



COMMUNICATION POLICY FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

Introduction

This policy is robust and extensive because the St Peter's Church needs to be sure that young people, clergy, staff and volunteers are safe and kept safe in all areas of our ministry with regard to communication and social media (with particular emphasis on young people).

All communication regarding new arrangements for St Peter's Church Youth Ministry groups must be communicated in letter to parents/guardians using St Peter's Church standard headed paper with proper greetings and signatures. This is to include information relating to timings, venues, travel for trips and activities and events outside of the normal scheduled groups timings and venues for its Youth Ministry groups.

Once the initial communication has been sent by letter, follow up reminders and changes of information may made by email or phone call. Letters, emails, phone calls or conversations are the only direct ways of communication with parents/guardians.

It is absolutely vital that written signed permissions are given on the standard consent/information forms for each group and for the extra activities and trips.

Written and signed permissions need to be given for use of social media as outlined in this policy.

Written and signed permissions need to be given for the taking of photographs of young people and then also for their use in any form of communication in and outside the groups that are run as a parish, especially social media.

Many young people regularly communicate using the internet and mobile phones. Using these methods effectively can really help St Peter's Church Youth Ministry to stay connected with group members and keep them up to date with what is planned and to be able to reflect on events and activities. It is important, however, to use these platforms in a safe way to protect those involved in youth ministry, the people with whom the church works and to not bring the church into any disrepute.

Technology is growing at a fast pace and, as a result, the way in which young people communicate evolves very quickly. It is therefore prudent that this policy is reviewed regularly to adhere with the guidelines of the platforms being used and that they are relevant to the time.

There are some key principles to remember when communicating electronically:

- It is very difficult to ensure any communication made electronically is truly private

- Once there is something online it is very difficult to delete it with absolute confidence – “once it is out there, it is out there!”
- Communication electronically can be at a greater danger of being misinterpreted as the normal nuances of conversation are missing
- All communication should be broadly positive

This policy makes some specific (but not all-inclusive) guidelines for some ways

of communicating with young people under the age of 18. For all types of direct communication to happen with young people, signed and written permission must be sought from parents/guardians. This permission must be specific to each social media platform – it cannot be a catch-all!

TEXT MESSAGING

- Texting can be an effective way to send out information about events that are happening, or late cancellations
- Use group messaging as a general standard procedure
- When sending messages to those under 18, another suitable adult should be also be included in the message – either a co-leader, a member of the stipendiary clergy team, or the Youth Minister Supervisor
- If it becomes important to text an individual young person, both the messages sent and received must be forwarded to one of the people as outlined above and kept, printed out and filed
- Only people whose phone contract is a full/part paid by St Peter’s Church should engage in text conversation with a young person as then they can submit their itemised phone bill to account for all messages sent. All contracts should be online invoiced and sent to the Parish Office by email.
- Staff and volunteers should not send text messages outside of reasonable work hours unless on organised trips. Usually this would mean that texts are not sent between 9pm and 8am.
- No abbreviations that can have ambiguous or leading meanings should be used. Abbreviations should be those used in common parlance, using appropriate and well-understood language.
- Messages should always end with just a name with no ‘kisses’ etc.
- Any texts or conversations that raise concerns should be saved and passed on by the normal safeguarding routes.

INSTAGRAM

Instagram allows users to share photographs with followers. If enough followers are gained, it can be an instant visual way of showing events that are happening now or later.

- **Note that** once on the internet photographs are no longer private.
- Users of Instagram must be a minimum of thirteen years of age. It is therefore only applicable to groups with all participants who are of this age or above.
- The Instagram page is to be ‘followed only’ by young people and not to be used to follow young people back.
- Parents/Guardians are invited to follow the page if they wish, so that communication is transparent.
- The Instagram page must only be used to follow projects, events and activities in the interest of St. Peter’s Church.
- St. Peter’s Church Instagram account must not be used as a direct messaging service.
- All Instagram ‘terms of use’ must be strictly adhered to.

SNAPCHAT

SnapChat is an instant picture messaging service that sends a picture to groups or individuals that only lasts for a set amount of time before being deleted. It is not appropriate to use this platform in the context of St. Peter's Church. Staff, volunteers and clergy must not have any young person on their SnapChat follow list.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a free instant messaging app. available on all major carriers that use the internet to send text messages. It is an effective way to let large groups of people know about events and activities.

Users of WhatsApp must be a minimum of thirteen years of age. It is therefore only applicable to groups with all participants who are this age or above.

All WhatsApp 'terms of use' must be strictly adhered to.

Email

Email is an appropriate way to send out information. An option to opt out of this at a later date should be available.

- There must be regular housekeeping of email lists to ensure all addresses are up to date and relevant to the message being sent.
- All emails sent by staff, clergy or volunteers should be written in a professional manner , use an appropriate salutation/greeting and have a signature at the end with contact information included.
- All emails should be positive and use language that avoids ambiguity.
- If a negative email is received it may be more appropriate to reply with an offer of a face to face meeting or a phone call in order to lead to a clearer understanding.
- Group emailing is an appropriate way to communicate to a wide audience. The use of 'bcc' is recommended in these situations.

X (formerly known as TWITTER)

X is a micro blogging site which allows users to share a short quote with followers.

X's terms of service state: 'What you say on X may be viewed all around the world instantly. You are what you put on X!' All official St Peter's Church X users are to bear this in mind.

It is very difficult to restrict who follows an account on X but their Privacy Policy states 'that their services are not directed to persons under the age of thirteen'.

St. Peter's Church and other areas of its ministry such as Youth Ministry can use X to share information and follow other institutions that are deemed 'worth following' by those involved. It is not however a policy to follow all the possible individuals involved.

St Peter's Church should strive to ensure that all accounts are 'verified'.

It is not advisable for clergy, staff or volunteers to 'follow' anyone under the age of 18 years on X using a personal account.

St. Peter's Church X account must not be used as a direct messaging service.
All X 'terms of use' must be strictly adhered to.

FACEBOOK

Facebook is a highly effective way of quickly communicating to large groups of people and to Individuals.

Facebook restricts its use to those 13 years of age and above – no one under 13 can have an account. Facebook also advises that no one email address should hold more than one personal account on its platform.

- If St. Peter's Church has a Facebook PA, it will be regulated by the Vicar, Youth Leader with the Parish Administrator as support.
- The Youth groups for those aged over 13 years can have a dedicated Facebook Page regulated by the Vicar with the Youth Leader as support.
- Facebook pages can be used to post events, be an open forum and share photographs of events, with pictures of young people only to be used if consent has been given by the parent/guardian, noting that the page is a public face that represents St. Peter's Church.
- Other people can be encouraged to post on the page although any inappropriate content will be removed at the first possible opportunity.
- All requests to join the group will be vetted and approved by the Vicar and/or Youth Leader.
- The Vicar and Youth Leader can send and receive *friend requests* to young people who attend St. Peter's Church youth groups and are over 13 years of age.
- No abbreviations such as 'lol' are to be used.
- The Youth Leader/Vicar has the right to delete any comments or posts on the Youth Ministry Facebook page.
- All work using Facebook should be done within reasonable hours (not between 9pm and 8am).

Signed:

Rev'd Amber Beresford – Vicar & PCC Chair

Adopted by the PCC at its meeting on: