

Social Media and Digital Communication Policy

1. Purpose

This policy provides practical guidance for the safe and appropriate use of:

- social media
- websites
- messaging apps
- mobile phones
- livestreaming
- online meetings
- digital communication platforms

The policy supports the congregation's Online Safety Policy and safeguarding procedures.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- ensure appropriate online conduct
- provide clear communication boundaries
- support safe ministry practice
- protect children, young people and adults at risk
- ensure online activity reflects the Christian ethos of the congregation

2. Congregational Social Media Accounts

Administration

- All church social media accounts and websites must be approved by Kirk Session.
- At least two approved leaders must have access to each account.
- One account administrator should ideally be an elder, where appropriate.
- Passwords must be securely stored and regularly updated.
- Accounts should be actively monitored.

Content Standards

Content shared online must:

- reflect Christian values
- be respectful and appropriate
- avoid offensive or discriminatory language

- avoid sarcasm or “banter” that could be misunderstood

Care should be exercised regarding:

- “likes”
- “shares”
- endorsements of external organisations or campaigns

3. Photography and Video Recording

Consent

- Written parental or guardian consent must be obtained before sharing images or videos of children online.
- Consent should be obtained from adults at risk where appropriate.
- Group images are preferred where possible.

Protection of Identity

The following should not be shared publicly without consent:

- addresses
- schools attended
- contact numbers
- detailed personal information

Children’s full names should not normally appear alongside photographs or videos.

Video Recording

- It will be clearly communicated to the congregation when recording is taking place.
- Camera operators should avoid unnecessary focus on children.
- Personal filming may be restricted during certain events.

4. Messaging Apps and Group Communication

Approved Platforms

Only platforms approved by Kirk Session should be used for church communication.

Communication with Children and Young People

- Messaging groups involving children under 16 are generally not considered good practice.
- Communication with younger children should normally occur through parents or guardians.

- Parental consent must be obtained for approved communication with 16–17-year-olds.

Group Messaging Standards

- At least two approved leaders must be included in any group involving young people.
- Messaging should be informational only.
- One-to-one messaging with children or young people should be avoided wherever possible.
- Disappearing-message functions should not be used.

Appropriate Communication

Messages should:

- be respectful and professional
- relate only to church activities
- avoid slang or suggestive language
- be sent only during agreed hours

5. Personal Social Media Use

Staff and Volunteers

Staff and volunteers should:

- maintain professional boundaries online
- ensure public content reflects the congregation's ethos
- remember that children and young people may access public profiles

Staff and volunteers must not:

- “friend” or follow children or young people using personal accounts
- communicate with children through personal social media messaging
- share inappropriate or offensive content

6. Use of Mobile Phones During Congregational Activities

General Expectations

Different organisations and ministries may apply different expectations regarding mobile phone use depending on:

- age of participants
- nature of activities
- safeguarding requirements

- privacy considerations

Some groups may:

- restrict phone use during meetings
- implement temporary phone-free activities
- use agreed behavioural expectations or “mobile phone contracts”

Residentials and Overnight Events

- Mobile phones should not normally be permitted in bedrooms during youth residentials or overnight events.
- Expectations should be clearly communicated before the event.

7. Online Meetings and Video Calls

Where online meetings involve children or young people:

- at least two approved leaders must be present
- parents should be informed
- children should participate from shared family spaces where possible
- approved platforms and security settings must be used

8. Online Gaming

Joymount Presbyterian Church have taken the decision to not permit online gaming in organisations operating in our church premises.

9. Standards of Behaviour

The following behaviour is not acceptable on church-related platforms:

- bullying or harassment
- racist, sexist or hateful language
- inappropriate jokes or “banter”
- sexualised communication
- intimidation or exclusion
- sharing confidential information

The congregation reserves the right to moderate and remove inappropriate content where necessary.

10. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed regularly by Kirk Session and updated in line with our Safeguarding policies at a minimum of every three years. We will consider:

- safeguarding guidance

- legislative changes
- technological developments
- ministry needs

