

**St Anne's Church
Oldland
Diocese of Bristol**



Digital Communication Policy

Agreed at PCC meeting on 23 January 2018

Signed *Bruce Goodwin* Vicar

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Signed *David Gray* Churchwarden

David Gray

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Steve Hemmings

Digital Communication Policy for St Anne's Church, Oldland Common

The purpose of this document is to clearly outline the policy adopted by St Anne's Church for volunteer leaders, staff members, and congregants when using social networking and other forms of digital communication with children and vulnerable adults. It will also clarify the necessary boundaries and create accountability to safeguard both the adult and the young person. Most young people use these methods of communication all the time. When used effectively and safely they can be extremely effective tools to help connect, build relationships, organise events, and help young people to follow Jesus in their daily lives. The aim of this document is to promote "visible" communication. These guidelines explain how to keep the same boundaries, and follow same safeguarding practice as in the physical world. The level of digital/online interaction between an adult and a young person should mirror the relationship that they have in the physical world.

Safe guarding policies promote that one to one conversations with young people happen in full sight of others. It would be inappropriate for an adult to visit a young person in their bedroom or their house when they are alone. Therefore guidelines need to be put in place when considering the context of communication via email, social network sites and texts, which can mostly be made in private.

Firstly, St Anne's youth and families workers communicating with young people via the internet, social networking or mobile phone first need to have gone through the application process for being a volunteer, which includes:

- DBS Check
- Application Form
- Interview
- Two references
- Read and sign the St Anne's safeguarding and digital communication policies.

For many obvious reasons, there is a need for communication between youth workers, young people, and parents/carers. Regular communication with parents usually happens via E-mail, group text, letters, and face to face. Communication with young people tends to happen more over Facebook or group text.

General policies:

- Communication should be from a specific account/address known to the young people, parents or guardians.
- In the same way that 1-to-1 conversation in the physical world should happen in full sight of others, online/digital communication should also be in 'full sight' of others. Therefore, at least two leaders should be involved in all online and text conversations between young people and youth workers.
- Communication between youth leaders and young people should only happen between 7:00am and 10:00pm.
- Any communication that raises concerns should be saved and shown to the safeguarding officer. Any conversations should be written up as soon as possible.
- Clear and unambiguous language should be used in all communications. Avoid abbreviations that could be mis-interpreted.

- Parents, youth workers, and young people can opt out of any of the forms of communication.
- Young people must be made aware of these guidelines by the youth leader.

Mobile Phones and Email:

- Send group texts and emails rather than individual wherever possible. If a young person or parent cannot see other recipients in the message, communicate that this is a group text – i.e. “hi everyone”
- The content of a text needs to be brief and unambiguous.
- Where possible, use landlines when phoning young people.
- Youth workers should not encourage an exclusive text or email relationship.
- In the guidelines for young people, they will be made aware that the safeguarding officer has access to the conversations.

Facebook & Social Networking Sites:

St Anne’s Church agrees with the Facebook terms and conditions that a young person should be 13 years or older to join Facebook. Young people under the age of 13 should not be added as a ‘friend’ by youth leaders. Whilst some organisations have a policy that youth leaders should not be ‘friends’ with young people, we have made the decision that the benefits of being connected with young people outweigh the concerns, as long as strict guidelines are put in place and followed.

Youth leaders must be aware that parents and young people are looking up to them and seeing their activity on Facebook and other social networking sites. Like it or not, the reality of social networking is that you are always watched closely!

- Youth workers with personal social networking accounts should customise their privacy settings in order to maintain the boundaries between their personal lives and youth work. They should avoid uploading inappropriate personal information.
- The most appropriate way of engaging with young people is through the official Facebook group ‘Youth’ chat which all other members can see, the CORE Facebook page, or the St Anne’s Church Facebook page.
- Youth leaders must not start a private messaging conversation with a young person without including another leader. Keep messages public and for all to see.
- Young people should be instructed not to initiate private messages, and that another leader will be shown or included in any messages they write.
- If a young person wants to talk to a youth leader about an issue or a problem, it should be done face to face in full sight of others and not on social media if at all possible.
- If pictures of young people are uploaded onto social media, youth leaders must:
 - Have written permission from parents and verbal permission of the young person

- Keep the privacy settings of the photo/album limited to sharing in the group page only.
- Youth leaders should only accept friend requests from young people known to them, that they have met offline.

Implementation:

- This policy should be communicated to leaders, young people and parents.
- It should also be uploaded to the church website.
- This policy should be reviewed annually by the PCC with the children and vulnerable adults safeguarding policies.