

Seven Towers Benefice Social Media Policy

11th May 2021

A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything or destroy it!
James 3:5 (Message)

Social media sites enable users to create and share content and keep in touch with other users. They include maintaining a profile page on a networking site such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat; writing or commenting on a blog, whether it is your own or the blog of another person; taking part in discussions on web forums or message boards. For many, especially young people, using social media is an extension of physical face-to-face relationships. It is therefore important that we as a church also engage with our community and worshippers through these platforms.

However, this must be done safely to avoid the risk of:

- Forming inappropriate relationships;
- Saying things you should not, such as offensive, sexual or suggestive comments;
- Blurring the boundaries between public work/ministry and your private life;
- Grooming and impersonation;
- Bullying and harassment;
- Breaching regulation and / or legislation.

1. Purpose

At Seven Towers our social media presence, including our website, is a way of delivering and promoting our church vision:

A. Encourage more involvement in the life of the church through our various social media platforms by:

- Sharing positive stories about church involvement
- Providing information on upcoming events and activities
- Promoting appeals for church and charities
- Share links to Diocesan, Church of England and other Christian websites eg for Prayer resources, online seasonal materials for Advent & Lent
- Sharing church administrative information as appropriate eg Faculty application, APCMs, policies

B. Encourage people of all ages to follow Jesus by:

- Sharing of positive stories about our own discipleship
- Providing resources for children and young people to follow their faith journeys
- Uploading regular Kids' worship videos, Morning Prayer, other special services
- Sharing links to other appropriate sites in line with Christian faith and values
- Hosting services and home groups
- Advertising church teaching events such as Alpha, Advent and Lent courses
- Personally inviting people to church activities e.g. Alpha, Home Groups etc
- Streaming special services

- C. Give opportunity for the whole church family to share its life beyond Sunday services by:
- Encouraging all members to contribute and be an active part of the any social media groups
 - Sharing links to Norton CE Primary School and Diocesan Education pages
 - Promoting our church buildings, history and place in community, along with life events - Baptism, Weddings and Funerals.
 - Responding to each other's post, stimulating discussion and interaction
 - Posting items that encourage discussion
 - Advertising church and community events
 - Making all members feel welcome whether or not they attend on a Sunday morning
 - Ensuring that our social media groups are a safe place for members
 - Using social media to share our lives and resources

Gloucester Diocese Guidance

The Diocese of Gloucester provides clear guidance on the use of social media within local churches as follows:

The Role of the PCC / Benefice

The Benefice Council must approve the use of social media and, where applicable, mobile phones by the church. Under the approved scheme, once the Benefice Council approve this policy all PCCs should ensure it is adopted. Where there are Facebook or similar online groups set up on our behalf, the Benefice Council must ensure there is at least one **named person** to whom all users are accountable.

The named person must be a member of Benefice Council, who should be aware of the account name and password of all Social Media platforms so that they can at any time log on to the account to monitor the communications. The named person should be proactive in fulfilling this role.

Communications must be shared with the named person. Church officers remain bound by professional rules of confidentiality.

Where there is concern that a young person or adult is at risk of abuse, or they themselves pose a risk of abuse to others, safeguarding procedures, as per Seven Towers Safeguarding Policy, must always be followed.

The Diocese of Gloucester provides the following guidance for Church Officers (This includes church staff, volunteers using social media on behalf of the church or who may be seen to represent the church and the Named Person)

DO

- ✓ Have your eyes open and be vigilant.
- ✓ Maintain the upmost integrity – honesty, transparency, consistency and accountability are key. Treat online communication with children, young people and adults as you would communication that is face to face. Always maintain the same level of confidentiality.
- ✓ Report any safeguarding concerns that arise on social media to the Benefice Safeguarding Officer and the Diocese Safeguarding Advisor
- ✓ Always assume that everything you write is permanent and may be viewed by anyone at any time; that everything can be traced back to you personally as well as to your colleagues or the church. Always think before you post
- ✓ Draw clear boundaries around your social media usage associated with your private life and your use of different social media for public ministry. Keep church account/s and profiles

separate from your personal social media account/s e.g. only use a Facebook page, Twitter or blogs for public ministry, while keeping a separate Facebook profile for private life.

