



## **Safeguarding Social Media and Online activities;**

*A Policy for the Diocese of Lichfield; its churches and Parishes.*

The Parish of Short Heath



Written By Neil Spiring DSA; in Consultation with Rosalind Clarke (Online Pastor), with Material taken from the Online Pastors Policy as written by Kim Hodgkins (DSA).

### **1) Introduction and context.**

This policy was written by Neil Spiring (Diocese Safeguarding Advisor), with Consultation being provided by the Diocesan Online Pastor Rosalind Clarke. As such it pulls in relevant parts of pre-existing Online Pastor's Policy (written by Rosalind Clarke and Kim Hodgkins), and seeks more importantly to integrate the learning and evidence from the development of the Online Pastor's role over the last two years.

This Policy recognises that the Christian faith has communication (the word – written or spoken), at its heart and that electronic communications is now a central part of everyday life. In this sense it has a vital role in updating, co-ordinating and improving the experiences of Christian groups (such as youth groups, community care groups, house groups and prayer ministry). It is also recognised that with this comes risk, and it is in this document that we will explore how this risk can be managed; what can, should (and how it should), be done with regards church life online in the Diocese and Parishes of Lichfield.

this document is an open document - to be developed and improved over time by the amendment and contributions of our stakeholders in the diocese and beyond. We welcome suggestion, debate and engagement in development to ensure organic improvement. To this end should you have any queries, ideas, suggestions or additions relating to this or any other Diocese Safeguarding Policy - we would like to hear from you.

***Neil Spiring – Diocese Safeguarding Advisor. 25/04/2017***

### **2) Working Principles of this Policy:**

Safeguarding vulnerable Adults, Children and Young people is always the primary concern and responsibility of all those associated with church activity. As a consequence Safeguarding is everyone's concern and no one person's.

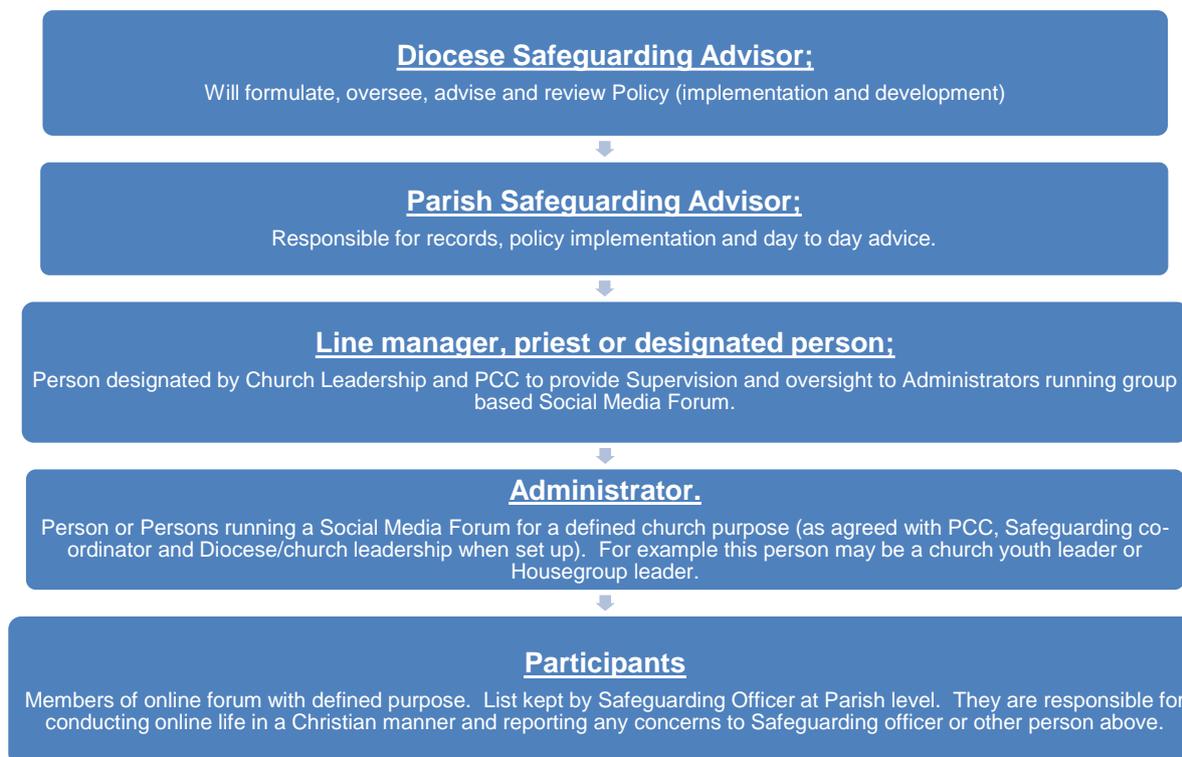
As a result of the above we commit to the principle of 'No More Secrets', and in so doing will be transparent in our responsibilities, interests, behaviours and concerns. We will be open to scrutiny without defence and admit mistakes openly. We will challenge each other in appropriate ways and work together to ensure we consider all issues from as wide a range of perspectives and views as possible. We will be forgiving but hold ourselves and others to account.

