

St Michael & All Angels, Sunnyside, Berkhamsted

Social Media Policy

Social media sites enable users to create and share content and keep in touch with other users. They include maintaining a profile page on a networking site such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat; writing or commenting on a blog, whether it is your own or the blog of another person; taking part in discussions on web forums or message boards. For many, especially young people, using social media is an extension of physical face-to-face relationships. It is therefore important that we as a church also engage with our community and worshippers through these platforms. However, this must be done safely to avoid the risk of:

- Forming inappropriate relationships
- Saying things you should not, such as offensive, sexual or suggestive comments
- Blurring the boundaries between public work/ministry and your private life
- Grooming and impersonation
- Bullying and harassment.

1. Purpose

At Sunnyside, our social media presence is a way of meeting and promoting our church values:

- By getting people involved in the life of the church through our various social media platforms
- By creating community, as people interact with each other online, regardless of attendance on Sunday mornings
- By reaching out to those who do not yet know Jesus (sharing of testimonies, advertising church events)
- By enabling people to encounter God.

2. The Role of the PCC

The PCC must approve the use of social media and mobile phones by the church. Where there are Facebook or similar online groups set up on the church's behalf, the PCC must ensure there is at least one **named person** to whom all workers are accountable. **The named person must be a church officer**, who should be a colleague or supervisor, and should be aware of the account name and password so that they can at any time log on to the account to monitor the communications. The named person should be proactive in fulfilling this role. Communications must be shared with the named person. Church officers remain bound by professional rules of confidentiality.

Where there is concern that a young person or adult is at risk of abuse, or they themselves pose a risk of abuse to others, safeguarding procedures, as per the Sunnyside Safeguarding Policy, must always be followed.

3. Guidance for church officers

The Parish Safeguarding Handbook (Section 12) provides clear guidance for church officers (this includes paid staff team members, volunteers using social media on behalf of the church or who may be seen to represent the church, and the named person):

DO

- ✓ Have your eyes open and be vigilant.
- ✓ Maintain the utmost integrity – honesty, transparency, consistency and accountability are key. Treat online communication with children, young people and adults as you would communication that is face to face. Always maintain the same level of confidentiality.
- ✓ Report any safeguarding concerns that arise on social media to the Parish Safeguarding Officer and the Diocese Safeguarding Advisor.
- ✓ Always assume that everything you write is permanent and may be viewed by anyone at any time; that everything can be traced back to you personally as well as to your colleagues or the church. Always think before you post.
- ✓ Draw clear boundaries around your social media usage associated with your private life and your use of different social media for public ministry. Keep church account/s and profiles separate from your personal social media account/s e.g. only use a Facebook page, Twitter or blogs for public ministry, while keeping a separate Facebook profile for private life.
- ✓ Always ask parents/carers for written consent to:
 - Use and store photographs of children/young people from activities or events in official church publications, or on the church's social media, website and displays
 - Use telephone, text message, email and other messaging services to communicate with young people
 - Allow young people to connect to the church's social media pages.
- ✓ Only use an approved church/ministry account to communicate with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults. The named person should be able to access this and review conversations, and the account should be visible to young people and their parents. Young people must be made aware that any communication will be viewed by all users. Save any messages and threads through social networking sites, so that you can provide evidence to the named person of your exchange when required.
- ✓ Avoid one-to-one communication with a child or young person.

- ✓ Use clear and unambiguous language in all communications and avoid abbreviations that could be misinterpreted.
- ✓ Save and download to hard copy any inappropriate material received through social networking sites or other electronic means and show immediately to the named person, Parish Safeguarding Officer, vicar, or, if appropriate, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.
- ✓ Use passwords and log off promptly after use to ensure that nobody else can use social media pretending to be you.

DO NOT

- ✗ Use a personal Facebook or any other social media account in your work with children, young people or vulnerable adults
- ✗ Add children, young people or vulnerable adults as friends on your personal accounts
- ✗ Share any videos or reels on social media with young people
- ✗ Facebook stalk (ie dig through people's Facebook pages to find out about them)
- ✗ Say anything on social media that you would not be happy saying in a public meeting, to someone's face, writing in a local newspaper or on headed notepaper
- ✗ Comment on photos or posts, or share content, unless appropriate to your church role
- ✗ Invite young people to register for apps, software or platforms which are not age-appropriate for them (eg WhatsApp)
- ✗ Use visual media (e.g. Skype, Facetime) for one to one conversations with young people – use only in group settings.

In particular, do not allow content to contain or share links to other sites that contain:

- Libellous, defamatory, bullying or harassing statements
- Breaches of copyright and data protection
- Material of an illegal nature
- Offensive sexual or abusive references
- Inappropriate language
- Anything which may be harmful to a child, young person or vulnerable adult, or which may bring the church into disrepute or compromise its reputation.

Mobile Phones

Wherever possible, church officers should be supplied with a mobile phone dedicated for work purposes. This allows for the phone to be switched off outside working hours, and for usage to be accountable. This means that the work phone number is the only number that young people or adults are given, and the church officer's personal number can remain private. Texts or conversations that raise concerns should be saved and passed on to the

named person or the Parish Safeguarding Officer / vicar (or, if unavailable, the Diocese Safeguarding Advisor).

4. Current Social Media Profile (January 2023)

Sunnyside Church has the following Facebook / Instagram pages:

1. **Sunnyside Church Facebook page**. This is open to be viewed by anyone, much like a website would be. It is our official profile for the church on Facebook where we can advertise events to those who are not yet part of our community group. This is kept up to date by Rebecca (vicar), Stephen Tizzard (Worship Leader) and Sarah Tizzard (Families and Young People Leader).
2. **Sunnyside Instagram Account**. For all church members. This is administered by Rebecca (vicar), Stephen Tizzard (Worship Leader) and Sarah Tizzard (Families and Young People Leader).

5. Expectations for use of Sunnyside Church social media by church members and wider community

Sunnyside expects all church members who comment on posts to participate in a way that is consistent with Christian values. Any comments which are offensive, or which breach confidentiality or others' personal security, or which raise safeguarding concerns, will be reported and blocked.

6. Responsibility of Sunnyside Church in cases of misuse of social media

The Sunnyside named person will respond to any complaints or breaches to our social media policy, which may include the following:

- Contacting the source of the complaint/breach to discuss issue and advise on expectations
- Removal/blocking an individual from social media
- Making a safeguarding report where a concern has been identified.

This policy has been approved by the PCC on

16th March 2026

The named person is

Rebecca Fardell (vicar)