



ST. THOMAS MAR THOMA CHURCH

Stackpool Road, Southville, BRISTOL, BS3 1NW

UNITED KINGDOM - Regd. Charity No. 1122211

Diocese of North America & Europe & UK-Europe Zone of the Mar Thoma Church

Vicarage: 24 Sherbourne Avenue, Bradley Stoke, Bristol BS32 8BB Tel. +44 (0) 117 9834521

Social media usage - Policy

1. General policy

- 1.1 The Trustees of St Thomas Mar Thoma Church recognise the distinctive contribution that social media can make in achieving the organisation's purposes.
- 1.2 Social media is essential to the success of communicating the work of the Church. It is important for staff and volunteers, including trustees in an ambassadorial role, to participate in social media to engage with the Church's audience, participate in relevant conversations and raise the profile of its work.
- 1.3 This policy sets out guidelines on how social media should be used to support the delivery and promotion of the Church, and the use of social media by staff, volunteers and members in both a professional and personal capacity. It sets out what individuals need to be aware of when interacting in these spaces and is designed to help staff support and expand official social media channels, while protecting the charity and its reputation and preventing any legal issues.
- 1.4 In constructing this policy, the Trustees have considered the (*currently draft*) guidelines produced by the Charity Commission. Trustees are recommended to refer to these guidelines.

2. Responsible officials / authorised representatives

- 2.1 The authorised representatives of the Church in respect of social media are:
 - Vicar
 - Secretary
 - Trustee - Finance
- 2.2 No other staff member, trustee, volunteer or other person [purporting to speak for the church] can post or delete content on the church's official channels without the permission of an authorised representative.
- 2.3 YouTube Content Manager will be responsible for the day to-day publishing, monitoring and management of YouTube social media channels. Specific questions about any aspect of those channels, should be raised with them.
- 2.4 No-one may set up other Facebook groups or pages, Twitter accounts or any other social media channels on behalf of the Church without permission.
- 2.5 In the event of a crisis requiring urgent action, reference should be made to those listed in 2.1.

3. Guidelines for organisational social media use

- 3.1 Risks of misuse, unhelpful or adverse comments from external users and responses to inappropriate comments will be considered by authorised representatives prior to implementation of a campaign, including the issues around allowing facilitation of comments



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from others or posting or uploading of potentially controversial content. Where risks are considered to be significant, approval by the Vicar is required and, where appropriate, time allowed to take external advice.

3.2 All staff and others with social media responsibilities or posting on behalf of the Church must follow the following guidelines:

- Make sure that all social media content has a purpose and a benefit for the Church and intentionally reflects any agreed position.
- All those posting must refrain from offering personal opinions via the Church's social media accounts, either directly by commenting or indirectly by 'liking', 'sharing', 'forwarding', or 'retweeting'. If in doubt about the Church's position on a particular issue, please speak to an authorised representative.
- Everyone should ensure they reflect biblical values in what they post, and use 'tones of voice' that reflect the descriptions of appropriate care of others in 1 Corinthians 12.
- Individuals should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on an official Church social media channel (making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion, or belief, using social media to bully another individual, posting images that are discriminatory or offensive, or links to such content).
- Express opinions and deal with differences of opinion respectfully. Don't insult people or treat them badly. Passionate discussions and debates are fine, but always be respectful of others and their opinions. Be polite and the first to correct personal mistakes.
- Be a representative and an upholder of the church, both local and universal.
- Bring value to the audience(s). Answer their questions, help, and engage with them. Always pause and think before posting. That said, reply to comments in a timely manner when a response is appropriate.
- Take care with the presentation of content. Make sure that there are no typos, misspellings, or grammatical errors. Also check the ownership and quality of images.
- Ensure not to post content about others without their express permission. If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, everyone must ensure they have the consent of a parent or guardian before using them on social media.
- Always check facts. Do not automatically assume that material is accurate. Take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification, for example, by checking data/statistics and being wary of photo manipulation.
- Be honest. Say what is known to be true or has a reliable source. If a mistake has been made, check with those that posted but, if agreed that a mistake has been made, don't be afraid to admit it.
- It is vital not to encourage others to risk their personal safety, or that of others, to gather materials. For example, a video of a stunt.
- No-one should encourage people to break the law to supply material for social media, such as using unauthorised video footage. All relevant rights for usage must be obtained before publishing material.

3.3 The Church is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. While individuals have a right to express views on policy, this should only be done with the express authority to use a specific form of wording by



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an authorised representative and voting guidance/recommendation must not be made in any circumstances.

- 3.4 If anyone becomes aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on the Church's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the Vicar immediately, ensuring a prompt response and establishment of ownership.

4. Responsibilities and breach of policy

- 4.1 Everyone is responsible for their own compliance with this policy. Participation in social media on behalf of the Church is not a right but an opportunity, so it must be treated seriously and with respect.
- 4.2 For staff, breaches of policy may incur disciplinary action, depending on the severity of the issue. Staff who are unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach this policy, should seek advice from an authorised representative.

5. Complaints on social media channels

- 5.1 If a complaint is made on the Church's social media channels, advice should be sought from the Vicar before responding.
- 5.2 The handling of formal complaints (or those that although not worded as a formal complaint but appear to be a complaint) should be in line with the Church's Complaints Policy and Procedure.
- 5.3
- 5.4 Issues can arise on social media which, whether framed as a complaint or not, can escalate into a crisis because they are sensitive or risk serious damage to the organisation's reputation. All such issues should be referred as soon as possible to [an authorised representative/ senior spiritual leader/ trustee].

6. Use of personal social media accounts – appropriate conduct

- 6.1 This policy does not intend to inhibit personal use of social media but instead flags up those areas in which conflicts might arise. All staff, trustees, volunteers and others are expected to behave appropriately, and in ways that are consistent with the Church's values and policies, both online and in real life.
- 6.2 All those who are associated with the Church should be aware that any public statements could affect how people perceive the Church. An authorised representative of the Church should therefore be consulted wherever posts are considered to be at risk of being contentious or breaching the guidelines in this policy.
- 6.3 Individuals must make it clear they are speaking for themselves and not on behalf of the Church. If using personal social media accounts to promote and talk about the Church's work, a disclaimer must be used, to be agreed with an authorised representative.



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- 6.4** Staff or volunteers who have a personal blog or website which indicates in any way, or who want to start blogging and wish to say, that they work for or attend the Church should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with an authorised representative.
- 6.5** Those in senior leadership and trustees must take particular care as personal views published may be misunderstood as expressing the Church's view. Where appropriate, consider adding a phrase/clause making clear the personal nature of the comments.
- 6.6** Staff or volunteers who have a personal blog or website which indicates in any way that they work for the Church should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual. (making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion, or belief, using social media to bully another individual, posting images that are discriminatory or offensive, or links to such content). Where individuals wish to post material which could be construed as such, they should discuss this with a Church authorised representative.
- 6.7** The Church is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. When representing the Church, staff, trustees and volunteers are expected to hold the Church's position of neutrality. Staff, trustees, or volunteers who have a profile on the church website who are also politically active should be careful to be clear in separating their personal political identity from that of the Church and understand and avoid potential conflicts of interest as far as possible.

7. Adoption of this policy

- 7.1** The Trustees of St Thomas Mar Thoma Church Bristol formally accepted this policy at the Executive Committee meeting held on the 11th of July, 2024