whilst using video conferencing platforms for Ministry"

<https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Guidance-on-safeguarding-whilst-using-videoconferencing-platforms-for-ministry-v1-1.docx>

"Using Zoom for video meetings with young people"

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Being%20connected%20with%20ZOOM%20safely.pdf>

#### **Help and Further Advice**

Welcome to our sign posting page for help and further advice.

Kent County Council - main contact: 03000 41 41 41

[Adult social services & health](#): 03000 41 61 61

[Children & Families Information Service](#): 03000 41 23 23

Children's social services: 03000 41 11 11

[Worried about a child page](#)

[Worried about an adult page](#)

[Kent Domestic Abuse Services - Domestic Abuse](#)

[Safe Spaces](#)

[Kent Police](#)

[NSPCC](#)

[Mind](#)

[Family Matters](#)