- ✓ Always ask parents/carers for written consent to:
 - Use and store photographs of children/young people from activities or events in official church publications, or on the church's social media, website and displays. Use telephone, text message, email and other messaging services to communicate with young people.
 - Young people connecting to the church's social media pages.
- ✓ Only use an approved church/ministry account to communicate with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults. The named person should be able to access this and review conversations, and the account should be visible to young people and their parents. Young people must be made aware that any communication will be viewed by all users. Save any messages and threads through social networking sites, so that you can provide evidence to the named person of your exchange when required.
- ✓ Avoid one-to-one communication with a child or young person.
- ✓ Use clear and unambiguous language in all communications and avoid abbreviations that could be misinterpreted.
- ✓ Save and download to hard copy any inappropriate material received through social networking sites or other electronic means and show immediately to the Named Person, Parish Safeguarding Officer, Incumbent or, if appropriate, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.
- ✓ Use passwords and log off promptly after use to ensure that nobody else can use social media pretending to be you.

DO NOT

- ✗ Use a personal Facebook or any other social media account in your work with children, young people or vulnerable adults.
- ✗ Add children, young people or vulnerable adults as friends on your personal accounts
- ✗ Facebook stalk (i.e. dig through people's Facebook pages to find out about them).
- ✗ Say anything on social media that you would not be happy saying in a public meeting, to someone's face, writing in a local newspaper or on headed notepaper.
- ✗ Comment on photos or posts, or share content, unless appropriate to your church role.
- ✗ Use visual media (e.g. Skype, Facetime) for one to one conversations with young people, use only in group settings.
- ✗ Allow content to contain or share links to other sites that contain:
 - Libellous, defamatory, bullying or harassing statements
 - Breaches of copyright and data protection
 - Material of an illegal nature
 - Offensive sexual or abusive references.
 - Inappropriate language.
 - Anything which may be harmful to a child, young person or vulnerable adult, or which may bring the church into disrepute or compromise its reputation.

Mobile Phones

The following only applies where the Benefice provides / pays for a mobile phone for church matters only.

Wherever possible, Church Officers should be supplied with a mobile phone dedicated for work purposes. This allows for the phone to be switched off outside working hours, and for usage to be accountable. This means that the work phone number is the only number that young people or adults are given, and the church officer's personal number can remain private. Texts or conversations that raise concerns should be saved and passed on to the Benefice Safeguarding Officer (or if unavailable the Diocese Safeguarding Advisor).

2. **Current Social Media Profile (May 2021)**

Seven Towers has a Facebook page, a YouTube account, a website and uses Zoom for hosting on line worship and meetings. Groups / Pages may be closed or open access.

Open access indicates that anyone can access the page or feed content and post onto it

Closed indicates that an individual has to request to join the page or group before they can view content and post onto it and this request can be either accepted or declined by an Administrator. The Administrator also has the ability to remove someone from the group

A. Seven Towers Benefice Facebook Page - Open access

This is open to be viewed by anyone, much like a website would be. It is our official profile for the church on Facebook where we can advertise events and minister to those who are not yet part of our community group. This is kept up to date by Jordan & Carina Murrison and clergy.

B. Seven Towers YouTube – Open access

This is open to be viewed by anyone, much like a website would be.

C. Website

The website is our platform to enable everyone to understand the ministry and mission of the benefice, whether or not familiar with this location, and to relay current information to all our parishioners, especially in fast changing circumstances.

A representative in each parish has password access to update the website.

D. Zoom

Zoom provides a means of reaching our parishioners whilst face to face meeting is restricted or parishioners prefer not to meet in person. It has allowed real time contact for services, meetings, home groups and social gatherings, always controlled and with closed access to the zoom session.

