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# Electronic Communications, Photographs & Websites Policy Statement

This is the Electronic Communications & Digital Images Policy Statement of Christ Church Parochial Church Council (PCC) and covers:

Christ Church  
Christchurch Road  
Virginia Water  
Surrey  
GU25 4PT

## Safeguarding Children & Vulnerable Adults

Christ Church fully endorses *“In Safe Hands: A Guide to Safeguarding Children & Vulnerable Adults”* (July 2011) a handbook provided by the Diocese of Guildford, and the subsequent publication *“Using the Internet and Electronic Communication Safely”* (October 2011). The handbook gives further information and guidance on the issues covered by this Policy Statement and should be read in conjunction with it.

## Policy Statement & Purpose

The church aims to provide a warm, nurturing environment for children and vulnerable adults, and requires all clergy and lay people to maintain the highest professional standards in their work and relationships with them.

Whilst every attempt has been made to cover a wide range of situations, it is recognised that the following information cannot cover all eventualities. There may be times when professional judgements are made in situations not covered in this section, or which may contravene the guidance given. It is expected in these circumstances that adults will always advise their Incumbent and/or Parish Safeguarding Representative of the justification for any such action taken, or seek advice from the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

Approved:

Christ Church PCC

Effective:

10 June 2014

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## **Electronic Communications**

Communicating with children and young people is at the heart of what the church does with them, and we have been doing this ever since the church began 2000 years ago

The Church recognises that:

- information and communication technology are very much part of our everyday social and working lives
- the majority of families now have a computer in their homes and may use the internet for research, communicating with family, friends and colleagues and learning new things
- for children and young people in particular, it is the norm to communicate electronically through mobile phones, e-mail and social networking sites such as Facebook
- the issues surrounding modern forms of communication are in many ways the same as those surrounding more traditional methods of communication, except that the person is not with you so that neither of you can use facial expression or body language to clarify your meaning (except when using video messaging).
- it is also usually private, so others are not there to provide context and background.
- these new technologies offer a wealth of new experiences and possibilities but can be used inappropriately by men, women and young people and that adults who work with children and young people need to know how to make the most of these technologies but at the same time ensure they are used appropriately and responsibly, in order that children are protected and the integrity of workers safeguarded

Therefore, all communication between children and adults, by whatever method, will take place within clear and explicit boundaries and only for reasons related to the work of the church so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of motives or any behaviour which could be construed as grooming.

Adults will ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny and maintain a good and open relationship with parents and carers regarding communication with their children.

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## **E-Mail**

When using e-mail to communicate with children and young people, workers will:

- obtain consent from both the individual and their parent/guardian. This is done most simply when an individual registers to join a group, and email consent wording can be added to the general consent that is signed on the form.
- use a specific and known account to communicate with the children and young people. This address should be known to the young people, children, parents and the worker's supervisor. It should be possible for the worker's supervisor to access all messages, both sent and received on this account. Under no circumstances should messages be sent or received on a separate account. Children, young people and parents should be aware that the supervisor has access to the account, which is most simply done at the same time consent is given.
- use clear and unambiguous language. Nuance and tone in email can sometimes be hard to read, and ambiguity, flirtation, crude humour, ridicule or insulting language should never be used, even in jest. Be careful to avoid abbreviations that can be misinterpreted, such as 'lol' (laugh out loud or lots of love) and 'luv'.
- do not say anything in an email that you would not say face to face to the child or young person.
- not forward chain e-mails to young people
- make sure images, if sent, are appropriate
- make sure that any hyperlinks do not lead to inappropriate content
- always copy another adult into the e-mails, and save copies sent

## **Instant Messenger (MSN etc.)**

- all the above guidance for email should be taken into account, particularly consent, the use of unambiguous language and accountability.
- there should be an agreed length of time for a conversation and a curfew from, say, 10pm to 7am. If you wouldn't meet a young person at a given time face to face, don't meet in cyberspace either.
- log all conversations in a text file (there is a setting to do this in MSN) ensuring that it is saved in an appropriate place on your computer. Inform people at the beginning of the conversation that this is going to be saved. Make sure your supervisor knows where the files are saved, and that they have access to them.
- take extreme care if using video or voice messaging, ensuring that you are in a public place when you do so, and that other people are around and aware of what you are doing and to whom you are talking.

