



1. Introduction¹

Social Media sites and applications 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, Twitter, Instagram or Snapchat; writing or commenting on a blog; taking part in discussions on web forums or message boards. For many, especially young people, using social media is an extension of physical 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.

2. The Scope of this Policy

This policy is to be used in conjunction with Cambourne Church's Safeguarding Policy which is available on the church website: www.cambournechurch.org.uk/safeguarding This policy draws upon the House of Bishop's safeguarding policies and practice guidance².

This policy relates to the use of approved church/ministry social media accounts and any communication on the church's behalf. For personal use, we encourage all who communicate via social media to adopt the Church of England's Social Media Community Guidelines – Appendix 1.

3. Key Terms in this Policy

- **Church Officer** – anyone appointed/elected by or on behalf of the Church to a post or role, whether they are ordained or lay, paid or unpaid³. For the purposes of this policy, 'Church Officer' is used to describe members of Cambourne Church Council and Cambourne Church staff.
- **Appointed Volunteer** – a person appointed by Cambourne Church Council to create/share content and to communicate on behalf of the church, using an approved social media account.
- **Youth Leader** – a volunteer who has been safely recruited to Cambourne Church's Youth Ministry Team and works with young people face-to-face. All Cambourne Church Youth Leaders are checked with the Disclosure and Barring Service and receive ongoing safeguarding training in their role.
- **Young Person/Young People** - for the purposes of this policy, young people are defined as those in the age bracket of school years 7 to 13. Where a young person reaches the age of 18

¹ This introduction can be found in the Parish Safeguarding Handbook (2018), Section 12: Use of Social Media

² Promoting a Safer Church (2017); Parish Safeguarding Handbook (2018); Safer Environment and Activities (2019)

³ Promoting a Safer Church (2017), p6

but remains within Cambourne Church's youth work provision, it is good practice to adhere to this policy.

4. The Aims of this Policy

This policy aims to:

- Empower Church Officers and Appointed Volunteers to engage with their communities using social media;
- To provide guidance for safe and effective communication and raise awareness of the benefits and potential dangers of using social media;
- To set clear boundaries for communication between Youth Leaders and young people.

5. The Role of the Church Council

The Church Council must approve the use of social media by Cambourne Church. It is recommended that any social media presence intended to directly represent Cambourne Church, and its activities (e.g. Baby and Toddler Group, Youth Groups) as approved by Cambourne Church Council, should be created by the Church Office. The Administrators can then give appropriate access to other Church Officers and Appointed Volunteers.

The Church Council must ensure there is a named person to whom all workers are accountable. The named person must be a Church Officer and should have full access to all approved social media accounts to monitor the communications. The named person should be proactive in fulfilling this role. Communications must be shared with the named person. The named person should not be a Church Officer who holds a responsibility to regularly create/share content and communicate using an approved social media account.

Church Officers remain bound by professional rules of confidentiality. Where there is a 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.

6. Guidance for Church Officers⁴ and Appointed Volunteers

Do:

- **Have your eyes open and be vigilant.**
- **Maintain the upmost integrity** - honesty, transparency, consistency and accountability are key. Treat online communication with young people and adults as you would communication that is face to face. Always maintain the same level of confidentiality.
- **Report any safeguarding concerns** that arise on social media to the Parish Safeguarding Officer or, if appropriate, the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.
- **Always assume that everything you write is permanent** and may be viewed by anyone at any time; and that everything can be traced back to you personally as well as the church. Always think before you post.
- **Draw clear boundaries** around your social media usage associated with your private life and your use of different social media for public ministry. Keep church account(s) and profiles separate from your personal social media accounts. We recommend setting 'working hours',

⁴ Parish Safeguarding Handbook (2018), Section 12: Use of Social Media

only being available on social media between the hours of 8am and 10pm – this means not posting online, checking a group chat or responding to messages outside of those times.

- **Always ask a person's permission** before you take and use their photo online and explain how you plan to use it.
- **Always ask parents/guardians for written consent to:**
 - Use and store photographs of children/young people* from activities or events in official church publications, or on the church's social media, website and displays.
 - Use telephone, text message, email and other messaging services to communicate with young people.
 - Allow young people to connect to the church's social media pages.

**We must also obtain the consent of the young person before taking their photo.*

Obtaining such consent is the responsibility of the Ministry Team Leader for Children and Young People. These permissions are requested on children's and youth work registration forms.

- **Avoid one-to-one communication with a child or young person.** As a general principle, avoid 'lone working' in the online world.
- **Use clear and unambiguous language** in all communication and avoid abbreviations that could be misinterpreted.
- **Report inappropriate material** - save and download to hard copy any inappropriate material received through social networking sites or other electronic means and show *immediately* to the named person, Parish Safeguarding Officer, Minister or, if appropriate, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.
- **Use passwords** and log off promptly after use to ensure that nobody else can use social media pretending to be you.

