

# THE FREE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY



Social Media is a very public way of enabling us as Christians to live out our calling to share the good news of Jesus Christ. One of its many joys is that it is immediate, interactive, conversational and open-ended. This opportunity comes with a number of downsides if users do not apply common sense and sound judgment in its use.

Churches can be both positively and negatively impacted by the Social Media posts of their Clergy and representatives. If the Clergy or other representatives of the Denomination use Social Media to broadcast comments, posts, or images that contradict the Church's values, it could hurt its image and damage its reputation.

The Free Church of England's position on many issues is clear in its Canons and other documents; we are not defined by others. In our use of Social Media we make statements inspired by and consonant with biblical teaching and doctrine.

**A healthy Christian community is a place of mutual care, where all people are valued, loved, and respected.**

This Policy for engaging on Social Media reflects those values.

This Policy applies to all content and comments posted by the Clergy and Officers of the Free Church of England and to any of the Free Church of England's Social Media channels.

### **Why use Social Media?**

The Free Church of England encourages the use of Social Media tools as a means of extending our engagement with people inside and outside the Church. This includes:

- ✧ Sharing our stories
- ✧ Engaging in conversations, discussions, and debates
- ✧ Sharing, learning, and encouragement
- ✧ Reaching those who cannot physically attend church
- ✧ Forming and deepening relationships locally and globally

### **Consider the safety of yourself and others**

It is important that the safety of children and vulnerable adults is maintained.

If you have a safeguarding concern, please inform the Denominational Safeguarding Officer, the Rev'd Mark Spiers, [markspiers198@btinternet.com](mailto:markspiers198@btinternet.com) or 07900 912 754.

Conversations on Social Media can sometimes develop into heated and pointless arguments. Be aware of the effect on yourself, and don't feel you always need to engage. You can always 'sign off' from a heated conversation calmly, with something like 'I think we'll have to agree to disagree.'

## **Respect**

Do not post or share content that is sexually explicit, unnecessarily inflammatory, hateful, abusive, or threatening. Try to think of the effect on others who may see what you post. A disclaimer stating that any views expressed are held personally does not absolve any user of behaviour that is unacceptable under this Policy: we are ambassadors for Christ and for the Church at all times. Remember, users are personally responsible for the content they publish online, whether in a blog, social networking site, or any other form of user-generated media.

## **Be transparent**

Do not mislead people about who you are or use pseudonyms.

## **Be relevant**

Don't add comments to a Social Media post that are irrelevant to the topic. Engage in the conversation rather than broadcasting opinions. Be the first to correct your own mistakes.

## **Disagree with love**

The internet is home to a lot of argumentative people. When posting, seek to do so with calmness and clarity. If you have a criticism you need to make, carefully consider the tone of what you write. If you are personally attacked, do not respond in kind. If you need to respond, do so appropriately. Being a Christian means that sometimes we must speak out and challenge error, falsehood, and injustice. Remember when you need to point out something you think is wrong, that there is a real person at the receiving end of what you say.

## **Be careful when sharing content**

Do not share in haste. Read linked content thoroughly or watch a video to the end so you know exactly what you are sharing before you judge whether it is suitable to share or not.

Be mindful that what you publish will be public indefinitely. Even if a post or tweet is taken down, there may still be records of it online (people are now very quick to screenshot posts, particularly if they disagree with the content).

Social Media entries may well attract wider media interest in you as an individual. Proceed with caution and remember that you are responsible for your online activities.

## **Maintain confidentiality**

If telling a story about someone else, ask yourself first 'Is this my story to tell?' Don't reveal personal details about others without their explicit permission.

## **Our responsibilities**

Our Social Media channels will feature a variety of information from across the Free Church of England.

We are here to help in any way that we can. We always expect users to offer us the same level of courtesy that we offer them. We want our Social Media channels to be places for healthy, open, and insightful discussion, which is why we have the following practical guidelines:

- ✘ All users must comply with the relevant Social Media platform's terms of use as well as our own expectations.
- ✘ Images of children can only be used with the consent of their parents or guardians.
- ✘ We will remove, in whole or in part, posts that are demonstrably inappropriate.
- ✘ You are wholly responsible for any content you post including content that you choose to share.
- ✘ We will remove messages and/or disable comments (where function allows) including reporting and/or blocking users on our Social Media channels who post messages or leave comments that we believe are:
  - Abusive or obscene
  - Deceptive or misleading
  - In violation of any intellectual property rights, including copyright
  - In violation of any law or regulation
  - Spam and off-topic content, including persistent negative and/or abusive posts in which the aim is to provoke a response
  - Promotional material, including links to external websites and promotions that are not relevant to the original post
- ✘ If you're not sure or have any doubts, don't post it.
- ✘ Be a good ambassador. Personal and professional life can easily become blurred online so think before you post.

The Free Church of England will take appropriate action if they receive sustainable complaints or see inappropriate or offensive material posted to Social Media accounts. Anyone repeatedly engaging with us using content or language that falls into the above categories will be blocked and reported to the associated Social Media platform. We will not tolerate or respond to abusive messages. Clergy will be subject to the The Free Church of England's internal disciplinary processes (Canons J3 and J4) if they fall short of the standards expected of them.

### **Social Media and Money**

If money is earned or paywalls are created in the name of the Free Church of England, any funds realised belong to the Free Church of England (unless exempt under Canon D6) and must be paid either to the Parish where the user is based or to the Denominational funds.

*Dr Bob Stephen  
General Secretary  
December 2023*