St Francis, Isleworth - Social Media & Electronic Communications Policy

This document has two parts: Part 1 constitutes the policy statement with Part 2 as supplementary guidance on the risks of social media, with specific relation to under 18s, and a note on confidentiality.

St Francis, Isleworth is committed to the safe use of social media and electronic forms of communication. In addition to ensuring that our communication methods are safe, we will equip our teams to be aware, and competent in all aspects of communicating electronically, especially in relation to young people. This policy works alongside the St Francis, Isleworth Safeguarding policy.

Not all sections of this policy are relevant to St. Francis', but are included in case they become relevant in due course.

PART 1: Policy Statement

1. Underpinning principles:

• Passwords should be kept secure and changed regularly.

• Electronic forms of communication are not always an adequate substitute for person-to person interaction. All staff and volunteers should think carefully about whether information may be better relayed face-to-face or over the phone.

• All staff and volunteers will be mindful of the way that the written word can be misinterpreted when it is presented without the benefit of tone, body language and facial expressions and take care in the words we choose to use.

• Anyone with a position of responsibility within the church is aware that they continue to represent St Francis, Isleworth, even when using online channels for personal use. Nothing should be shared that is at odds with the values of St Francis, Isleworth or could bring the name of Jesus or St Francis, Isleworth into disrepute.

Please remember that, legally, if a conversation / comment is accessible to even one more person it is deemed to be published information and in the public domain. It would therefore be subject to libel and defamation, data protection and copyright laws.

2. Best practice rules for communication, essential for communicating with under 18s:

• Always obtain parental consent before using any electronic method of communication with young people.

• Use clear, unambiguous language that cannot be misinterpreted. Use a friendly, but not over-familiar or personal tone.

• The content of messages should relate only to the group / club / activity attended.

• To ensure accountability, all text messages must be accessible to the supervisor/ line manager, upon request, and this must be made explicit to all those involved.

• Wherever possible, send group texts / emails, not individual ones.

• Any electronic communications which raise concerns must be reported to a Safeguarding Officer who may also share it with the staff team member's line manager or volunteer supervisor. Line managers and volunteer supervisors can help team members to report concerns.

• All electronic communications should be sent / responded to within appropriate time boundaries i.e. not after 9pm or before 8am.

• Ensure that there are alternative methods of communication to account for those without mobile phones/ computers.

• Always obtain parental consent before using any electronic method of communication with under 18s.

• As part of the safer recruitment process, staff and volunteers should declare any existing personal relationships with under 18s where they have their telephone number or follow them on social media.

• Images should only be taken / shared with consent (from both the parent/carer, when under 18, and the person in the image) and should be stored securely in accordance with Data Protection and not left on mobile phones. This includes images shared on social media sites or on 'YouTube'.

• A separate 'page' or group should be set up where specific business relating to the church / group is discussed.

• Ensure that privacy settings allow only approved friends to message or add people as a friend – these should also be members of the group.

3. Photographs & Video Footage

Photographs and video footage may be taken and shared internally during church services, or externally via the Church website, or social media platforms. No photographs should be stored on personal devices.

Before photographs are taken of any adult, they should be made aware that it is happening and told how the images might be used. Anyone who expresses a desire for their photograph not to be used in this way should be respected and they should not be photographed. If they are photographed by accident, then their images should not be used.

Photographs may be taken of under 18s as long as parental consent has been given to do so. This will be on the young person's consent form. Volunteers shouldn't take photographs or video footage of the young people. Only St Francis, Isleworth,staff or designated volunteers should do this. In addition to parental consent, the young person also should be happy with the image. No identifiable logos, names or badges should be visible in any footage or images.

4. Communication Channels

• Email

Email is a standard form of communication within the church and official St Francis, Isleworth email addresses should be used for church-related work only. A confidentiality 'rider' should be added to the foot of each St Francis, Isleworth email account. Youth Leaders may send and reply to emails from young people using the designated youth@ email address, provided all best practice rules are followed.

• Text

Texting is a popular form of communication, especially for young people. This form of communication is however difficult to monitor; workers and volunteers using this method of communication must be accountable for what is said. Youth Leaders who are required to communicate regularly using this method should be supplied with a parish mobile phone, with itemised bills that can be provided for accountability. The limits as to the usage of texts and the responsibilities associated with this form of communication must be made clear to workers and volunteers.

• Social media

Social media is a set of online tools used to communicate and engage with other people and includes:

• Writing or commenting on blogs

• Micro-blogging (i.e. Twitter)

• Personal profile pages on networking sites (i.e. LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+)

• Using specifically designed "Apps" (i.e. Snapchat, WhatsApp)

• Reviews of products or services on retailer sites / customer review sites

• Taking part in online votes, polls or surveys and

• Taking part in conversations on both public and private web forums (message boards).

The boundaries between personal and church work can be easily blurred over social media. Access to church social media accounts will only be given to staff members or volunteers who are responsible for taking an active role in sharing information about church activities. Everyone with access to these accounts should be mindful of the way content is written to ensure that it is in line with the values of St Francis, Isleworth. Personal accounts can be used to share published items but should not be used as the main channel of communication about church activity.

