

**St John's Church Harpenden
Social Media+ policy**

Last adopted by PCC resolution	Sept 2025
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Social media offers many opportunities for the church such as: increasing communication; building relationships and community; providing opportunities for participation, collaboration and feedback; enhancing learning and generating ideas; reaching and connecting with new groups. There are also risks involved such as: forming inappropriate relationships, saying things you should not, breaching confidentiality and spreading gossip, bullying, harassment, grooming and impersonation.

Social media is immediate, interactive, conversational and open-ended. This sets it apart from other forms of communication and demands a new way of thinking. It is important to participate online as you would in any other public forum. Your actions should be consistent with your work and Christian values, and you are responsible for the things you do, say or write.

The following policy statement seeks to lay down parameters for its use within St John's Church.

Policy

The following guidelines cover all types of social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, etc, but also extend to the use of mobile phones (including texts), blogs, website forums and emails. They should be read in the context of St John's Safeguarding, and Data Protection (GDPR), policies.

- All St John's official social media accounts must be linked to a St John's Church email address.
- The maintenance of records and posts, wherever possible, is key to good practice.
- Content issued by the church must be appropriate, clear, and take lower age limits into account. The content, and responses to it, must be managed to ensure acceptable behaviour and language. Special protections are to be taken for the under 18s, and the under 13s, in accordance with government guidelines. For example, parental permission is required for these two categories.
- Regular monitoring can mitigate the risks of offensive, bullying, abusive, sexually inappropriate, libellous, defamatory, or illegal content. Content that breaches copyright or data protection, or seeks to unduly influence, or cause harm or potential harm, should be dealt with, and reported to the appropriate agencies if necessary.
- It must be made clear that postings on the internet are permanent and public.

Responsibilities of all church members (especially leaders of groups and activities)

1. To use social media well as servants of Jesus Christ, communicating with integrity and accuracy. Each leader is a role model for their church and the Christian faith.
2. To always express messages in an appropriate tone: friendly, polite, courteous and never rude, abrupt or over-familiar. Avoid hasty, ill-thought-out responses to blogs, tweets, etc.
3. To ensure that the 'professional', ie, the role in which one is communicating, is kept separate from the personal.
4. To be aware of, and minimise, the risk of messages being taken as official church policy, by means of appropriate disclaimers.
5. To ensure that no-one's private or family information and contact details are disclosed on a public platform.
6. To conserve and file records of official church messages so that they are able to be traced at a later date.
7. On live calls, to be aware of what may be seen on a webcam, both foreground and background.
8. To not hide your identity or use an alias.

Legal responsibilities

While sharing thoughts and reflections with friends or followers via social media can seem personal and private, it is not. By law, if one or more people can access it, content is classed as published in the public domain and subject to legislation around libel, defamation, copyright and data protection.