

## Youth Communications and Social Media Policy

### **Introduction**

Social media are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or participate in social networking. The purpose of this policy is to direct the way in which all staff and volunteers of St Leonard's and St Peter's communicate with young people through social media, e-mail and phone contact.

Young people use social media as a matter of course and it is essential for the ministry of our churches that we engage with this effectively and safely.

Social media are continually changing and this policy will therefore be reviewed regularly.

### **Scope**

For the purpose of this policy, young people are defined as those in school years 7 to 13 or equivalent. Where a young person reaches the age of 18 before leaving our youth work provision, it is still good practice to adhere to this policy. Children in year 6 and below should not normally be communicated with by the church using social media or mobile phones.

### **Consent forms**

Annual consent forms for involvement with St Leonard's and St Peter's youth work will continue to be renewed at the start of each new academic year. On these forms parents and guardians will be given the option to consent to the following:

1. Photos to be taken at youth events and then used in official church publications, youth and church Facebook pages, the church website and displays.
2. Young people to have e-mail contact with staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy
3. Young people to make and receive calls and texts to and from staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy
4. Young people in school years 9 and above to connect to their group's/ St Leonard's youth work Facebook page.

Communication should not usually take place with young people after 9:30 pm or on staff members' days off

Note this does not mean staff and volunteers have to be available to young people at all other times. Young people should also note that, whilst staff and volunteers will exercise appropriate discretion in dealing with the substance of communication, they cannot promise confidentiality.

## **Forms of social networking guidelines**

### **Emails**

1. Once permission is given, staff and volunteers (Cell, Pathfinders, Friday Pathfinders and CYFA leaders) can hold email addresses for young people in their care.
2. Emails should be short and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind young people to attend an event.
3. Emails should be kept on file for at least a term, so that they can be traced if necessary, in accordance with the Oxford Diocesan guidance on record keeping in parishes.
4. Conversations should not be had over email. Staff and volunteers should arrange to meet one on one with a young person if the young person would like to talk.
5. If an email raises any child protection concerns, the safeguarding lead should be informed immediately.
6. When a volunteer leaves the youth work team, young people's email addresses should be removed from their personal address book.
7. Staff should only email using a work account and not a personal email account.

### **Phone calls, texts and instant messaging**

1. Once permission is given, staff and volunteers (Cell, Pathfinders, Friday Pathfinders and CYFA leaders) can hold mobile phone numbers of the young people in their care.
2. Text communication should be short and should usually be a one-off communication to arrange a meeting or remind young people to attend an event.
3. Staff and volunteers should use an appropriate tone: friendly but not over-familiar or personal. They should not suggest or offer a special relationship.
4. Staff and volunteers should only give personal contact details that are within the public domain of St Leonard's and St Peter's, including their mobile phone number. All staff working with young people should only use their work phone. Volunteers should only text from private phones as an exception. Conversations should not be had by text. Staff and volunteers should arrange to meet one on one with a young person if the young person would like to talk.
5. Staff and volunteers can have phone calls with young people, but these should be short.
6. If a disclosure is made that raises a safeguarding concern, verbatim notes should be made as soon as possible. This information should be reported to the safeguarding lead and the records kept on file for a term in accordance with the Oxford Diocesan guidance on record keeping in parishes.
7. When a member of staff or volunteer leaves the youth work team, young people's numbers should be removed from private phones and any other digital or written record, and work phones should be returned to St Leonard's and St Peter's for secure storage.

## **Facebook and Instagram**

Schools and secular youth work policies state that an adult cannot be friends with an under 18 in their care on Facebook. This is also the policy of St Leonard's and St Peter's.

1. Volunteers and staff cannot be friends on Facebook with an under 18 where their contact has been established through their role as a staff member or volunteer.
2. Once a young person has left the youth work provision at age 18 it is then the volunteer or staff member's choice whether to be Facebook friends with them.
3. Each group (eg each Cell, Pathfinders, CYFA) can have a Facebook group. They should follow this policy on the group page:
  - a. The group must be closed
  - b. The group must be monitored by at least two staff/volunteers who have admin rights
  - c. Young people, staff and volunteers can become a member of this group
  - d. Communication can occur openly through comments and posts on the page
  - e. Events can be posted on the page
  - f. Once permission is given, photos of events and young people can be posted on the page
  - g. Privacy settings on photographs should be set to ensure that only members of the group see them.

## **Twitter**

1. Young people can follow staff and volunteers on Twitter. Leaders should be aware as they tweet that they are a role model to young people.
2. Direct private messages should not be sent or responded to as these are hidden forms of communication.
3. Staff and volunteers must not follow young people on Twitter.

## **Snapchat, or similar apps**

1. Staff and volunteers should not connect with young people on Snapchat.

## **YouTube or similar**

1. Staff and volunteers should not subscribe to any young person's YouTube channel.

## **Role of the PCC**

The church Youth Steering group, youth worker and safeguarding lead should agree which forms of social networking will be used as part of the youth work of St Leonard's and St Peter's. The PCC should approve this and appoint two administrators. The church's experience in using social media should be included in the annual safeguarding report to the PCC.

## **Restrictions**

Staff and volunteers must ensure that their content and links to other content does not contain:

1. Libellous, defamatory, bullying or harassing statements
2. Breaches of copyright and data protection
3. Material of an illegal nature
4. Offensive sexual references
5. Inappropriate language
6. Any content which may bring the church into disrepute or compromise its reputation

## **Compliance**

Breaching this policy will result on the offending content being removed and may lead to the employee or volunteer being suspended from using social media as a representative of the church. A note of the incident will be kept and in the case of a safeguarding issue will be reported to the Diocesan Safeguarding team or the police if appropriate. For staff, more serious violations will also be pursued through the provisions of the disciplinary policy including dismissal.