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## **Mobile Phones and Text Messages**

Most young people have a mobile phone and with these also come text messages. The benefit of text is the ability to communicate and respond immediately in a given situation but it is important to ensure that the content of the message cannot be misinterpreted. When using mobile phones and texting to communicate with children and young people, workers will:

- obtain consent from both the individual and their parent/guardian.
- be supplied with a mobile phone dedicated to work purposes. This allows the phone to be switched off when outside work and protects the worker's right to a personal life. It also allows costs for calls and texts to be accounted for in an itemised bill.
- if supplied with a work phone, workers should not supply their personal number to the young people with whom they work.
- as with IM conversations, the worker should not use the phone outside reasonable hours, with a curfew from, say, 10pm to 7am.
- young people should be told that the number is for a work phone rather than a personal one.
- texts or conversations that raise concerns should be saved and passed on to or discussed with the worker's supervisor.
- many phones have cameras. All cameras used by workers should be covered by a separate policy on photography, including those in a phone. This policy will cover issues including consent, storage of images and their use in publicity and online.
- use appropriate language and not include words or phrases which could be misinterpreted
- never use a kiss at the end of a text or within a signature
- always copy another adult into the text message

## **Social Networking and Chat / Messenger Sites**

Social networking sites have become increasingly popular for contacting people, discussing issues and advertising up-and-coming events. Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Bebo and the like raise issues that go beyond those covered in previous sections. All the general guidance surrounding language, curfew and parental consent should be followed.

Adults need to be especially careful about those they accept as 'friends' on sites such as these, as they are essentially designed for peer-to-peer contact.

It is recognised that many youth groups use social networking sites to share information, concerns and photographs, that young people often initiate these groups and promote them with their friends and that the content of the messages and photographs available to be viewed may not always be suitable for young people to see, and could be damaging to the adult worker's reputation and position as role model.

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- leaders will maintain boundaries between their personal and professional lives by customising their privacy settings and avoiding uploading inappropriate personal information
  - workers should consider having two profiles, with a dedicated one for work. This will protect young people from being messaged by contacts of the worker through the worker's profile.
  - workers should only accept friend requests for this profile from young people known to them whom they have met offline.
  - communication should be in the public domain where possible (by using group mailings or public wall posts).
  - events or parties at a private address will be reserved for the group's private area
  - where groups are set up, they should be closed, and not open to the general public. The worker should retain administrative rights and moderate the group, only sharing those rights with other trusted workers.
  - photographs posted on these sites are subject to all the restrictions of posting any photograph on the internet, and workers should comply with their photographic policy at all times (see section 2D of Diocesan Safeguarding Policy).
  - content that raises issues or concerns for the worker should be saved/printed and shown to or discussed with the worker's supervisor.

## **Computers**

Where children and young people have access to computers as part of church activities, the Group Leader will ensure that:

- measures are in place to ensure that the likelihood of children accessing inappropriate materials is reduced e.g. parental controls and software to filter out internet material
- children and young people are aware that their personal details e.g. last name, address, school, passwords, e-mail addresses and telephone numbers are private and should not be disclosed unless approval is given by the Group leader
- children and young people know that they should never send photographs and should be wary of chat-rooms
- children and young people are aware that they should advise a leader about any e-mails or anything on line that makes them feel uncomfortable or bothers them
- shopping and downloading (especially music and games) is forbidden
- each young person's time on the computer is limited
- the PCs are running up-to-date antivirus and anti-spyware software and that complete virus and spyware scans are performed regularly using up-to-date and licensed tools

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## **Places to go for further guidance on electronic communication**

- The Diocesan Safeguarding Policy covers policy, procedures and good practice to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. Copies are available online at [www.cofeguildford.org.uk](http://www.cofeguildford.org.uk) – search for Safeguarding Policy.
- The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service produces a number of leaflets giving general advice in this area: [www.ccpas.co.uk](http://www.ccpas.co.uk)
- Childnet International works to help make the internet safe for children. The website offers resources to help in this area: [www.childnet-int.org](http://www.childnet-int.org). This site also points to a host of other resources.
- The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) is a government-backed site to report suspicious behaviour with or towards a child. See [www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk).
- For specific advice contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser in the first instance. Their details can be found in the Safeguarding Policy mentioned above.

