



West Hill Parochial Church Council

Policy for the use of Online Communication & Social Media

A guide for staff and volunteers using online resources and social media channels to promote the work of St Michael the Archangel Church, West Hill, Devon

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The PCC of St Michael the Archangel Church, West Hill will review and update this policy bi-annually, following consultation, where appropriate.

This policy is for paid staff or volunteers, who represent the church in any capacity.

Designated Social Media Leads:	January 2021:		
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Contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1 What are online communications and social media?	3
1.2 Why do we use social media?	3
1.3 Why do we need an online communications and social media policy?	3
1.4 Setting out the social media policy	3
1.5 Internet access and monitoring usage	3
1.6 Point of contact for social media	3
1.7 Which social media channels do we use?	4
2. Guidelines.....	4
2.1 Using St Michael’s Parish Church's website and social media channels — appropriate conduct	4
2.2 Use of personal social media accounts — appropriate conduct	6
3. Further guidelines	8
3.1 Libel.....	8
3.2 Copyright law.....	8
3.3 Confidentiality	8
3.4 Discrimination and harassment.....	8
3.5 Use of social media in the recruitment process	8
3.6 Protection and intervention	8
3.7 Under 18s and vulnerable people.....	8
3.8 Responsibilities and breach of policy	9
3.9 Public Interest Disclosure.....	9

1. Introduction

1.1 What are online communications and social media?

Online communications include websites and all social media channels, as they are web-based tools and applications, which enable users to create and share content (words, images and video content), as well as network with each other through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of social media include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.

1.2 Why do we use online communications and social media?

Online communications and social media are useful for the success of communicating St Michael's Parish Church's work. It is important for some staff and volunteers in key roles to participate in social media to engage with the wider community, participate in relevant conversations and make the church of St Michael's, its messages and events, accessible to the wider community.

1.3 Why do we need an online communications and social media policy?

The difference between a personal and professional opinion can be blurred on social media, particularly if you are discussing issues relating to St Michael's Parish Church's work. Standards must be maintained in all communications made on behalf or any that could be deemed to come from St Michael's Parish Church, as outlined in this policy, which we require everyone in positions that represent the church to observe. Publication and commentary on the website and through social media carry similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary in the public domain.

This policy is intended for all: *Staff members, trustees and volunteers in the church*, and applies to content posted on both a *St Michael's Parish Church* device and a personal device. Before engaging in work-related social media activity, staff, trustees and volunteers should read this policy.

1.4 Setting out the social media policy

This policy sets out guidelines on how the website and social media should be used to support the delivery and promotion of St Michael's Parish Church, and the use of social media by staff and volunteers in both a professional and personal capacity. It sets out what you need to be aware of when interacting in these spaces and is designed to help staff support and expand our official social media channels, while protecting the church and its reputation, in order to prevent any legal issues.

1.5 Internet access and monitoring usage

There are currently no access restrictions to any of our social media sites in the St Michael's Parish Church office. However, when using the internet at work or at home on behalf of the church, it is important that staff and volunteers follow the guidelines in this policy.

1.6 Point of contact for social media

The person(s) designated by the PCC oversees the day-to-day publishing, monitoring and management of our website and social media channels are the initial point of contact and are named as the Social Media Lead(s) at the start of this policy. Staff and volunteers should seek advice from the Designated Social Media Lead(s), if they have specific questions about any aspect of these channels, who will then consult the diocesan advisor on social media, if needed. If any other person intends to post content on social media on behalf of St Michael's Parish Church, this must be cleared by the PCC, and they should receive appropriate training first, either in-house or through the diocese.

1.7 Which social media channels and online publicity do we use?

St Michael's Parish Church uses the following website and social media channels:

Website: <https://stmichaelatwesthill.weebly.com/>

Facebook:

Twitter:

We use these online facilities and channels to inform the community about our team of people and the services available, as well as to celebrate our achievements, publicise events and encourage people to join us.

