Electronic Communication at Holy Trinity Westbury-on-Trym

Holy Trinity has many ways of communicating with its congregation and the wider community as a whole. One such method to do this, is with the use of Social Media. It is important that the way we as a church communicate with people is adaptable using a proactive approach to Social Media and other forms of communication. This is so we keep people informed, but also a means of restricting the feeling of isolation that many people experience, particularly if they are unable to physically attend church for a period of time or indefinitely.

This policy is aimed at giving guidance to those involved with the use of Social Media for the church. It is a policy created by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and reviewed at least every two years, with the next being in May 2022. As well as providing guidance, it should be seen as a reference tool for the PCC if the need arises. Where the policy refers to actions by 'Holy Trinity' it does so, on the basis that such actions are collectively made by the PCC of the church as part of its responsibilities.

As a form of communication, with social media in particular, there is a crossover into the area of Safeguarding in general and therefore these two policies will make reference to each other and should always be considered in conjunction with each other.

1. Purpose:

To provide best practice guidelines and a structure for electronic communications whoever the potential audience is. By the nature of Social Media there may be greater emphasis on young people, and their families but the Church needs to recognise that a duty of care exists to all people, young or old, vulnerable or not.

Social Media covers a wide range of tools, facilities and communication methods including E-mail and Text Messaging, but it is more commonly considered to relate to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp etc). The policy will outline some general guidelines for electronic communications as well as specific guidelines that will govern activity through specific methods and platforms.

2. General Guidelines:

Electronic Communication is an easy, useful and increasingly popular way of communicating for people of all ages. However there are also several risks involved in using electronic communication methods. Perhaps the biggest of these are safeguarding and accountability issues, as well as ensuring that the privacy and security of all parties is upheld. Therefore the following guidelines will cover all electronic communications.

1. The Diocese of Bristol has a golden rule of using social media in ministry. This is: If you would not
   – say something in a public meeting or to someone's face
   – write something in a local newspaper or on headed notepaper
   DO NOT put it online.

2. Wherever possible, the originating message being published on Social Media should come from the *Holy Trinity, Westbury-On-Trym* Profile.
If people are linked to that profile and <u>share</u> the 'announcement' after that, then we still have an element of responsibility for it. Naturally however, we would hope that the person sharing it was doing so responsibly, but if as a result of doing so, online comments or conversation follows which may be considered contentious or harmful in some way, then we have a duty to police that. It is possible that such posts can be removed.

3. Wherever possible, the 'Church Profile' should not engage in a conversation with individuals through Social Media. Any responses to questions asked should be factual, helpful, polite, short in content and if a fuller explanation or answer is required to any question raised, maybe suggest the person contact either the parish office or churchwardens.

4. Where photos are being taken at an event, this should be publicised so that people are aware. If a photo or video is being used as a promotion or record of an event, then it can only be done so with prior agreement of those involved. If this relates to young people, then parental approval must be obtained. Always work on a default position if you wish to post photos and/or videos of individuals – HAS CONSENT BEEN OBTAINED? The church is designated as a private place, as opposed to public. This means anyone taking photographs should first seek permission of the church. Where photos are being taken on behalf of the church, then we have to give notice that this is the case. Where children may be a part of such a photograph then we choose to ask general permission from their parents/guardians where they are under age 18.

5. All new methods of electronic communication (such as a Facebook page or group) MUST be approved by the PCC before use. The number of platforms which could be used to aid communication is ever changing. A full investigation is required into any proposed new platform to consider security risks, access, longevity of information held, and other potential risks. The PCC must be comfortable that any proposed new platform is 'safe to use'.

The following perhaps relate more to the specific area of youth work, but best practice would indicate they also be followed in general terms wherever possible.

6. There will be no private communication between a youth leader and young person. In the event of a young person messaging a leader, the leader will respond saying that they cannot communicate privately online, including another leader in the response.

7. If a leader must communicate individually with a young person (or with a small number of young people) they should <u>ALWAYS</u> include at least one other adult. Where possible this should be the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the young people being communicated with. If this is not possible it should be the youth leader responsible for those young people (e.g. the choirmaster or the youth worker), the chair of the youth committee, the safeguarding officer or the vicar.