## **Taking and Publishing Photographs and Videos**

The church is committed to providing a safe environment for children and young people. Implicit in this, is the commitment to ensure that all published images represent participants appropriately and with due respect and are taken and displayed in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

The key concerns regarding the use of images of children and young people relate to:

- the possible identification of a child when a photograph is accompanied by personal information
- the inappropriate use, adaptation or copying of images for use in child pornography websites
- the taking of inappropriate photographs or recorded images of children and young people

## **Data Protection Act**

Fear of breaching the provisions of the Data Protection Act should not be wrongly used to stop people taking photographs or videos which provide many with pleasure.

Photographs taken purely for personal use are exempt from the Data Protection Act. Where the Act does apply, the photographer will ensure that he/she has permission to take the photograph to ensure compliance.

## **Consent**

When planning community celebrations or public events at which parents may wish to take photographs and/or professional photographers may be present, those attending will be advised of

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this in advance. If they decide to participate in the event, their consent to photographs being taken will be assumed.

In all other circumstances, the consent of parents and carers will be obtained before taking and using images of children and young people and a chance to opt out must be given. Consent need not be in writing if it is not proposed to publish the pictures in any way but if they are going to be displayed on a notice board, used in a parish magazine or put on the internet, then specific consent will be obtained using the Diocesan Photo Consent Form.

Those taking photographs will be required to bear in mind that parents and carers may have good reasons for refusing consent, e.g. some children may have been involved in legal disputes, local authority care, or adoption, and their whereabouts may not be widely known. Parents and carers of the affected children will know this and will appropriately withhold consent without giving the reason.

### **Vulnerable Adults**

For vulnerable adults, images will only be used for a purpose which is explained to them, and to which they give their recorded and preferably signed consent, i.e. they understand and agree. They will be enabled to see the photograph before being asked to give consent. All images will respect the dignity of the person being photographed. If the vulnerable adult cannot give informed consent, the images will not be used unless the individual cannot be identified from the photograph.

### **Storage of Images**

We will be clear about whether images are to be retained for further use. Retained images will be stored securely and, where possible, with consent forms for future reference.

### **Good Practice Guidelines**

As far as is reasonably possible, these good practice guidelines will be followed:

- pictures of children or vulnerable adults should not be taken without another adult present.
- the photograph/video will focus on the activity rather than a particular child, avoiding full face and body shots and taking into consideration the age of the children involved. All children and young people featured in photos or recordings must be appropriately dressed
- photographs submitted for publication where young people and/or vulnerable adults are recognisable and there is insufficient evidence that their consent has been obtained should

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not be published. Permission will not be assumed, even if images have been submitted by parishes for publication

- if at a church-related event, children or vulnerable adults may use cameras to take photos of each other, or if parents or carers take photos of children other than their own, they should be advised that these can be used for personal use only and should not be displayed in any publicly accessible space including on internet or web-based communication channels such as Facebook
- if approached by a reporter, photographer or film-crew who want to use images of children from your parish or school, we will emphasise that our policy is to obtain permission from the parents involved and refer them to the Diocesan Communications Adviser

## **NOTES RELATING TO THIS POLICY**

This Policy is derived from the Section 2D, pages 30 to 35, of the Handbook ***“In Safe Hands: A Guide to Safeguarding Children & Vulnerable Adults”*** provided by the Diocese of Guildford (July 2011). The content has been modified only to:

- re-phrase policy suggestions in the Handbook to become actual policy statements
- modify sections as noted below to reflect local circumstances
- exclude sections as noted below that are not applicable to a Policy Statement

### *Details of modifications*

- None

### *Details of exclusions*

- “Guidelines for Communicating Electronically” including reference to an Information and Communication Technology Policy (Handbook page 32)
- “Safety Tips for Children & Young People” (Handbook pages 32 and 33)