Online Media Policy and Guidance
Chessington Evangelical Church
June 2016
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The important role of social media

Throughout history, people of all generations have gathered in town squares—public spaces where the local community gathers for social and commercial purposes. In the old days, it used to be a literal "town square," and it still is in some places. Until social media came around, town squares were shopping malls and other social areas. Social media is the 21st century town square.

The Apostle Paul preached in open squares where the people gathered. In Acts 13 it was to the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia. In Acts 17, it was to the literal town square of conversation—Mars Hill. People today aren't sitting around in debate clubs. They aren't going to the town squares in the middle of cities. Instead, they're having discussions online through social media. It's where people are gathering, debating, discussing ideas and connecting with others.

As a church we want to see the Gospel impact and influence our communities. In order to do this we need to go to the place where we can meet, interact and converse with as many people as possible. Today, that place is online social media.

Social media is no longer a fad. It is established in our culture. And churches should do everything they can to engage the public in this forum. As of January 2014, 74% of all adults who have some sort of presence online use social media—our church needs to be accessible there. With some strategic thought, as a church we can reach those who are regularly using social media. The Apostle Paul provides some insight for churches that are still on the fence:

*"I have become all things to all people, so that I may **by every possible means** save some. Now I do all this because of the gospel, so I may become a partner in its benefits."*
1 Corinthians 9:22b-23

Online Media Policy

Underlying principles:

Biblical principles.

As a Church, CEC has identified 5 Core Values that act as the foundation for all its policy and practice:

1. **DEPENDENT -** Dependent on God but taking risks. We want to be a people whose prayer and devotional life - corporately, individually and in small groups - reflects are dependence on Him and our joy in Him.
2. **GROWING - Reaching the lost but preaching to ourselves**. We want to be a community of God's people who are humble and teachable; who don't want to stay as infants but to grow and mature! Who recognise that we never out-grow our need for the gospel and that maturity in Christ is a life-long journey.
3. **CHRIST-LIKE - Realistic but expecting change.** We want to be a community of God's people who are increasingly Christ-like: characterised by grace and truth; praise and thankfulness; trust, hope and love. We want to be counter-cultural - not just to be different but to point people to Christ.
4. **WHOLE-LIFE - Biblically orthodox but culturally relevant.** Life is like a peach not a segmented orange - our whole life matters to God! We want to be a church that reflects that Jesus came to give *abundant* life and is Lord of *all* areas of our lives. We want to glorify Him in the 'ordinary' - to see the gospel like the sun coming-up, illuminating everything.
5. **OTHER-CENTRED - Gospel centred but socially active.** Our God is radically generous and always acts justly. We want to reflect His fatherly compassion and mercy for the needy and oppressed; by proclaiming the gospel in what we say and what we do. We want people in Chessington and everywhere to experience and respond to the love of Jesus.

These 5 Core Values underpin the whole outlook of the Church towards both those inside and also outside its parameters. Several more principles emerge as we think about how the Christian message should be communicated to the world:

- **The Christian Gospel is clear**, and not mysterious or available only to a spiritual elite: clarity and transparency are important, and faithfulness to the Biblical message paramount;
- **Those who communicate the Gospel are to be humble and servant-like**, not lovers of controversy: we do not always need to 'win the argument';
- **We are not to be arrogant in thinking that the truth has been revealed to us at CEC only:** there is room for disagreement on secondary or tertiary issues within the Christian tradition;
- **In all our communications we will seek not to bring personal embarrassment to any individual or grouping:** our motives should always be love and compassion.

1. Necessary disclaimers.

We recognize that whilst the leadership and membership of CEC has bound itself to a Basis of Faith on primary issues, there is room for interpretation on matters not central to salvation, such as the mode of Baptism, the particular understanding of eschatology, and so on. This means that occasionally, views will be expressed in the public ministry at CEC, which are not necessarily endorsed by the leadership. We can agree to disagree over some issues, and occasionally views will be expressed which are minority views.

In addition, there will be occasions when views will be expressed where current social orthodoxy and the teaching of CEC clash, for example over issues such as immoral sexual practice. On such occasions, CEC reserves the right to take what it believes to be a Biblical position, without fear or favour and without wishing to upset or provoke those with opposing views. This may lead CEC into a position where legal challenge by outsiders may be possible: notwithstanding, CEC reserves the right to stand firm on the teaching of Scripture.

Having said this, communications from CEC will not be discriminatory in content or tone in terms of age, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability. All people bear Gods image and are worthy of the dignity inherent in that identity.

