E-Safety Policy

This policy should be read alongside the Parish of St Matthias' policies on Safeguarding, Whistleblowing, Photography, responding to safeguarding concerns and the youth and kids team handbook.

This policy applies to all staff, including clergy, PCC members, paid staff, volunteers including children's and youth workers, those involving in leading or coordinating music and worship, and anyone else involved in working or volunteering on behalf of (name of parish).

Purpose of Policy

• To protect children and young people who are ministered to by St Matthias who make use of information technology (such as mobile phones/devices, games consoles and the Internet) as part of their involvement with the parish.

• To provide our staff. volunteers, and parents with the overarching principles that guide our approach to e-safety.

• To ensure that, as a Christian community, we minister in line with our values, and also within the law, in terms of how we use information technology and behave online.

• To guide us as we seek to equip the children and young people with whom we minister to be safe, discerning and wise users of information and communication technology.

We recognise that:

The use of information technology is an essential part of all our lives; it is involved in how we as a church gather and store information, as well as how we communicate with each other. It is an intrinsic part of the experience of children and young people, and is greatly beneficial to all. However, it can present challenges in terms of how we use it responsibly, and, if misused either by an adult or a young person, can be actually or potentially harmful.

Issues relating to the use of social media, and other forms of information technology, including the potential for misuse, are continually evolving as social norms and technology change. Therefore specific questions or situations arising related to particular events will be considered and decided on a case-by-case basis by the leadership team as part of the risk assessment of that event.

The welfare of the children and young people to whom we minister and with whom we come into contact is paramount, and should govern our approach to the use and management of electronic communications technologies and online behaviour;

All children, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, have the right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse;

Working in partnership with children, young people, their parents, careers and other agencies is essential in promoting young people's welfare, and in helping young people to be responsible in their approach to e-safety

We will seek to keep children and young people safe by:

• Treating any child protection concern arising from the online world in the same way, taking it just as seriously, as concerns arising from the offline world.
• Ensuring that our parish safeguarding officer has access to up-to-date information and training regarding online safety, assisting them as appropriate to access this training.
• Ensuring that all staff and volunteers at St Matthias avoid using private/one to one forms of electronic communication (text message, email, direct messaging including on social media) to communicate with the children and young people they are responsible for.
• Taking the use of such private communication between staff or volunteers and young people as seriously as one-on-one contact between adults and children without another responsible adult present. It is always the responsibility of the adult staff member or volunteer to put appropriate boundaries in place in their relationships with the young people with whom they minister, in both the offline and online worlds.
• Using open online forums or official church accounts to communicate with children, to notify young people of events etc. It is not appropriate to use personal social media accounts to contact children and young people.
• Avoiding any form of inappropriate content in what we, our staff and our volunteers post online, including (but not limited to) sexual content, racist, sexist or otherwise bigoted content, or content promoting illegal activity.
• Only sending messages and posts within appropriate hours: No posts or messages will be shared after 9pm at night and young people will be informed that messages sent after this time will be replied to on the next working day.
• Maintaining electronic versions of sensitive personal data securely, according to the principles of the Data Protection Act.
• Providing age-appropriate awareness material, including training, to children and young people with regards to online safety.
• Providing awareness material to parents with regards to online safety.

Using Mobile Devices

We recognise that church employees and volunteers may well be required to use a mobile phone in the course of their work or volunteering. Where possible in the case of

paid staff they will be offered a phone dedicated for work purposes, or an e-sim system that enables them to have a clear distinction between work and personal phone use.

Texts or conversations that may raise concerns should always be saved and shared as appropriate with a line manager or, where safeguarding concerns are raised, with the Parish Safeguarding Officer.

It will be made clear when there are spaces or circumstances where the use of a mobile phone is not appropriate eg for youth and kids teams during events or sessions with children and young people.

Using WhatsApp for groups

Whatsapp is a commonly used space and generally comfortable and familiar to most people. However there are specific concerns or issues to be aware of in the use of Whatsapp, particularly with young people.

If a WhatsApp group is not properly managed, it could have the potential to breach people's privacy. It is therefore essential that these guidelines are followed to ensure every official St Matthias/St Richards WhatsApp community, group or broadcast adheres to and continues to meet GDPR requirements.

