

Guidelines on the use of Social Media and Digital Communication

Policy Number: P-007

Approved by: Parish Council

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Introduction:

Over the past decade, the use of internet and mobile phones has transformed the methodology we use for communicating information. As a church we promote godly face to face personal relationships in our ministries and programs, in accordance with God's purposes for community.

The use of St Mark's website and Facebook page has increased considerably and we encourage people to use this as a form of communication and interaction. Below are some key guidelines to be aware of when using these as a community and especially with children and youth.

1. Guidelines for information posted by St Marks on Social Networks

- 1.1 All text should be written in the context of being from St Mark's and not from an individual. Posts should not contain any opinions or views on public events or issues unless deemed to be the opinion of Vicar and approved for public distribution.
- 1.2 Visual media should not contain an individual's face unless approved in writing by that individual or their guardian in the case of a minor. Images which do not show recognizable facial features are allowable.
- 1.3 Audible media should not contain any opinions or views on public events or issues unless deemed appropriate to be the opinion of the Vicar and approved for public distribution.
- 1.4 Links or referrals to other media should not be posted unless approved for affiliation to St Mark's by the Vicar.

2. Guidelines for information posted by the public

- 2.1 Allowable text posted by the public should be free of slander and obscene language and should not contain distasteful content that is not constructive in its merits. Negative or argumentative text is allowable if it is constructive in its merits
- 2.2 Audio and/or visual media posted by the public is allowable if it complies with the ethical principles of St Mark's and is free of obscene language and slander. It is not the responsibility of St Mark's to seek approval for posts uploaded by the public that contain persons' faces or voices. However, if the persons present in the image or sound bite request removal of the image/voice St Mark's will comply.
- 2.3 Links and referrals posted by the public are allowable if they comply with the ethical principles of St Mark's. All links that do not comply with these guidelines should be deleted.

3. Guidelines for staff and volunteers regarding use of individual profiles on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and other social networking sites

- 3.1 It is not appropriate for staff or volunteers to communicate with primary aged children on social networking sites, or to have other forms of on-line contact, except to post promotional and logistical information about events and programs on the St Mark's website.
- 3.2 Interaction with children and teenagers in electronic form should be carried out in a team context. At least one other leader (either a staff member or a volunteer) must be notified and made aware that a staff member or volunteer is communicating with a young person in electronic form. They must be copied in on the electronic communication or, where this is not possible/appropriate, provided with copies of the communication or have the communication

drawn to their attention. Where possible and practical, for primary-aged children or teenagers, the parent's permission must be given before any electronic communication is used with their child.

- 3.3** Staff and volunteers working with children and youth must not send any electronic communication that attempts to hide their identity or represent himself or herself as someone else.
- 3.4** All Staff and volunteers must give careful consideration as to whom they interact with and what is on their profile page. This includes being careful about what is 'liked' or 'commented' on.
- 3.5** With regards to their electronic profile all staff and volunteers must comply with the Melbourne Diocese position: "Ensure that any text, all photos and videos, are beyond reproach and cannot be misconstrued" (Duty of Care Handbook p25).
- 3.6** Further, staff and volunteers are required to not write negatively about other people or organisations; or publicly express anger, disappointment and other such emotions when posting. As gratifying as it may be social media is not the place to do this.
- 3.7** Pastoral care or deeper conversations with a young person should be face to face. Staff and volunteers should, in general, not accept friend requests on social networking sites from young people they have encountered in their volunteer capacity at St Mark's.

4. Guidelines for staff and volunteers using Mobile Phones

- 4.1** Preferably, when telephoning a child or young person, call on the home phone. Whenever possible ensure that a parent of the young person is aware of the phone call. Mobile phone use should be kept to a minimum and never used for long calls or more than 3 text messages within a conversation. If a young person initiates a phone call that requires a long chat then move the conversation on to either a land line or organise a face to face meeting.
- 4.2** Record or save text messages that you send and receive from young people.

5. Guidelines for staff and volunteers using emails

- 5.1** All emails to children or young people should have at least one other staff member/youth leader or parent cc'd into them. Emails should generally be restricted to purpose only emails. As far as possible, save all emails to and from young people.

6. Guidelines for Staff and Volunteers using Video Chat (includes Google Chat, Skype, Facetime, or any other applications that allow personal conversation via video form)

- 6.1** Youth influencers should not be entering into any conversations of this nature with a young person.

7. Guidelines for Staff and Volunteers using Photos

- 7.1** Any photos of children or young people at a specific gathering should be taken by someone appointed to do so.
- 7.2** Do not photograph a person who does not wish to be photographed.
- 7.3** Photos should focus on the activity rather than on particular people or individuals.
- 7.4** Do not identify in writing the person/s in the photograph.
- 7.5** When using photos from programs at St Mark's ensure that permission in writing has been given.

8. Damage Limitation

In the event of a damaging or misleading post being made the Vicar must be notified as soon as possible and the following actions should occur:

- 8.1** The offending post should be removed or corrected.

- 8.2** Where necessary an apology should be issued, either publicly or to the individual or organisation involved.
- 8.3** The origin of the offending post should be explored and steps taken to prevent a similar incident occurring in the future. This may include warning an individual who has posted the misleading or damaging information or blocking that user from the page.