3. Guidelines for Specific Forms of Electronic Communication.

➢ Email:

This is likely to be the primary form of electronic communication. This means that all formal communication should be sent in an email in addition to any other forms of electronic communication. This provides consistency as most people have access to an email address, even if they do not have, or prefer not to use other forms of electronic communication.

In addition to the general guidelines mentioned above the following guidelines should be adhered to when using email.

1) When sending an email to a large group of people the email should always be blind copied (bcc) to them to ensure their privacy is maintained.
2) If accidentally other people's email address are disclosed, then the person should immediately seek to recall the email.
3) People in the church who hold various positions should look to move towards using generic email addresses at the next convenient time to do so, new role, new appointment etc. such as Vicar@Westbury-Parish-Church.org.uk, youthworker@westbury-parish-church.org.uk

➢ Text Messaging/Whatsapp:

People within the church, perhaps those on a committee for example are able to use Texting and/pr WhatsApp providing they are comfortable doing so and have given their consent. The use of Texts or communications within WhatsApp should follow the general guidelines outlined above.

In a youth environment, the use of Text Messages between Youth Leaders and young people should be avoided unless there are exceptional circumstances (i.e. an accident perhaps) in which case a copy of the text message should also go to an adult.

➢ Church Website

Holy Trinity has a Church Website. Pages on that website are under the control of a limited number of administrators. The same care in terms of promotion of events, accurate information, photographs, data protection, licensing laws and safeguarding as mentioned within this document applies to all content on the website.

➢ Church YouTube Page

Holy Trinity has a Church YouTube page. It is also under the control of a limited number of administrators. Videos posted on here need to also reflect the necessary adherence to photographs, data protection, licensing and safeguarding in particular. A request can be made for videos to be removed , if there is a breach in any of these aspects.

➢ Social Media:

1) Holy Trinity currently has a **Facebook Page**:

https://www.facebook.com/wotchurch/

Posts on this are only permitted by specific people within the church congregation. These are listed in the attached Appendix. This list will be reviewed each year in line with this policy.

2)   Holy Trinity currently has a **Twitter feed**:

@HolyTrym

Posts on this are only permitted by specific people within the church congregation. These are listed in the attached Appendix. This list will be reviewed each year in line with this policy.

As mentioned above, any additions to Facebook and Twitter must first be agreed formally by the Church Parochial Church Council (PCC) before being established.

4. Content of Social Media Posts:

Holy Trinity does not have a prescriptive list of what can and cannot be posted on the church's various forms of Social Media as clearly often appropriateness, interpretation and relevance are subjective matters. However, the church does insist that those using Social Media are responsible for what is posted as they are doing so on behalf of the church. Inappropriate posts can have far reaching consequences. Holy Trinity does expect all those using Social Media on behalf of the church do so, giving due consideration to the basic principle laid down by the Church of England in its Social Media Guidelines:

https://www.churchofengland.org/terms-and-conditions/our-social-media-community-guidelines

Any Social Media representative of Holy Trinity should refer to this page to make sure they are fully conversant with its content.

- **Be safe.** The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained. If you have any concerns, ask a diocesan safeguarding adviser.

- **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.

- **Remember it's not about your personal opinion or preferences.** In everyday ministry, the distinction between public duties and private life is difficult to draw. It is no different online. There are risks associated with personal opinions being seen as public statements. Be careful with what is posted, particularly if divisive. Remember that the frequency of similar posts and messages over time on a common subject, can lead to questions on impartiality. Make sure you define boundaries.

- **Be honest.** Don't mislead people about who you are.

- **Don't rush in**
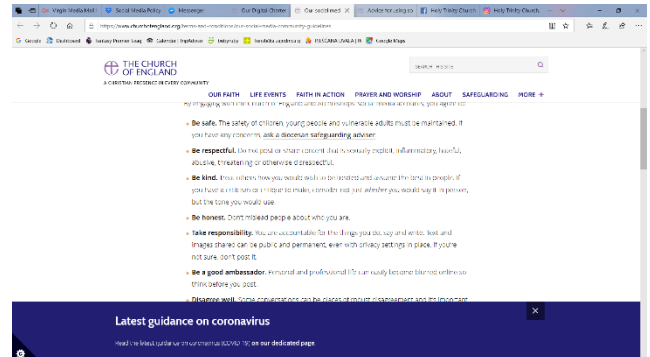
The immediacy of social media is one of its benefits – we can respond quickly to questions, correct misunderstandings, give our perspective about a breaking story in the news media. Responding quickly doesn't mean doing so without due consideration.