5. Social Media and under 18s

Anyone with leadership responsibility at St Francis, Isleworth, should not begin following or be followed by or initiate being online 'friends' with young people under 18 without special arrangement, which includes both parental permission and agreement of the line manager.

• Instagram: St. Francis' has neither a youth team nor an Instagram account, but this statement is included in case that should be the case. Youth team members may message a young person via the youth Instagram account, making sure the best practice rules are met. Photos of young people should only be posted on the St Francis, Isleworth Youth Instagram account and never on personal accounts.

• Twitter & Facebook: We will not post any photos of young people on personal accounts. This will be done on designated St Francis, Isleworth accounts and with full permission.

• Snapchat: Leaders will not 'friend' or add young people on Snapchat or any other such applications because it does not record a history trail.

• WhatsApp: WhatsApp's minimum age requirement is 16 years of age. If a young person, known to be below the age of 16, is using the platform, do not contact them in this way.

WhatsApp groups can be created as long as age requirements are met and two youth team leaders, with relevant DBS clearance, are involved. WhatsApp groups should only be set up using the invitation function. Individuals should not be added without prior consent.

PART 2: Understanding Risks of Online Communication, with particular reference to under 18s

Cyberbullying

Incidences of bullying via text, social media and email are increasing rapidly and can have devastating consequences. It is important that those working with our children and young people are alert to the signs that could indicate that someone is being bullied. These risks are not exclusive to young people and can also be experienced by adults.

You may see a person:

• Becoming withdrawn, anxious or diminishing in confidence

• Becoming aggressive, abusive, disruptive or unreasonable

• Beginning to stammer

• Changing their routine

• Starting to bully others

• Being afraid / reluctant to use the internet or their mobile phone or

• Being nervous or 'jumpy' when a cyber-message is received.

You may hear / see the person:

• Threatening or attempting suicide or self-harm

• Threatening or attempting to run away

• Asking for or taking money

• Making improbable excuses for their bad behaviour.

If cyberbullying is suspected, then it should be reported to the team leader who will raise the appropriate safeguarding concerns.

Sexting

Sexting is understood as 'the creating, sharing and forwarding of sexually suggestive nude, or nearly nude, images.'

1 Making, possessing or distributing an indecent image of a child under 18 is a crime.

Everyone needs to be aware of the dangers associated with these actions and the problems it can lead to:

• Once sent, the sender has no control over the further distribution of the images.

• The person can become the target of cyberbullying (see above).

• The person can become the subject of grooming by a sexual predator.

• The above can lead to serious mental health issues caused by the fear of what may happen, leading to depression and desperation that can drive a person to self-harm or to contemplate suicide.

It is possible that a young or vulnerable person will confide in their youth or church leaders. All leaders should be vigilant and, if they become aware that this has happened, support the person in referring it to the internet service provider or social media platform. Support can also be sought from Childline2 or CEOP3 (Child Exploitation and Online Protection service). This should also be treated as a disclosure under the [church name] Safeguarding Policy.

Matters for concern may include:

• The content of messages/e-mails suggesting some form of abuse.

• Being concerned for the mental well-being of a young person.

• The content of what a young person has said online or by text seems inappropriate.

• Inappropriate images have been shared.

1 Lenhart, 2009 http://ncdsv.org/images/PewInternet_TeensAndSexting_12-2009.pdf

2 https://www.childline.org.uk

3 https://www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre/

• You feel a young person may have become too dependent on the leader through frequent and extended online, text, and face-to-face contact.

• A young person is hiding their emails or texts (this could be an indication of online grooming).

• A young person is being contacted by unknown adults or receiving gifts from people they don't know (this could be an indication of online grooming).

• Overuse/Addiction: In 2008, U.S psychiatrist Dr Jerald Block[4] suggested that obsessive internet use, including excessive gaming, sexual preoccupations and emailing/texting should be recognised as a clinical disorder.

Action to take

If you become concerned about the content of conversations on social network sites, you should take the following action:

• If you believe someone is at immediate risk from harm, do not delay call 999 (i.e. if you believe that a young person is on their way to meet someone they met on the internet where you have good reason to suspect they are not genuine).

• Do not close down the conversation. This will potentially lose any evidence.

• Always seek help and advice first - advice can be sought through the CEOP website.

• Ensure you preserve any 'paper trails'. If necessary, copy and paste any conversations and have these witnessed, signed and dated.

A note on confidentiality

We should normally treat any sensitive personal information that someone shares with you as confidential, however there may be circumstances in which the law, the public interest, or safety of the person in question may override an individual's right to confidentiality. If a person of any age asks if they may share something with you and asks for confidentiality, you must inform them that it depends on the nature of what they'd like to share; if it is putting either themselves or others in harm's way, or is breaking the law, you will not be able to keep it confidential. If they choose not to share with you because of this, that is their choice, and you should not force them to tell you. However, if a person of any age does not ask you to first promise confidentiality and shares something with you that has concerned you, you must inform them that you will need talk to someone else about what they've told you.

4 https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.ajp.2007.07101556

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