2. Guidelines

2.1 Using St Michael's Parish Church's website and social media channels — appropriate conduct:

a. The Designated Social Media Lead(s) are responsible for setting up and managing St Michael's Parish Church's website and social media channels. Only those authorised to do so by the PCC will have access to these accounts and no one person has the right to delete or significantly amend the format or structure of the website, Facebook or Twitter Pages without first gaining the permission of the PCC. If the PCC find that a person in a role that represents the church fails to meet the standards set by them in this policy, they should be removed from the role.

b. The Designated Social Media Lead(s) will endeavour to respond to comments Monday-Friday, 9am-11am.

c. Users of these online channels should be seen as an ambassador for St Michael's Parish Church. Staff and volunteers should ensure they reflect the values of the PCC in what they post and use a tone of voice that is professional and friendly. Content should be carefully thought through, positive and caring so as to reflect what the church does and be seen to be always inclusive and respectful.

d. Persons who post online should ensure that all social media content has a purpose and a benefit for St Michael's Parish Church, and accurately reflects St Michael's Parish Church's agreed position, as designated by the PCC. If there is any doubt the Designated Social Media Lead(s) should be consulted, who may bring the matter to the PCC.

e. Information placed online through any channel that relates to the church should bring value to the community, inform, support and engage with all who may use the sites.

f. If staff or volunteers wish to contribute content for social media, either non-paid for material or paid advertising, they should send it to the Designated Social Media Lead(s) for posting. Where there is a concern over the content to be posted, the Churchwardens or PCC should be consulted by the Designated Social Media Lead(s) prior to posting.

g. Those who are permitted to place content online should take care with the presentation of content, making sure that there are no typos, misspellings or grammatical errors. The quality and content of images should also be of a standard that will not cause offence, be in keeping with church policy, as expressed by the PCC, be visually well presented and not in breach of copyright.

- h. Those posting online should always check facts and not automatically assume that material is accurate. They should take reasonable steps, where necessary, to seek verification, for example by checking data/statistics and being wary of photo manipulation.
- i. Those posting online should take care to check their work before posting, to avoid errors being made. They should seek to be honest, communicate what they know to be true or have a good source for their information. Should a mistake be made, staff or volunteers should seek help from the Designated Social Media Lead(s) as soon as possible.
- j. Staff or volunteers should not post content about supporters or third-party organisations without their express permission. If staff are sharing information about supporters, service users or third-party organisations, this content should be clearly labelled so those accessing the church sites know it has not come directly from St Michael's Parish Church. If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, staff must ensure they have the consent of a parent or guardian before using them on social media and that the child is not named, in line with our Safeguarding Policy and the Safe Use of Children's Photographs Policy.
- k. When using social media channels, staff and volunteers should endeavour to reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.
- l. Staff and volunteers should refrain from offering personal opinions via St Michael's Parish Church's social media accounts, either directly by commenting or indirectly by 'liking', 'sharing' or 'retweeting'. If anyone posting is in doubt about St Michael's Parish Church's position on a particular issue, they should consult the Designated Social Media Lead(s) who may consult with the PCC, or seek guidance from the Diocese, as required.
- m. At no point should any message be posted online on behalf of St Michael's Parish Church that would encourage others to risk their personal safety or that of others. For example, a video of a stunt.
- n. Staff or volunteers should take care to check that they are not making themselves vulnerable by putting personal information online, thereby risking their own safety.
- o. Staff or volunteers should not encourage people to break the law to supply material for social media, for example using unauthorised video footage. All relevant rights for usage must be obtained before publishing material.
- p. Staff or volunteers should not set up other Facebook groups or pages, Twitter accounts or any other social media channels that could be seen to be on behalf of St Michael's Parish Church, as this would confuse messaging, might suggest any opinions or information shared are those of the church, and could also breach GDPR. By having official social media accounts in place, the PCC in conjunction with the Designated Social Media Lead(s) will ensure consistency of messages and maintain the integrity and reputation of the church.
- q. St Michael's Parish Church is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. Staff and volunteers should refrain from expressing personal views on the policies of political parties and engaging in community discussions on any site that could be linked to the church, where views could be deemed to represent the church in any way.