No other social media platforms / sites in the Benefice's name should be set up without prior approval of the Benefice Council.

3. **Expectations for use of Seven Towers Benefice social media by church members and wider community**

All are based on principles of common sense and good judgement. Essentially, you should participate online in the same way as you would in any other public forum. Your actions should be consistent with Christian values - to love God and love your neighbour as yourself – (dignity, honesty, hope & trust) and you are responsible for the things you do, say or write.

DO

- ✓ Read this policy before posting to one of our social media platforms

- ✓ Always follow the guidelines below. If you do not comply with the guidelines then you will be given a warning. Multiple offences will mean you are removed from any closed group or blocked from posting comments on open groups

DO NOT

- ✗ Post anything that does not align with Christian values and the vision of the Benefice.

A. Think before you post

The immediacy of social media is one of its benefits – we can immediately respond to another users post or share what is on our minds, but before we post we should take a moment to consider:

- Is this my story to share?
- Could this be 'Fake News'?
- Would I want God to read this?

B. Transient yet permanent

Social media updates are immediate and will outdate quickly BUT they can have a more lasting impact and you should assume that anything you post is permanent. Even if you delete it later on, it may have been seen and re-published or referred to elsewhere.

C. You represent the church

Our social media platforms have a wide range of members and followers including those who have yet to join our church fellowship in person and those who no longer attend.

When we post as a church member we give an impression of what the church fellowship is like. Think about the portrayal you are giving and consider whether what you post:

- Is in line with church values
- Is helpful to past, current and future members of the church fellowship

D. Be mindful of your own and others security

Don't overshare personal information. Never publish detailed personal information such as your address or telephone number, unless in a private message to someone you know and trust. Never publish anyone else's full name and contact details without their explicit permission

E. Safeguarding

We are committed to safeguarding and recognise that social media can increase vulnerability for some people. It is important to be clear that we all have a duty to safeguard and report any concerns that we have in regard to Seven Towers social media activity to the Benefice Safeguarding Officer or the Incumbent immediately to enable action to reduce risk.

F. Sharing photos

There's nothing wrong with sharing photos online, but please make sure you have documented permission from anybody who features in the image before sharing, especially parental permission for children. Be ready to remove an image as quickly as possible if requested.

G. Advertising

It is a great use of our platforms to advertise church or other Christian events. However, do always consider whether adverts should also or instead be included in the Church Notice

Sheet which is available in paper form to those who do not have internet access as well as on the website. None of our platforms should be used to advertise any business or for commercial gain. None of our platforms should provide a link to other social media sites / websites promoting non-Christian events/societies without prior permission of the Benefice Council.

H. Stay within the legal framework

Whilst sharing thoughts and reflections within our community on social media and our website can seem personal and private, it is not. By law, if one or more people can access it, content is subject to legislation around libel, defamation, copyright and data protection. If you wouldn't say something in a public meeting or to someone's face don't say it online!

Do not post music on our platforms unless we have permission of the performer and / or the necessary copyright permissions.

I. Confidentiality

Use of social media does not change the Church's understanding of confidentiality. Within the life of the Church there are private meetings and conversations, particularly in terms of pastoral work.

Breaking confidentiality is as wrong as it would be in any other context. Arguably, it is worse as via social media a broken confidence could spread rapidly and be impossible to retract.

Remember: Is this story mine to share? If in doubt, don't.

4. Responsibility of Seven Towers Church in cases of misuse of Social Media

The Seven Towers Named Persons will respond to any complaints or breaches to our social media Policy, which may include the following

- Contacting the source of the complaint / breach to discuss issue and advise on expectations
- Removal / blocking an individual from social media
- Making a safeguarding report where a concern has been identified

All officers in the Benefice should be vigilant and inform the named person(s) of any cause for concern noted on our social media platforms.

This policy has been approved by the Benefice Council on (date) 11-05-2021

The Named Persons for Facebook / YouTube Carina & Jordan Murrison

Named Persons for website / zoom Carolyn Wright & Simon Trapnell