Do not:

- Use a personal social media account in your work with children, young people or vulnerable adults.
- Add children, young people or vulnerable adults as friends/followers on your personal accounts.
- Say anything on social media that you would not be happy saying in a public meeting, to someone's face, writing in a local newspaper or on headed notepaper. Simply put, if you would not say it offline, do not say it online.
- Comment on photos or posts, or share content, unless appropriate to your church role.

In particular, do not allow content to contain or share links to other sites that contain:

- Libellous, defamatory, bullying or harassing statements.
- Breaches of copyright and data protection.
- Material of an illegal nature.
- Offensive sexual or abusive references.
- Inappropriate language.
- Anything which may be harmful to a child, young person or vulnerable adult, or which may bring the church into disrepute or compromise its reputation.

7. Best Practice for Youth Leaders

We recognise that, for young people, the distinction between the 'online' and 'offline' world is an artificial one. It is likely that as Youth Leaders seek to build supportive relationships with young people, a young person may seek to communicate with a Youth Leader using social media. We also recognise that, the use of social media sites and applications has the potential enhance our work with young people. The use of social media should never be a replacement for meeting in person but can exist alongside an organised youth group or activity.

In order to use social media to safely communicate with young people, it is important to set clear boundaries.

The Ministry Team Leader for Children and Young People can communicate with a young person via telephone, text message, email and other messaging services, where written permission has been obtained from the parent/guardian. The Ministry Team Leader for Children and Young People should communicate from a dedicated phone number for work purposes.

A Youth Leader should not use social media to communicate with a young person without the explicit permission of the Ministry Team Leader for Children and Young People. Any decision to grant such permission will require the written permission of the parent/guardian.

If a young person sends a Youth Leader a private message, the Youth Leader should not respond. Instead, the Youth Leader should inform the Ministry Team Leader for Children and Young People at the earliest opportunity. The Ministry Team Leader for Children and Young People and/or Parish Safeguarding Officer will advise the next step.

Where the use of social media to communicate with young people has been approved by Cambourne Church Council, we ask all Youth Leaders to:

- **Be accountable** – Cambourne Church Youth Leaders are accountable to the Ministry Team Leader for Children and Young People. Be clear about how you are using social media and transparent about your communication with young people.
- **Avoid private messaging** – a minimum of two DBS-checked and safeguarding-trained Youth Leaders should be present in any conversation.
- **Draw clear boundaries** – it is not appropriate for Cambourne Church Youth Leaders to be available to young people at all times, therefore sensible time limits should be set. We recommend that Youth Leaders should not be available to young people before 8am or after 10pm – this means not posting online, checking a group chat or responding to messages outside of those times.
- **Maintain the upmost integrity** - honesty, transparency, consistency and accountability are key. Treat online communication with young people and adults as you would communication that is face to face. Always maintain the same level of confidentiality.
- **Report any safeguarding concerns** that arise on social medial to the Parish Safeguarding Officer or, if appropriate, the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.
- **Adopt the Social Media Community Guidelines** – as listed in Appendix 1.

8. Video Conferencing

Video conferencing has become a valuable tool when meeting in person is not practical. As a general principle, apply the same good practice online as you would in person.

Cambourne Church Council must approve the use of video conferencing for a church meeting, group or activity.

It is important to be transparent about the use of video conferencing. If you are meeting with a child, young person or vulnerable adult, ensure that the meeting is booked in advance and that someone else is aware the meeting is taking place.

Written permission must be obtained from a young person's parent/guardian to participate in youth work online. The date and time of the video conference should be made clear and which Youth Leaders are participating. Every call involving children and young people must include at least two DBS-checked and safeguarding-trained leaders. A record of participants should be kept.

Church Officers and Youth Leaders should avoid conducting online meetings from your own bedroom or personal space. If this is not possible, use the technology to blur or change the background to a neutral image.

We strongly advise that invited participants are not in their bedroom, although we also recognise that for some young people there will not be another private space in their home. Consideration should be given to this in the risk assessment.

Key Safeguarding Contacts:

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Cambourne Church Communication and Social Media Policy November 2023

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Appendix 1: Social Media Community Guidelines⁵

Created by the Church of England



Cambourne
Church

- **Be safe.** The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained. If you have any concerns, ask your local Parish Safeguarding Officer or the 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.
- **Be honest.** Don't mislead people about who you are.
- **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.
- **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. If you see a comment that you believe breaks their policies, then please report it to the respective company.

⁵ Available on the Church of England's website: <https://www.churchofengland.org/terms-and-conditions/our-social-media-community-guidelines>