### **3) Who is covered by this policy?**

Any activity relating to Social Media usage for Church sponsored or organised contents and function is subject to this policy, along with the Diocesan safeguarding policies for children and vulnerable adults, and national church policies. This policy is specific to Social Media and online material and any issues not covered within this Policy relating to this type of activity should be addressed to the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor on a case by case base.

#### 4) Structure for ensuring Safety on Social Media.

The persons shown in the structure below are referred to throughout this document:



#### 5) Transparency and social media accounts

5.1 Personal social media accounts should be kept distinct from accounts relating to church roles and responsibilities, and should be clearly labelled so that the views expressed cannot be taken to represent those of the Diocese or Parish. Nonetheless, church leaders administering online duties for the church should ensure that their personal social media use is conducted in a manner consistent with their Christian character.

5.2 Online social media accounts relating to church roles and responsibilities should all be supervised by a line manager (if staff), or by pastoral oversight (or delegation by priest/church leadership/PCC to appropriate individual). The line manager, Priest or appropriate designated person should always have the login and password details for full supervisory access at any time. The Priest, line manager or designated person should be DBS checked appropriately and have completed safeguarding training to C2 level. *This person shall be referred to as Line Manager throughout this document but may be one of the persons listed above.*

5.3 The line manager, priest or designated person should check all the social media accounts periodically and keep a log of this. Any concerns should be raised with the Parish Safeguarding co-ordinator and the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor as appropriate. Screenshots of any concerns are to be taken and retained by the Safeguarding Co-ordinator where they will be retained on file for 3 years in case they need to be later referenced.

5.4 In addition to above all online church groups will have online administrators who will regulate membership, behaviour, content and undertake other functions identified to this role in line with this policy.

## **6) Social Media types and parameters.**

- 6.1 The church group will only use clearly labelled private/closed groups/forums to facilitate communication between members. Public pages (church websites or church Facebook page available to all), may be used to communicate with the church and the wider community, but should not normally be a place for specific online groups or activities (such as youth groups etc who should have specific regulated and managed spaces). Secret groups will not be permitted at any time or in any circumstance.
- 6.2 Admission to clearly labelled private/closed groups/forums will be based on admission of those already known to the group administrator and church in person (ie a member of an offline church group). Application by those not known for online membership only will not be permitted.
- 6.3 Software applications such as Snapchat that routinely delete information and files/attachments shared after they are seen are not permitted for use in church activities.
- 6.4 The church accepts the suitability of closed group/forum accounts of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for use with groups where those under 18 are involved.
- 6.5 The church accepts the suitability of closed group/forum accounts of WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for use with groups where those over 18 are involved (this is due to age restrictions applying to use of WhatsApp put in place by that service provider).
- 6.6 Safeguarding Co-ordinators **and** the Diocese Safeguarding Advisor must be informed of all operational online Media groups operating in relation to church activities. The Diocese will maintain a central register of those groups operating and the Church/Parish they are operating within.

## **7) Online Behaviour of participants.**

Being online is an extension of church life and the expectations of the parishioner remain as high in this context as in any other. In general those engaging online will conduct themselves in a Christian manner and demonstrate these values at all times. In particular:

- 7.1 Language: there must be no swearing or offensive language.
- 7.2 Respect: those participating will give space to others when communicating and will not say anything designed to cause upset or distress to other participants. Individuals will not engage in online disputes and arguments contrary to group harmony or that may cause wider offence and distress.
- 7.3 Equity: unkind and inappropriate reference to someone's race, gender, disability, religion or other similar demographic factor will not be tolerated and will result in an offline discussion in line with equal opportunities and other policy processes.
- 7.4 Rules and boundaries: participants will respect all local group rules in addition to all those points made here in this Policy. This will be monitored by the online administrator and their line manager, Priest or appropriate designated person.

7.5 Participants will respect and act upon any direction provide by administrator and their line manager, Priest or appropriate designated person.

7.6 Persons refusing to respond to direction and instruction by administrator and their line manager, Priest or appropriate designated person are subject to removal from said group and may be cautioned offline in relation to their behaviour.

