

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION & SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

Email and texting are powerful communication tools, and essential to the workings of the Benefice. They can be used to complement other forms of communication. They are not a replacement for face-to-face communication for sensitive matters or imparting information likely to upset.

Video conferencing platforms are a useful alternative to face-to-face meetings or services. However, they turn a private space (home) into a public space on view to anyone else who has signed in. Video conferencing platforms can also include recording facilities for viewing by a wider audience online.

Scope

This Policy applies to anyone using electronic communication and social media platforms for church business within the Benefice.

Copies of the Policy will be given to new office holders when taking on roles within the Benefice and to all individuals who agree to be included on group email address lists.

Chairs of committees or groups are responsible for ensuring that their committee or group members see and understand the Policy.

Policy

1. We will use email for secretarial business eg circulating rotas; minutes of meetings; notices; documents or thoughts to be discussed at the next meeting.
2. Email can be used for event organisation which needs attention before the next meeting.
3. Email can be used for conducting simple non-controversial business but is not suitable for conversations that are complex, may upset, or which may result in disagreement.
4. Where differences of opinion result through e-conversation, electronic communication should cease, and conversation continue by telephone, face to face or in the next meeting.
5. Allow time to reflect wisely and slowly before responding to emails.
6. Data controllers may block individuals who do not follow the policy. The decision to block someone will be taken in consultation with the Complaints Committee. Anyone who is blocked from emailing witneyparish email addresses will be notified by the parish office. Other committees or people who are affected will also be notified.

General Guidance and Email etiquette

Be mindful that emails can be misread or misinterpreted. Take time and care when writing and when reading. Emails can be written and saved as drafts to be reread at a later time before sending.

Forwarding emails

Emails are for the recipient(s) only. If it is necessary to do so, forward an email to somebody else, but only if the content of the email is purely business and not confidential or controversial. If in any doubt, consider responding with '*The most appropriate person to deal with this is x. Would you like me to forward your email or would you like to approach directly?*'

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Be particularly mindful when forwarding emails from people who are personal friends as well as church partners to avoid confusion over private correspondence and church business.

Blind copying

For data protection reasons blind copying should be used for open group emails eg notices. Blind copying must **not** be used in any other circumstance, without the express permission of a Data Controller.

Closed group emails

When emailing closed groups eg PCC, DCC or committees, the email addresses of all recipients should be available for all to see. This is to ensure that nobody has been inadvertently left off the list and to allow individuals to reply to the whole group.

Intrusion

Give consideration to the timing and content of emails, which can often be received out of working hours on mobile phones or tablets.

Give consideration to the demands made on the recipient's time before sending emails that relate to business that can be conducted in the next meeting.

Non-urgent emails can be scheduled to be delivered at appropriate times.

Avoid using 'reply to all' unless it is absolutely necessary.

Access to email addresses

Email addresses obtained by being a member of a closed group should only be used for the purposes of communicating with the group-on-group business. The email address should not be used for other purposes or passed to anyone else. If your email address is used by more than one person this must be made clear to anyone sending emails.

Communications involving young people (under 16 years old)

Young people should only contact leaders or other adults (outside of the meeting) via normal channels ensuring that at least 2 adults are receiving the email. Adults should only contact young people with permission from parents/carers. Another adult must be copied into any electronic communication with young people

At least one leader will be fully DBS checked and have received appropriate safeguarding training.

Security

Electronic devices storing other people's personal data should be protected by passwords and a fire wall. Office holders and other people conducting confidential business on behalf of the benefice must have their own email address which only they have access to.

GDPR

Be mindful of information written in emails. Emails to or from @witneyparish.org.uk addresses can be accessed at a later date even if deleted.

Posting on Social Media

Witney Benefice has Social Media accounts, currently *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *You Tube*. Members of the Church acting in an official capacity can request permission from the Data Controllers to become a contributor.

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Anyone approved by the Data Controllers to post on social media on behalf of the Benefice will sign to say they have read the Safeguarding Policy and agree to comply.

Contributors do not need authorisation to post 'factual' non-controversial entries about Church events, such as date, time and venue, or positive feedback to or from others. However, contributors using the Benefice *Twitter* or *Facebook* accounts must not post or retweet non-factual 'subjective' posts, or post photos naming individuals, without their consent. Before retweeting, it is important to check the original source of the tweet for appropriate content.

If a contributor is unsure whether a post is appropriate, they must seek approval from the Parish Data Controllers. This Policy does not preclude Staff or any other members of the Church from posting 'subjective' material via their own personal Social Media accounts.

Before posting photographs of children, ensure you have written consent from parents or guardians as well as the children themselves where possible, and clearly explain how and where the images will be used. Refusal of consent will never lead to a child's exclusion from activities.

Photographs of children taken on personal devices such as phones must be uploaded to the Photos channel in the Comms Team and then deleted from personal devices. Such images must not be shared on personal social media accounts.

Photographs in the Photos channel will be stored for a period of 5 years before being archived and no longer used by the benefice.

Video conferencing platforms

Using Zoom for services or other open group activities

Anyone signing in to a video (eg Zoom or Teams) can be seen and heard by everyone else throughout the session. If you do not wish to be seen or heard, ensure the camera is not on and sound is muted.

Before signing in, all household members not involved should be aware that you are signing in and that they may be overheard or seen without realising it. This gives everyone the opportunity to know their private space is now public and to make sure their dress, language and actions are appropriate

If the camera is on, ensure the background is appropriate for anyone to see or use a virtual background.

When Zoom is being used for meetings or activities that may be viewed by young people the host will endeavour to give warning if it may contain content unsuitable for young people.

Recording Video Sessions

Only Zoom hosts or co-hosts are authorised to record video meetings such as Online-services or Benefice Parties.

The host should notify participants if their session is being recorded so that it can be made available on YouTube

Using Zoom or Teams for closed group meetings

It is the responsibility of everyone attending to ensure the meeting is conducted to the same levels of confidentiality as would be expected for a physical meeting. Each person present is responsible for ensuring the meeting cannot be overheard by anyone who has not been invited to attend.

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If it is not possible to maintain adequate levels of privacy it is important that everyone is informed at the start of the meeting, that they can be overheard by someone not on view.

Using Zoom with young people

Zoom may be used as a platform for activities involving people under 16 years old eg Youth Council meetings, Youth choir or Young Disciples.

Parents/carers will be given a copy of the Benefice Online Safety Guidance outlining what is expected of the leaders and the young people. Parents/carers are asked to sign their agreement to follow the guidance.

Parents/carers will be asked to give permission if the activity is recorded and uploaded to YouTube as an unlisted video.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with General Data Protection Regulations and the Benefice Safeguarding Policy.

Adopted by Witney PCC 14 October 2024

Adopted by Minster Lovell PCC 7 September 2024

Signed *Kate Banks*

Counter-signed *Jeremy Lasman* Witney PCC

Counter-signed *Judith Warwick* Minster Lovell PCC

Review date: 3 years from date of adoption