

# **Policy for members and friends of Marshside Road Church on the use of Social Media**

## **Introduction**

Social networking through the use of Internet based and other electronic social media tools is integrated into everyday life. Use of Facebook, LinkedIn, Blogging, Wikis and other social media vehicles are common place.

The lines between work, social life and what happens in church, can become blurred. Generally what people do in their own time is a personal decision. However actions that are deliberately damaging or hurtful to the Church, or to an individual or group within it, or that bring the Church into disrepute are already potentially disciplinary matters, whether they are carried out online or not.

## **Matter of Trust**

Methodist discipline relies on trust, these guidelines therefore as far as possible trust in people's common sense.

- Social media do not change our understanding of confidentiality or what is or is not acceptable to say. The Church expects all involved to respect confidences when they are included in them. Similarly, something that would be unacceptable to print in a newsletter or the letters pages of the Recorder – for example – would be unacceptable to publish online.
- Increasingly, people with an existing personal online presence are assuming paid or voluntary roles within the Church. The Church cannot expect that all of this is consistent with what we would want to say on any given topic. How people reconcile their past online writings with their role in the Church is for them and their line manager or other person to whom they are accountable in the first instance.
- These guidelines should not limit or prevent constructive debate or discussion through social media. People should be free to engage in discussions and debates within and beyond the Church on any topic, but should also remember their responsibilities to the Church or to any bodies they are members of when they do so. There is a wide range of opinion within the Church on some topics, and one of the attractive features about Methodism is our ability to disagree constructively.
- There is a fine line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour online, and this line will move with time. One of the benefits of a healthy online community is that it is this community that provides the best guidance to others and to itself. The aim of the Church should therefore be to foster healthy and active online and social media.

The core summary of being responsible, respectful and good representatives of the Church remains.

### **Benefits to the Methodist Church**

The rise of social media has considerable potential benefits to the Church.

- It can allow us to: spread our messages through our own social media sites; enable a sense of connectedness across the Connexion; and encourage collaborative working amongst people in different parts of the Connexion or even the world. It also enables us to listen to and participate in online “conversations” that might provide a stronger sense of what really matters to the Church or to groups within it.
- Social media are also increasingly the way that young people choose to communicate, or even expect to communicate. For all groups, when well used, social media and other electronic communications can act as levellers – all can participate more equally, regardless of their position in society or the church, their geographical location or any disabilities.

### **Risks to the Methodist Church**

There are also multiple risks and the major ones include:

- A member of staff, other employee or someone clearly linked to the Church (e.g. a minister) posts something online that is illegal, defamatory, offensive or otherwise damaging to the Church, its reputation or relationships within it or with partners
- Confidential information is disclosed, accidentally or deliberately
- An individual within the Church posts comments about colleagues, managers or others that are serious enough to warrant investigation or possible disciplinary action.
- Decisions made by governance bodies are undermined or disrespected through continued argument online.
- The speed of electronic communications, including social media, makes it easy to say something that is later regretted, but which has become permanently online for all to see.

### **Next Issue**

The next edition of **The Link** will be published on the **Sunday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 2017**. Therefore, items for inclusion in the next edition need to reach me by **Sunday the 26<sup>th</sup> of March**. Thanks, Mike ([MikeOwen10@aol.com](mailto:MikeOwen10@aol.com))