7.7 Photos, files and attachments will not be posted by members unless first vetted and authorised by administrator and their line manager, Priest or appropriate designated person.

7.8 **Web cameras and livestreaming videos are not permitted.** Recorded Videos may not be posted by members **unless first vetted** and authorised by administrator and their line manager, Priest or appropriate designated person. They must be relevant, appropriate and Christian in appearance and content. Nudity, bad language or content directly or sociologically offensive will be considered a breach of Policy and acted upon accordingly.

7.9 Offline meetings should not be arranged in the online groups unless part of a pre-arranged church organised activity, organised by administrator and their line manager, Priest or appropriate designated person. We accept that in some cases members of groups may have offline friendships that are not connected to their involvement in a church group – in such cases any communication relating to that friendship should not be made on a Social Media group organised and connected with the church.

7.10 Users will undertake to keep themselves safe online – not engaging in inappropriate discussion, language or behaviour and reporting any person that approaches them in such a way to administrator and their line manager, Priest or appropriate designated person.

## **8) Reporting online Safeguarding Concerns.**

This policy deals with how to manage Safeguarding in an online Context but does not seek to define safeguarding of Adults or Children. ***What Constitutes abuse in the real world constitutes abuse in the virtual world*** and persons using this Policy should ensure they are fully aware of and trained in the use of all church Safeguarding Policies and procedures defined and discussed in other local and national policies.

8.1 Administrators and Line managers or others with concern should take screenshots of any concerning content. These should be stored safely, away from social media, and should be shared with the line manager, Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator and Diocese Safeguarding Advisor. A record of all incidents and actions taken should be kept.

8.2 The line manager, administrator and Safeguarding Co-ordinator should keep a log of all incidents and appropriate action taken to minimise immediate risk.

8.2 Concerns should be reported to the Diocese Safeguarding advisor as a Safeguarding referral (in line with the principle that abuse is abuse – online or offline).

8.2 Administrators, Line managers and participants should ensure that appropriate boundaries are maintained between their work, participation and their personal life when interacting with each other online and offline. This should be specifically monitored where children or vulnerable adults are participating.

8.3 Images and videos must not be posted online unless permission has been given from all those identifiable in the photograph or video and permission is given by group administrator in consultation with designated line manager, priest (to determine if this is necessary, of benefit and how long this should be posted before deletion – ie it should be time limited).

8.4 Online communication should normally take place in public forums. However if in rare circumstance the use of direct messaging is necessary (for example if a online member is reporting abuse to the administrator or making a disclosure, or should administrator or their line manager need to discuss a members behaviour with a member);

- In such cases it must be made clear that all conversations may be monitored and that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

8.5 The Administer and their line manager should provide safe spaces online, being particularly alert to bullying, trolling, grooming, sexting and other forms of internet abuse. Where necessary, the Administrator and line manager have the right to, and should, exclude and report anyone engaging in such practices.

8.6 Bullying, trolling, grooming, sexting and other forms of internet abuse should be reported to the Parish Safeguarding co-ordinator who in turn **will refer** as a Safeguarding referral to the Diocese Safeguarding advisor. This Policy makes no distinction between online abuse and real world abuse.

8.7 If it is necessary for an Administrator or Line manager to meet offline and face-to-face due to behaviour, disclosure etc - meetings should be in in a public place and should involve at least two persons from the list in section 4 of this Policy.

8.8 Under-18s should be accompanied by a parent/guardian/youth worker/other responsible adult for any face-to-face meeting. All such meetings should be discussed in advance with and between the Administrator, line manager and Parish Safeguarding co-ordinator. Such meetings should be discussed with the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor.

8.9 All allegations of abuse or other concerning information should be immediately reported to the Diocese Safeguarding Advisor and Social Services First Response team, or the Police as appropriate.

8.10 Administrator or Line manager should take and share screenshots of any concerning content with the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor, Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator and any statutory services involved

8.11 The Parish should review all online groups at least quarterly. This meeting as a minimum should involve all administrators, line managers and the Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinator.

8.12 Clergy and employees of the diocese board of finance may utilise the Listening Ear counselling support network when needed.

8.13 Those involved should seek guidance from the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisors when needed who will ensure issues relating to the use of Social Media are shared with the Diocese Safeguarding board.

**9) Persons with roles of responsibility.**

**Line Managers**

Holy Trinity                                      The Rector Revd. John Deakin

Furzebank Worship Centre      The Team Vicar Revd. Helen Duckett

**Safeguarding Officer**

Mr. Bryn Evans

**Administrators**

Holy Trinity                                      Mrs. Janet Davies

Furzebank Worship Centre      Mr. Andy Morgan