It is important to note the difference between 'personal' WhatsApp groups and 'official' WhatsApp groups. Sometimes members of the congregation and / or members of the church leadership may set up a personal WhatsApp group that could include other people from the congregation. In these situations, the church is not responsible for the running, privacy or management of these groups, even if the group discusses church related content. If a personal group has been set up and you would not like to be in it, you have the right to leave that group at any time. Official church WhatsApp groups/communities are defined as a group that has been created by the church specifically to communicate church related information (including events or prayer). The group will be managed by a member of the church leadership team and will adhere to these guidelines.

We will only create a group in order to communicate church related information. You have the right to leave the group at any time and can contact the administrator directly to request to not be added to any future groups. There are two groups you may be invited to join: a broadcast group or an interactive group.

Guidelines for 'Broadcast' WhatsApp Groups

In most circumstances when a group is created for church communications, it will be a broadcast group. In these groups only those who are administrators can add new people, pass on information or post in the group. Phone numbers are not shared apart from with the administrators. The administrator will inform members clearly of the purpose of the group, and has the right to remove numbers without warning should the

person be no longer part of the church, or relevant to the information being shared/ purpose of the group. A broad cast group will be closed when it is no longer needed, as designated by the administrator of the group, or another member of the leadership team. The administrator will provide members 2 days notice before closing the group.

Guidelines for 'interactive' WhatsApp Groups

In some circumstances an interactive WhatsApp group will be created. This is the more standard group where members can comments and ask questions to the group. Phone numbers are visible to other group members.

Once a group of this nature has been set up, the administrator will then inform you of the purpose of this group. An example of this type of group could be an official group for an event or trip where everyone going is included so they can share comments or info together.

Only the administrator can add people to an interactive group. If you think another member of the congregation should be part of this group, please let the administrator know.

An interactive group will be shut down when it is no longer needed, which will be determined by the administrator or another member of the church leadership team. The administrator will provide members a 2 day notice period before closing the group.

Due to the nature of interactive groups, there is sometimes the potential for sensitive data to be shared by the members of the group. If this is the case for a particular group, an administrator will shutdown this type of group once per term and immediately reopen for those who are applicable. This is in order to ensure this sensitive data does not remain accessible for an unreasonable period of time and also to ensure group members are still an active part of the church and / or relevant to the content being shared. The administrator will give 2 days notice before closing down the group. At any time you can tell the administrator directly that you would no longer wish to be added to a group that is about to be reopened.

Additional guidelines for the use of WhatsApp with those under 18

Staff and volunteers will be reminded of the age guidelines for the use of WhatsApp. Underage children and young people (those under 13) will never be encouraged to use WhatsApp or to join groups. Where whatsapp is used with groups over 13, consent will always be sought from those young people and their parents before they are added to a group.

Particular care will be taken with the formation of groups aiming to gather or communicate to young people. These will almost always be broadcast groups in order to protect the young people joining. However, in certain circumstances it may be

appropriate to form an interactive group. These decisions will be made by leaders in consultation with a member of the senior leadership team on a case-by-case basis.

No under 18 should ever be added to an interactive group where there are also over 18s present. If there are mixed age groups that require the same communications in an interactive group those under 18 must be on a separate distinct group.

No group will ever be formed with a leader and young person one to one; a second leader will always be added if there is a conversation with an individual young person. This is also best practice for any groups where in most circumstances there will be more than one leader included in the group.

Should a young person strike up a conversation on WhatsApp that is one to one, they will immediately be offered the choice to continue with a second adult added to the chat or to continue the conversation in person at a pre-planned time.

Whatsapp conversations will always be saved and recorded. Features such as disappearing messages, view once etc will not be used in groups with young people.

Young people (and their parents) will be advised to adjust privacy settings on WhatsApp (via 'settings' and then 'privacy' to select 'my contacts except' and then ticking all contracts. This means only that young persons phone contacts (bar those they choose to exclude) can add them to a group. They may also wish to turn off 'read receipts' to avoid them feeling under pressure to respond to messages. Young people will also be shown how to block and report other users of the app or inappropriate content. These conversations will be undertaken as and when WhatsApp is discussed, as appropriate within youth group settings, and revised whenever necessary.