Where the members and congregation of CEC as private citizens express opinions on social media, these should not be taken as representative as the views of the leadership or majority of the Church at CEC. Furthermore, it is expected that use of social media by the members and congregation of CEC does not bring the Gospel into disrepute: individuals are responsible for their own posts, blogs and images.

2. Data protection.

In all its communications, CEC will endeavor to act lawfully (though see Disclaimer above). In particular, in its communications via media of any kind, CEC will seek to uphold the provisions of the Data Protection Act. This will mean that:

- Confidentiality of individuals or groups will be maintained;
- Consent will be sought when publicity materials are displayed, showing individuals;
- Where possible, individuals will not be identified, nor their images shown without their consent;
- Where mistakes occur, CEC will endeavor to remove material immediately, where its legality is challenged;
- All public ministries of the Church will be subject to the above restrictions.

3. Safeguarding.

CEC operates safeguarding policies for both children and adults, and would seek always to recognize the vulnerability of certain individuals or groups. This Media Policy is intended to underline and reinforce good safeguarding practice. It offers advice and guidelines not only to the employees and ministry-leaders at CEC, but also to the individuals who make up the Church. Thus, in all circumstances this Policy is intended to:

- Protect those with particular vulnerability to public exposure;
- Work in tandem with our safeguarding policies to ensure the on-going protection of all;
- Help protect those in ministry at CEC by issuing guidance to them (paid or otherwise) as to their practice in this area;
- Develop as social media does, so that it will need continual revision and updating.

Gareth Edwards is the church lead safeguarding officer.

Simple questions to ask yourself for guidance online:

1. ## Is my communication open and transparent?

   One key principle to bear in mind when representing CEC online is the need to be transparent and open in all our communication. Where possible all online social media communication should have be traceable and clear. This is especially the case when dealing with children's and youth work and when dealing with vulnerable people. If for any reason you have to communicate in this way please keep a careful record of the communication made and why it was necessary.

2. ## Is it my story/information to share?

   One easy trap to fall into on social media is sharing information about another person that they didn't want to share. Before you share a photo, story or any other information please make sure you have the expressed permission of those involved in the communication.

3. ## Who can see this?

   Sometimes things put on social media are out there for everyone to see, other times it can be more restricted. It's very easy to make the mistake that you think only a few people can see something when in fact it's available to a wider audience. Photos and tagging photos on Facebook for example may go to a wider audience than you may think, through a friend of a friends Facebook page. If you are not careful, you could inadvertently identify a person to a group they would not want to do so. Unless you are 100% certain you understand the restrictions, it would be best only to post photos that are suitable for all and not to tag people in a photo (although they are free to tag themselves if they wish).

4. ## Can this be misunderstood?

   Most often Social Media communications are short and to the point. It's worth bearing in mind that this form of communication is easily open to misunderstanding. Quick messages that are meant to be indifferent can easily be misinterpreted as abrasive and aggressive. We want to be extra vigilant that any communication that represents CEC comes across in a careful and considered manner. Before you post anything, just think, "Is this post coming across in a way that will honour Christ? Can this post be easily misunderstood?"

5. ## Do I want the world to see this, forever?

   A very important principle to remember when posting anything on Social Media is that it will ALWAYS be there, even after it is deleted or edited. Even if you post it and immediately delete it, it is virtually impossible to get rid of it completely. It will be being stored somewhere online, in a server, and clever people can access this material.

6. ## Am I in doubt?

   If you have considered all the above and are still unsure about posting get advice. In this event please speak to Tony Whitmarsh or Ben Clark before posting.

Guidelines for online video streaming of church activities:

Church services are streamed (broadcast) on-line in their entirety and a video of each service is stored on-line under CEC's YouTube channel for approximately 24 hours. After approximately 24 hours the video is edited down to just the sermon or just the Bible reading and sermon. The framing of the camera will be limited to those person(s) on the front stage and to the top / back of heads of those in the front centre rows.

All people involved in the service who may be put on camera must be informed prior to the service starting.

Some other events (e.g. Big Day Out) are recorded and subsequently edited down to a 2-3 minute video, to be posted on the church / centre website and on social media as a record of the day – and for future promotional purposes. Notification of the filming should be made known to attendees and names taken of anyone who should not be in the edited down video. A photo of the child / person should also be requested.

Guidelines for use of Social Media in Youth work:

Private messaging in all forms is discouraged on social media.