r. If a complaint is made on St Michael's Parish Church's social media channels, staff or volunteers should seek advice from the Designated Social Media Lead(s), who may bring the matter to the PCC for guidance before responding. If they are not available, then staff or volunteers should speak to an advisor at the Diocese.

s. The Designated Social Media Lead(s) should regularly monitor the church social media spaces for mentions of St Michael's Parish Church so that the PCC is informed of any issues or problems early, and action can be taken. In addition, staff or volunteers have the responsibility to act quickly to inform the Designated Social Media Lead(s) if a problem is discovered. The Designated Social Media Lead(s) will inform the PCC or seek guidance from the Diocese, as required. This is due to the fact that issues can arise on social media which may escalate quickly into a crisis situation because they are sensitive or risk seriously damaging the church's reputation. The nature of social media means that negative comments or incorrect information will be visible to many, and a problem could grow quickly, so not acting immediately could be detrimental to the church.

2.2 Use of personal social media accounts — appropriate conduct

This policy does not intend to inhibit personal use of social media but instead flags up those areas in which issues might arise. St Michael's Parish Church staff, trustees and volunteer representatives of the church are expected to behave appropriately, and in ways that are consistent with St Michael's Parish Church's values and policies, both online and in their communications within the community.

a. Those representing the church should be aware that any information about the church or shared on behalf of the church, which is made public, could affect how people perceive St Michael's Parish Church. They must make it clear when they are speaking for themselves and not on behalf of the church. When using individual personal social media accounts to promote and talk about St Michael's Parish Church's work, staff, trustees and volunteers must use a disclaimer such as: "The views expressed on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent St Michael's Parish Church's positions, policies or opinions."

b. Staff and volunteers who have a personal blog or website, which indicates in any way that they work at or are volunteer representatives of St Michael's Parish Church, should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with the PCC and the Designated Social Media Lead(s). Similarly, staff who want to start blogging and wish to say that they represent St Michael's Parish Church should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with the PCC and the Designated Social Media Lead(s).

c. Those who hold St Michael's Church roles (both employed and volunteer) where they may be well known in another field of expertise, must take particular care to ensure that any personal views published should not suggest that they are expressing a view representative of St Michael's Parish Church.

d. Staff and volunteers should use common sense and good judgement, and if unsure about what is suitable to post, should check with the Designated Social Media Lead(s), who may seek advice from the PCC or Diocese. They should be aware of their association with St Michael's Parish Church and ensure their profile and related content is consistent with how the church would wish to present itself to the wider general public, colleagues, church members and those in the local community.

e. Staff and volunteers should not approach high profile people from their personal social media accounts to ask them to support the charity, as this could hinder any

potential relationships that are being managed by the PCC. This includes asking for retweets about the church.

f. If staff or volunteers have any information about high profile people that have a connection with our church, or if there is someone who could be approached to support the church, staff or volunteers should speak to the Designated Social Media Lead(s), who may seek advice from the PCC before sharing their details.

g. If a staff or volunteer member is contacted by the press about their social media posts, which relate to St Michael's Parish Church, they should talk to the Churchwardens or Designated Social Media Lead(s) immediately and under no circumstances respond directly.

h. St Michael's Parish Church is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. When representing St Michael's Parish Church, staff or volunteers are expected to hold St Michael's Parish Church's position of neutrality. Staff who are politically active in their spare time need to be clear about ensuring that they are separating their personal political identity from St Michael's Parish Church and understand and avoid potential conflicts of interest.

i. Staff or volunteers should never use St Michael's Parish Church's logos or trademarks unless approved to do so or replace the agreed church logos with ones of their choice in any publication or communication that represents the church. Permission to use logos should be requested from the Designated Social Media Lead(s), who may consult the PCC. All church representative documentation should include the church logo.

j. Staff and volunteers in key roles should always seek to protect the church by being careful with their personal privacy online and by being cautious when sharing personal information. It should be recognised that what is published online is widely accessible and will remain available for a long time, so the content should be considered carefully and displayed safely. Additional information about online responsibilities when using our computer systems is found in our GDPR Policy.

