

TITLE

WADHURST CHURCH SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

PURPOSE

This policy outlines the underlying principles and practical guidelines within which the church of St Peter and St Paul Wadhurst seeks to use social media platforms to communicate with its members, the rest of the benefice and those in the wider community about its activities.

It aims to ensure that all communications on social media are appropriate and respect the privacy of individuals and confidentiality of the church's business.

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1. Introduction

Social media platforms provide opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world. Social media is interactive, conversational, and open-ended, and happens in a public space open to interpretation and comments from other social media users. This and their immediacy and widespread popularity mean that guidelines are needed to ensure that these platforms are used properly.

2. Core Principles

Any message posted on any social media platform by anyone purporting to or perceived to be speaking on behalf of the church should follow these core principles:

- be credible, accurate, fair and transparent.
- be cordial, honest and professional.
- be interactive. Share others' posts where appropriate, like and comment.
- respect the views of others even where you disagree.
- never share personal details unless given explicit and specific permission
- respect confidentiality. Within the life of the Church there are private conversations, confidential processes and private or closed meetings. All involved have a right to expect that others will respect confidential information they receive in any context.
- never share something representing the Church on behalf of a third party without having previously obtained their prior explicit permission.
- take special care over photographs, videos or any other form of media.
- stay within the legal framework and be aware that safeguarding, copyright and data protection laws apply.
- be prepared to acknowledge ownership and not claim anonymity.
- remember that participating in online conversations will result in your comments being permanently and immediately available and open to public scrutiny and perhaps being republished in other media. Once material is posted to a blog or other internet site, it should be assumed to be still available even if it is later deleted from the original site.
- Make all postings carefully and with appreciation of how the item or comment may be received. Expressions of opinion should be made cautiously (if at all) and should be in keeping with the Church and its teachings. Subjects such as politics and humour are very personal and are best avoided.

3. Management of social media output

Although any church member is free to post on social media platforms, the 'official' output from the church should be limited to nominated individuals from the Communications team, the Vicar and the Youth Worker.

4. Special considerations for members of the clergy

Clergy should not submit “friend” requests to parishioners and others to whom they minister.

Clergy who want to connect via a social networking website with parishioners are strongly encouraged to set up a group account that all parishioners may join. The purpose of having a personal profile and parish group is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with parishioners and real family, friends and colleagues.

5. Children and young people

Particular care must be taken in social media links with children and young people. Reference should be made to the existing policies on safeguarding and the information specifically relating to online activities they contain.

Specific guidance in this policy:

- Adults who minister to children and youth are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile. Their individual personal profiles are to be used only to interact with real friends, family and peers.
- Adults should not submit “friend” requests to minors or youth.
- Youth may ask to be “friends”, and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests. If an adult chooses to accept friend requests from minors or youth who are associated with their community of faith, other adult leaders must have full access to all aspects of that adult’s profile and correspondence. Adults who want to connect via a social networking website with youth to whom they minister are strongly encouraged to set up a closed group account that youth may join. Youth requesting to “friend” an adult can then be invited to join this group rather than be accepted as a friend on an adult’s personal profile account. Groups should have at least two unrelated adult administrators as well as at least two youth administrators. Invitations to youth to join the group should be made by the youth administrators, unless a youth previously asked an adult administrator to invite him/her to join the group.
- Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that guidelines for the safety of children (and vulnerable adults) have not been followed should be reported to the Parish Safeguarding Adviser. If the material is on a church affiliated site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation.
- Material that is inappropriate but does not raise suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should immediately be removed from the site.

- Any content that details inappropriate behaviour during a church-sponsored event or activity should be addressed by adult youth leaders and parents.
- Social networking groups for youth should be open to parents of current members. Parents should be aware that the content of youth pages or groups that are not sponsored by the church are NOT within the purview of adult youth leaders.
- Adult leaders of youth groups and former youth members who, due to departure, removal from position, or who are no longer eligible should be immediately removed from digital communications with youth groups via social networking sites.

6. Photography and Video

The taking of photos and videos at events is always likely to happen and as a record of an occasion is to be encouraged. However, it is recommended that only those images where individuals are not clearly identifiable are used by the church for social media and digital platforms, unless explicit consent has been given.

- If children or young people are clearly recognisable, consent should be requested prior to publishing. Clubs and parishes must gain written photographic and video consent for under 16s, given by a parent/legal guardian, which outlines where the images will be shared. Written consent for 16-17 year olds is not obligatory, verbal consent by the young person is sufficient (although where appropriate and depending on a young person's circumstances, written consent may be advisable given by a parent/legal guardian)
- Independent individuals over the age of 18 do not usually require written consent for images or video, although verbal consent from the individual is courteous to maintain a positive relationship.
- Images of vulnerable adults should not be used without consent.