Before posting always think:

➢ Is this my story to share?
➢ Could this be 'Fake News'?
➢ Would I want my mum to read this?
➢ Would I want God to read this?
➢ Would I want this on the front page of a newspaper?

- **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. 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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **Stay within the legal framework** Whilst sharing thoughts and reflections with friends or followers via social media can seem personal and private, it is not. Posting on behalf of Holy Trinity is just the same. By law, if one or more people can access it, content is classed as published, in the public domain and subject to legislation around libel, defamation, copyright and data protection.

- **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.

A review of the social media output will be discussed by the PCC as part of the annual review of this policy. Naturally if specific issues arise during this time, they will be dealt with at the next appropriate PCC Meeting.

5. How will the PCC respond to anyone who breaches Holy Trinity's social media guidelines?

The PCC may take action if they receive complaints or spot inappropriate, unsuitable or offensive material posted to the church's social media accounts. This may include deleting comments, blocking users or reporting comments as appropriate.

Naturally because it might be important that this is done promptly, the decision to take action in such circumstances would be expected to be made by the Churchwardens on behalf of the PCC. If there is a grievance on this action, appeal can be made to the Vicar and Vice-Chair of the PCC who are unconnected to the matter.

6. Youth/Family Work and Social Media

There are specific issues with Social Media and youth/family work. These relate to the use of Social Media as part of the work engaging with youngsters and a more regular form of communication with members of a youth group for example. It provides greater detail about the practical application and use of Social Media within that environment. Rather than have a separate policy for this, the specific detail is covered below:

Facebook:
Youth Leaders/Workers/Family workers should avoid having young people as friends on Facebook (except for their family).

A profile will be set up under the name of Holy Trinity WoT Youth Worker/Family Worker or "ABC Youth Group". The privacy settings for the group will be set as the maximum possible so that only those who are 'friends' with it can see what is posted. The youth worker, the safeguarding officer and the chair of the youth committee will all have access to the username and password of this page.

The youth/family worker will be responsible for the day to day running of the page. The other two people will act as accountability, as well as being able to post to the page.

Parents, young people, leaders and other local youth/family workers will be able to become 'friends' with the page – the three administrators will monitor this and ensure that only the appropriate people have access to the page.

If there are events that people could be invited to via the Facebook page the three administrators will evaluate the event and collectively discuss if and who it is appropriate to invite to the event.

All of the information put on the page will be deemed as private and confidential and therefore will not be shared with any other party, unless agreed by the three administrators.

Instagram/Twitter
These will run with the same model as Facebook, with the same three people being responsible running the page.

Again leaders should avoid having young people as friends or followers on Instagram or twitter. They should also, where possible, set their privacy settings as high as possible.

YouTube

Due to the public nature of this platform extreme caution should be taken when using this platform. It should only be used if no other method of communication will work.

If this method is to be used a separate account should be used (as with Facebook) with the same three administrators.

Additionally comments should be disabled for all videos posted.

If using YouTube videos in youth group sessions the leader in charge of the activity is responsible for ensuring that the video is appropriate for the youth group in question.

Snapchat

Due to the lack of accountability associated with this platform the church should avoid using it.

Additionally, as before, leaders should not have young people as friends on Snapchat unless they are family.

Other Forms of Social Media

At the minute other forms of social media are not widely used with young people.

The general guidelines above apply for all forms of social media. If other platforms become widely used specific guidelines for them should be written.

Parochial Church Council May 2020

Appendix

Administrators responsible for various forms of Holy Trinity Church Media are as follows as at (May 2020)

- ➢ Church Website – Judith Ogden and Deborah Smith
- ➢ Facebook – Clare Warbis
- ➢ Twitter – Clare Warbis
- ➢ YouTube Page – Judith Ogden