B. Guidance on use of Social Media & Private Messaging with Young & Vulnerable People

Scope

Young people for the purpose of this guidance are defined as those in school years 7 to 13 (ages 12 to 18) or equivalent. Where a young person reaches the age of 18 but remains in youth work provision, it is good practice to adhere to this policy. Children in years 6 and below (under 11s) and below should not normally be communicated with by the parish/church using social media or mobile phones.

Good practice

When using any form of social networking to communicate, on behalf of the parish/church, with groups that could include children, young people or vulnerable adults, the following controls, based on the Diocesan Safeguarding Policies, should be followed to ensure the protection of all those involved:

- Take responsibility; you are accountable for what you do, say and write.
- Where possible use parish/church accounts rather than your personal account. If you must use a personal social media account for parish or church business, all of the controls listed here must be observed.
- Display only appropriate and necessary information about yourself.
- Ensure personal telephone numbers and email contacts are not visible on public display on social media.
- Only use instant messaging to further the aims of your parish/church role and not for personal reasons.
- Do not delete any messages/threads on social networking sites; so that you can provide evidence of your exchange should the necessity arise.
- Download to hard copy any inappropriate material received by electronic means and show to your group leader, the Incumbent or the PSO.
- Carefully consider what you display on your online activity.
- Be discerning about making public comments/rebukes and about liking or sharing posts.
- Do not comment on photos or posts unless appropriate to your parish/church role.
- Never add, as a friend, a young person or vulnerable adult, unless they have sent a request. It is at your discretion whether the request is accepted. Consider carefully the potential vulnerability of that person before accepting them as a friend, especially if the accompanying relationship is not strong or well established. Seek advice if you are unsure.
- Do not accept friend requests outside of social network terms and conditions (i.e. under 13 years of age for Facebook); you should not be friends with a person who should not have an account.
- Do not encourage participation on social media platforms outside of the legal age limit (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, SnapChat = 13 years, WhatsApp, Zoom = 16 years).
- Maintain the utmost integrity – remember that your profile only supplements the real person and is not an alter-ego.
- On Facebook, only allow friends to post on your timeline.
- Review all posts and tags before being made public to friends.
- It may be appropriate to restrict the viewing of your tagged photos.
- Do not Facebook stalk (i.e. dig through people's Facebook pages to find out about them) or use other social media sites for this purpose.

- Use passwords and log off promptly after use to ensure that nobody else can use social media pretending to be you.
- Care should be taken when using any visual media. Users, particularly under 18s, should be discouraged from connecting on screen when they are in personal or secluded spaces where possible.

Do not use social visual media for one-to-one conversations with young people - use only within group conversations where a minimum of two DBS checked adults are present.

Consents

Written consent from parents or guardians must be requested and received for all children and young people under the age of 18. It should be reviewed annually by the parent/guardian. Please be aware that sharing photographs of children and young people online can put them at risk of harm. If in doubt, don't.

Parents and guardians must be asked to consent to or to decline to consent to the following:

- Photos/videos being taken at church/parish events intended for use in official parish/church publications, on parish/church noticeboards, on the parish/church's social media page(s) and parish website.
  Bear in mind that traditional media, such as printed newspapers, expect to be able to use images they have been sent in their social media outlets as well, so parental consent must be obtained and refusals clearly communicated, clearly and unequivocally.

- Young people having email, telephone, or social media contact with staff and volunteers in accordance with this policy.

Timing

Communication should not usually take place with children or young people after 9.30pm 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 be made aware that, whilst staff and volunteers will exercise appropriate discretion in dealing with the substance of communication, they cannot promise confidentiality.

Incumbent: Fr Jeremy Harris.....

Churchwardens: Mr Stephen Foley:.....; Dr John Bolodeoku:.....

Date:...22nd July 2025.....

This addendum to the Safeguarding Policy will be reviewed one year after the month in which it was signed, by the end of July 2026.