k. Staff and volunteers should think about their own reputation as well as that of the church. The expression of personal opinions and any differences of opinion should be handled respectfully online. Staff and volunteers may never insult people or treat them badly online, or air any negative feelings in the messages they post. While discussions and debates are acceptable, a respectful response to the opinions of others is imperative. Staff and volunteers should always be polite and be seen to be the first to acknowledge and correct their mistakes.

l. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to share tweets and posts that the church has issued. When online in a personal capacity, staff and volunteers might also see opportunities to comment on or support St Michael's Parish Church and the work we do. Where appropriate, and using the guidelines within this policy, we encourage staff or volunteers to do this, as it provides a human voice and raises our profile. However, if the content is controversial or misrepresented, please raise this with the Designated Social Media Lead(s) who will respond as appropriate or seek guidance from the PCC.

3. Further guidelines

3.1 Libel

Libel is when a false written statement that is damaging to a person's reputation is published online or in print. Whether staff are posting content on social media as part of their job or in a personal capacity, they should not bring St Michael's Parish Church into disrepute by making defamatory comments about individuals, the PCC, church members or any other organisations or groups.

3.2 Copyright law

It is critical that all staff and volunteers abide by the laws governing copyright, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. They should check before using or adapting someone else's images or written content, seeking permission from the author or guidance from the PCC, if unsure. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, may also be considered a breach of copyright.

3.3 Confidentiality

Any communications that staff make in a personal capacity must not breach confidentiality. For example, information meant for internal use only or information that St Michael's Parish Church is not ready to disclose yet.

3.4 Discrimination and harassment

Staff should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official St Michael's Parish Church social media channel or a personal account. For example:

- making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief
- using social media to bully another individual(s)
- posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or any links to such content

3.5 Use of social media in the recruitment process

Recruitment should be carried out in accordance with the Diocesan Recruitment Policy, and associated procedures and guidelines. Any advertising of vacancies should be done through the PCC, in conjunction with the Diocese.

There should be no systematic or routine checking of candidate's online social media activities during the recruitment process, as conducting these searches might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics, such as religious beliefs or sexual orientation, played a part in a recruitment decision. This is in line with the Diocesan Equal Opportunities Policy.

3.6 Protection and intervention

The responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the social networking site itself. Different social networking sites offer different models of interventions in different areas. For more information, refer to the guidance available on the social networking site itself. For example, Facebook. However, if a staff member considers that a person or people is/are at risk of harm, they should report this to the Churchwardens or a member of the PCC immediately.

3.7 Under 18s and vulnerable people

Young and vulnerable people face risks when using social networking sites. They may be at risk of being bullied, publishing sensitive and personal information on their profiles, or from becoming targets for online grooming.

Where known, when communicating with young people under 18-years-old via social media, staff should ensure the online relationship with St Michael's Parish Church follows the same rules as the offline 'real-life' relationship outlined in the Safeguarding Policy. Staff should ensure that young people have been made aware of the risks of communicating and sharing information online and given guidance on security/privacy settings, as necessary. Staff should also ensure that the site itself is suitable for the young person and St Michael's Parish Church content and other content is appropriate for them. Please refer to St Michael's Parish Church Safeguarding Policy.

3.8 Responsibilities and breach of policy

Everyone is responsible for their own compliance with this policy. Participation in social media on behalf of St Michael's Parish Church is not a right but an opportunity, so it must be treated seriously and with respect. For staff and volunteers, breaches of policy may result in the PCC taking any necessary reasonable action to protect their reputation, depending on the severity of the issue. Staff who are unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach this policy, should seek advice from the Designated Social media Leads, the PCC or, if necessary, the Diocese.

3.9 Public Interest Disclosure

Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, if a staff member releases information through St Michael's Parish Church's social media channels that is considered to be in the interest of the public, St Michael's Parish Church's Whistleblowing Policy must be initiated before any further action is taken.