

Social Media Policy for Staff and Volunteers at St Martin's Church



1. Introduction

This policy provides guidelines for staff and volunteers of St Martin's Church to ensure responsible, respectful, and safe social media use that aligns with our Christian values, safeguarding standards, and protects the privacy and well-being of all individuals, especially minors and vulnerable adults.

2. Guiding Principles

2.1 Official Use of Social Media

Only staff and volunteers designated by the PCC may use social media to represent St Martin's Church. Authorised individuals will have access for ministry-related purposes, ensuring alignment with church activities and values.

2.2 Personal Use of Social Media

We do not discourage staff and volunteers to use social media personally, but personal use must maintain professional boundaries, align with Christian values, and ensure it does not interfere with responsibilities or harm the church's reputation.

2.3 Confidentiality and Safeguarding

- Confidential Information: Staff and volunteers are prohibited from sharing any confidential church-related information that is not already in the public domain. This includes sensitive information about members, staff, and the operations of the church.
- Safeguarding: It is essential to safeguard vulnerable individuals, especially children and young people. Never post photos or personal details of individuals (including minors) unless proper consent has been obtained.
- Private vs Public Information: Even with privacy settings, nothing online is completely private. Always think carefully before sharing personal information. When in doubt, avoid posting.

2.4 Respectful Behaviour Online

Social media engagement must reflect respect and kindness. Staff and volunteers must:

- Not post anything that could be offensive, discriminatory, or hurtful, including remarks based on race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or any other protected characteristic.
- Avoid bullying, harassment, or abusive language online, as such behaviour may result in disciplinary action.

2.5 Representing the Church

- When posting online, ensure that personal opinions or comments are clearly distinguished from those of St Martin's Church. No one should make statements on behalf of the church unless explicitly authorised.
- Criticism of St Martin's Church, its leadership, or ministries should be handled respectfully and privately. Publicly disparaging remarks are not acceptable.

2.6 Social Media Conduct in Relation to Church Activities

- Church staff and volunteers must not use social media to promote or engage in activities that could harm the church's reputation, such as supporting extremist views or harmful content.
- If you become aware of any content online that could harm the church's reputation, report it to your supervisor or the church communications team.

2.7 Content Sharing and Copyright

Ensure that any content shared on church-related social media accounts respects copyright laws and has the necessary permissions, especially for media such as images, videos, or music.

3. Safeguarding Considerations for Social Media Use

3.1 Protecting Children and Vulnerable Adults

Any images or content involving children or vulnerable adults must not be shared without explicit parental or guardian consent. Always adhere to safeguarding guidelines and avoid posting personal details or content that could lead to the identification of minors or vulnerable individuals.

3.2 Handling Online Interactions

When interacting with minors or vulnerable adults online, follow safeguarding protocols:

- Always include another adult in online communication.
- Avoid private, one-on-one messaging or interactions.
- Report any safeguarding concerns immediately to the safeguarding officer or leadership team.

4. Safer Working Practices with Minors on Social Media

4.1 Friend Requests and Connections

- **Limit Accepting Requests:** Staff and volunteers must not accept friend requests or connection requests from minors who are not directly involved in church activities. Relationships should remain professional and ministry-focused.
- **Church-Approved Accounts:** Communication with minors should occur through church-approved accounts (e.g., youth group accounts, church-specific platforms). Personal social media accounts must not be used for this purpose.
- **Communication Transparency:** Keep all online interactions with minors transparent, involving other adults in the ministry wherever possible.
- **Private Messaging:** Avoid private messaging minors, especially on personal social media accounts. If communication is necessary, it should occur in group settings or via ministry-approved platforms.
- **Parental Consent:** If you need to interact with minors online, obtain written consent from parents or guardians in advance and keep it on file.

4.2 Boundaries and Behaviour

- **Respect Boundaries:** Staff and volunteers must avoid engaging in overly personal discussions with minors or forming relationships that cross professional boundaries.
- **Safeguarding Training:** Staff and volunteers must complete regular safeguarding training to ensure safe interactions with minors both in person and online. This training should cover appropriate language, signs of potential abuse, and how to report concerns.

4.3 Reporting Concerns

If a staff member or volunteer receives a friend request or private message from a minor that feels inappropriate or raises concerns about safety, report it immediately to the safeguarding officer or line manager. All concerns will be addressed following safeguarding protocols.

5. Social Media Use and Work Devices

Staff and volunteers must use church-provided devices for work purposes only. Personal use should be minimal and not interfere with duties, and private documents, photos, or social media accounts must not be stored on church devices.

6. Monitoring and Consequences

St Martin's Church reserves the right to monitor online behaviour related to social media use. Breaches of this policy, particularly those compromising the church's values or individuals' safety, may lead to disciplinary action under the PCC's Disciplinary Procedure. Serious violations, such as sharing confidential information or posting content that harms the church's reputation, may result in immediate disciplinary action or dismissal.

7. Procedure for Reporting Concerns

If you encounter or become aware of content that violates this policy or poses a safeguarding risk (whether posted by church staff, volunteers, or others), report it immediately to your line manager or safeguarding officer. The church is committed to responding swiftly and appropriately to any concerns.

8. Conclusion

This policy aims to ensure that social media use aligns with the values and responsibilities of being part of St Martin's Church. It should be read in conjunction with the church's safeguarding policies and broader staff conduct guidelines.

Effective Date: [Insert Date]

Reviewed and Approved by: [Print and sign]

Position: [insert position]