

# Social Media Policy

## Parish of Malvern Link with Cowleigh

January 2024

This policy applies to all employees, Clergy, other office holders , volunteers or those with a representative role within the Parish of Malvern Link with Cowleigh.

### Our approach

Social media is immediate, interactive, conversational and open-ended. This is different from other forms of communication. We have less control, less time and sometimes less information, but we still need to engage and engage well. This means we need to think differently in how we use it, what we say and where we say it.

The Parish of Malvern Link with Cowleigh[MLWC] believes that social media offers a great opportunity for our churches, chaplaincy, schools and community. In this digital age, where communities are forming online, we need to be part of the conversation. It is a way for our churches and schools to branch out beyond their physical boundaries to meet people where they want to be met and be ambassadors for our faith.

This opportunity is not without risks but if people apply the same common sense, kindness and sound judgement that we would use in a face-to-face encounter, social media can be a tool harnessed for good.

For many younger people it may have become a primary source for gaining information about the world around them and networking with friends and acquaintances. Used responsibly social media and the internet can be of benefit to the church, providing the opportunity for networking, getting to know people, gaining and sharing information about church events, learning about the Christian Faith, and spreading the Gospel.

*‘Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may.’ Ephesians 4:29*

### Diocesan policy

The Diocese of Worcester has signed up to the **Church of England Digital Charter** - <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/digital-charter> and adopted their universal principle based Social media Community Guidelines.

## Our Policy

Together with the CofE and our Diocese, we at MLwC believe that our social media channels and individuals own channels should always be run in a way that reflect our values.

As Christians, the same principles that guide our offline conversations should apply to those that take place online. Interacting through social media does not change our understanding of confidentiality, responsibility and Christian witness. Our actions should be consistent with our work and Christian values and every individual is responsible for the things they do, say or write. Our conversation should be '*seasoned with salt*' (**Colossians 4:6**), and these guidelines aim to help us to do so.

- **Be safe.** The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained and is of paramount importance. If you have any concerns, ask our [diocesan safeguarding adviser](#).
- **Protect yourself.** Never share personal details like a home address and phone numbers, except with someone you know and trust. If you decide to do so use a private message. Be aware an address can be disclosed in many ways for example via photos or a GPS position, as well as in written form and once given can be shared by the recipient.
- **Protect information:** respect confidentiality, copyright, data protection and legal frameworks.
  - The existence of social media does not change the Church's understanding of confidentiality however breaking confidentiality over social media can see information spread with alarming speed.
  - Do not share sensitive information to which you might be a privileged party this would include confidential details provided during Bishop's Council; Diocesan Synod, information shared under Chatham House Rules etc.
- **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. Proverbs 12:25
- **Disagree well.** Some conversations can be places of robust disagreement and it's important we apply our values in the way we express them. Disagreement is not a bad thing but disagreeing well - respecting other opinions and being kind - can make a massive difference in how we engage with others.

- **Be honest.** Don't mislead people about who you are and identify yourself, especially if you are commenting on topics that your identity may change how your comment could be perceived.
- **Take responsibility.** You are accountable for the things you do, say and write.
  - Be aware that what you say may attract media interest in you as an individual, especially if perceived that you are acting in an official capacity (even if it's your personal view). If you have any doubts, ask for advice from the Incumbent or the PSO.
  - Text and images shared can be public and permanent, even with privacy settings in place.
  - If you're not sure, don't post it and seek guidance.
- **Be a good ambassador.** Personal and professional life can easily become blurred online. As an ambassador for Christ and the Church make sure you disclose your position as a member or officer of the Church, making it clear when speaking personally. Let **Galatians 5:22-26** guide your behaviour.
- **Credit others.** Acknowledge the work of others. At times we don't need to reinvent the wheel, but we must acknowledge where the ideas came from. 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.
- **Uploading photographs and videos.**
  - Photographs and video should never be taken during church services and events without the permission of the clergy.
  - Photographs and video should never be uploaded without the permission of the individuals involved, and with written permission from a child's parent or guardian.
    - Photographs and video should never be uploaded which could misrepresent, embarrass, or compromise the individuals involved.
- **Before posting always think:**
  - Is this my story to share?
  - Could this be 'Fake News'?
  - Would I want this on the front page of a newspaper?
- **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.

- **Enjoy it.** It's often easy to focus on the challenges rather than the opportunities of social media but by following these safe guidelines you can enjoy engaging with many different people across the globe, of all faiths and none, and on all topics.

## How will we respond to people who breach our social media community guidelines?

The Parish of Malvern Link with Cowleigh may take action if they receive complaints or spot inappropriate, unsuitable or offensive material posted to the Parish social media accounts. This may include deleting comments, blocking users or reporting comments as appropriate.

## Acknowledgements

These guidelines have been compiled to help all members of the Parish of Malvern Link with Cowleigh - clergy, office holders, representatives, volunteers and employees fulfil their role as online ambassadors for their local parish, the wider Church and our Christian faith. These are based on the best practice from the Dioceses of Worcester, Guildford, Gloucester, Exeter, Church of England and the Methodist Church

Incumbent - currently in vacancy

Churchwardens: Mark Cook Richard Tandy

Date : 12/3/24

Review : 03/25