

# ST MARK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, NORTHBRIDGE

## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY



Date approved: March 2022

### **Purpose of policy**

To reach our parish with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are committed to building an online presence which will complement and enhance our efforts to grow and deepen our networks in the local community.

This policy provides a framework to help our staff understand their responsibilities in using social media and to confidently engage with others on social media in order to promote awareness and interest in our message and activities.

### **Application and scope**

This policy applies to all parish staff, including officeholders, employees and volunteers.

It covers the use of social media using parish resources, and social media used in connection with work or for parish-related purposes. It also covers the personal use of social media in certain instances.

This policy must be read together with *Faithfulness in Service: A national code for personal behaviour and the practice of pastoral ministry by clergy and church workers* (as amended from time to time). Please note this policy applies in addition to safe ministry obligations, which are set out in *Faithfulness in Service* and other documents such as the *Safe Ministry Blueprint for Churches* and *Social Contact Policy* published by the Professional Standards Unit (as amended from time to time).

This policy can be reviewed and amended by the Parish Council at any time. It does not form a part of any employee's contract of employment and imposes no contractual obligations on the parish.

Social media sites have their own terms and conditions which apply separately to this policy.

### **Definitions**

**Social media** refers to websites and applications that enable the creation, sharing and publication of posts or otherwise support online social interactions, including:

- social networks like Facebook and LinkedIn
- enterprise tools like Microsoft Teams and SharePoint
- video and image sharing tools like Youtube and Instagram
- messaging tools like SnapChat and Messenger
- blogs like Twitter
- discussion forums like Reddit
- podcasts

**Post** means any content created, shared or published on a social media platform or the act of creating, sharing or publishing such content.

**Moderation** is the act of reviewing and approving a post published on a social media platform. It may be done prior to, or after, publication of a post.

### **Policy statement**

Staff and volunteer leaders represent the parish and are ambassadors for Christ in the online community.

Staff/leaders must always be mindful of how they come across on social media because nothing posted is private. Once something is posted on a social media platform, the content becomes publicly viewable, searchable and is immediately and permanently online (even if the original post is deleted).

In using social media (for work or personal reasons), staff/leaders must:

- always ensure posts are true and accurate to the best of their knowledge,
- comply at all times with legal obligations, including in relation to intellectual property, confidentiality and privacy,
- not post anything that is obscene, threatening, derogatory, defamatory or hateful to or about another person or entity, and
- not otherwise bring the parish into disrepute.

If staff/leaders are unsure about whether to post something, or are concerned about a post they've seen about the parish, they should speak to the rector or another staff member as appropriate.

There are three types of social media use covered by this policy –

#### **1. Using social media formally on behalf of the parish**

Only certain staff members are authorised to use social media in a formal capacity, including:

- maintaining the parish's profile pages on social media; and
- posting on social media for and on behalf of the parish, such as promoting church events, writing articles for blogs and providing their comments on social media.

Authorised staff have access to the parish's social media accounts and post on behalf of the parish. Such staff may also post in their own name, but as a representative of the parish.

We are required to moderate posts published on our public social media pages to ensure the posts are suitable for publication and to avoid legal claims. We reserve the right to edit, amend, delete, or otherwise respond to any posts which we consider inappropriate.

When using social media in a formal capacity, staff must comply with the guidelines set out below.

#### **2. Using social media in connection with work or for parish purposes**

All staff members are encouraged to use social media in connection with their work or for parish-related purposes, including:

- raising awareness about the parish and its activities,
- engaging with others on social media as a representative of the parish, and
- using social media for personal reasons during work hours or using parish resources.

Staff may engage in personal use of social media (like Facebook or Instagram) while at work, but it should be reasonable and not interfere with their work commitments or performance.

However, the parish expects that most social media use at work will be for parish-related purposes. Staff may choose to disclose their work details on social media (such as on their Facebook or LinkedIn profile).

When using social media at work, staff must ensure that they comply with the guidelines set out below.

### **3. Using social media in a purely personal capacity**

Because the online persona of staff/leaders reflects on their character and may affect the parish's reputation, they must still comply with this policy and all other parish and Diocesan policies concerning personal behaviour which may be in force from time to time when using social media.

The guidelines set out below will help staff/leaders engage in social media use confidently.

### **Guidelines for using social media**

These guidelines will equip you to use social media in a healthy and positive way, and contribute meaningfully to growing the parish's online presence and outreach efforts.

1. **Be a good ambassador.** You are a representative of the parish and for Christ online, even when you aren't 'working' or 'on the clock'.
2. **Read your post again.** Step back, re-read your post and think about what it communicates to others before pressing 'ok' or 'post'.
3. **Avoid online controversies.** State your views politely and respectfully, but avoid unhelpful online debates about controversial issues. Invite people to meet with you for a chat and coffee instead.
4. **Maintain strong privacy settings.** Consider privacy settings on social media platforms carefully. Do not share personal information such as your home address or bank account details.
5. **Respect confidential information.** Do not disclose any confidential information you have obtained in the course of your work with the parish, especially personal information regarding children in our parish.
6. **Don't break the law!** Do not post anything which is unlawfully discriminatory, defames anyone's reputation, condones unlawful activity or unlawfully infringes on the rights of others, such as privacy or intellectual property.
7. **Ask for advice.** If you aren't sure about whether to post something, or are concerned about a post you've seen, speak to the rector or another staff member as appropriate.

### **Privacy and confidentiality**

Privacy and confidentiality are key concerns when using social media.

A social media platform's security settings will not necessarily protect or keep posts private. Staff/leaders should expect that their posts may be copied, shared and read out of context.

Online conduct should be above reproach at all times. Staff/leaders should not rely on anonymity or pseudonyms (fake names) for protection or to prevent potential breaches of this policy. It is possible for posts to be traced back to their source.

Staff should not assume that if they use social media outside work hours or using their own resources that they are free to post whatever they want. ‘Out-of-hours’ conduct may still have a negative impact on the parish and lead to a breach of this policy.

**Breach of policy**

Any breach of this policy may lead to disciplinary action, ranging from a warning or requirement to remove the post/s, up to termination of a staff member/leader’s engagement with the parish, depending on the severity of the breach. If the law is breached, staff/leaders may also be held personally liable.

If any person in the parish becomes aware of or suspects a breach of this policy, they should contact the rector or another staff member as appropriate. Any information disclosed will be dealt with seriously and confidentially.