A basic principle in all our online communication is that we seek to be visible and transparent. For this reason all private forms of messaging, that are not open and recorded should be kept to an absolute minimum. We recognise that this may not always be possible, but where messages are sent, keep it short, direct, record it and let your ministry leader, or line manager know about it.

If you receive a private message from a young person, reply only to offer a better forum for communication (i.e. in person at club or an open chat forum like a Facebook group). If a message (private or otherwise) you receive is of an inappropriate nature, do not reply and inform your ministry leader or your line manager.

Twitter or similar:
1. Young people can follow staff and volunteers on Twitter and visa-versa. As a result, leaders should be aware as they tweet, that they represent Christ and are role models to the young people.
2. Direct private messages should not be sent or responded to as these are hidden forms of communication.

Snapchat or similar:
1. Staff and volunteers should not connect with young people on Snapchat as these are hidden forms of communication.
2. Each group (e.g. JF, YPF) can have it's own official account but must be monitored by more than one leader for accountability purposes.
3. Leaders should be aware as they post content, that they represent Christ and are role models to the young people.

Facebook or similar:

1. Volunteers and staff cannot be friends on Facebook with an under 18 where their contact has been established through their role as a staff member or volunteer.
   a. Once a young person has left our youth work provision at 18 it is then the volunteer or staff member's choice whether to be Facebook friends with them.
2. Each group (e.g. JF, YPF) can have a Facebook group. They should follow this policy on the group page.
   a. The group should be closed.
   b. Leaders should be aware as they post, that they represent Christ and are role models to the young people.
   c. The group should be monitored by at least two staff/volunteers who have admin rights.
   d. Young people, staff and volunteers can become a member of this group.
   e. Communication can occur openly through comments and posts on the page.
   f. Events can be posted on the page.
   g. Once permission is given, photos of events and young people can be posted on the page.
   h. Privacy settings on photographs should be set to ensure that only members of the group see them.

Intsagram and similar:

1. Young people can follow staff and volunteers on Instagram and visa-versa. As a result, leaders should be aware as they post, that they represent Christ and are role models to the young people.
2. Photos of young people are best used of a groups account (e.g. JF , YPF) rather than a personal one, and should only be done so once the correct permissions have been given.
3. Direct private messages should not be sent or responded to as these are hidden forms of communication.
4. Each group (e.g. JF, YPF) can have it's own official account but must be monitored by more than one leader for accountability purposes.

YouTube or similar:

1. Because it is not a public forum we advise that staff and volunteers should not subscribe to any young person's YouTube channel.
2. However public comments may be shared on videos created and shared by a young person.
3. Each group (e.g. JF, YPF) can it's own official account but must be monitored by more than one leader for accountability purposes.
4. Leaders should be aware as they post content, that they represent Christ and are role models to the young people.

Periscope or similar:

1. Although youth workers are of course permitted to use live video steaming apps in their own personal online life, it is strongly recommended that they should not be used as ways to communicate with young people as it is a non-traceable form of communication.
2. Each group (e.g. JF, YPF) may have an official account and may stream content prior to events as a way of encouraging people to come along.
3. Live streaming of Youth activates should not be done during clubs, unless parents of all children involved give prior written consent.
4. Leaders should be aware as they stream content, that they represent Christ and are role models to the young people.

Guidelines for staff of CEC and The King's Centre:

Remember that what you write is public. You should always assume that it will be read by your boss, your co-workers, church volunteers and attendees, other church leaders, your parents, your children, your spouse, and people who don't like the church. Ask yourself if you are comfortable with all of these people reading what you plan to post.

What you write is your responsibility and you are legally responsible for your comments.
Write as yourself. Use your real name. If you choose to identify yourself as an employee of CEC or to discuss anything related to the organisation, be clear about your role.

Be accurate in what you write and ensure that you have all the facts about your subject. If you make a mistake, admit it and be quick to correct it.

Be careful that what you write would not impair your ability to work with your staff team, lead your volunteer teams, speak with credibility to other churches, or represent us in the community. Remember that frustrations are best expressed in person. Sarcasm does not usually translate well, so be careful how you use humour. Respect your audience. Be thoughtful. Don't refer to volunteers, attendees, or vendors by name without permission. Don't post pictures of others without permission. Don't use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any conversation that would not be acceptable in our workplace.

Choose your topics wisely. There are some ideas that are best discussed in a personal conversation rather than a public forum. These might include political views and the church's stance or policy on certain topics. Don't allow your posts to hinder someone's spiritual growth.

Remember that what you write, even if retracted, is archived and can be with you longer than you might expect.

If you think you have made a mistake (as we all will from time to time), let your line manager about it.