



Parish of Walworth St Christopher

Digital Safeguarding Policy

The following policy was agreed at the Parochial Church Council (PCC) meeting on 25 January 2026.

Who does this policy apply to?

Safeguarding in church is everyone's responsibility and everyone in church is expected to follow the **Parish Safeguarding Policy**. Everyone in the church should be aware of good practice in digital communication, and what to do if there is a safeguarding concern.

There is extra responsibility placed on those working on behalf of the parish with children, young people and vulnerable adults. These are the people who are asked to follow the parish **Code of Safer Working Practice**. This group includes, but is not limited to, church officers (including churchwardens and PCC members), and church ministers including clergy, licensed lay ministers, youth leaders, children's leaders, and pastoral ministers.

Basic Principles

Digital media includes all forms of online and digital communication, including mobile phones, the internet, digital streaming platforms, and social media.

Social media are online platforms that allow users to create, rather than just consume, online content. Typically they allow us to upload photographs, videos, daily updates, comments, etc. These platforms are also available as "apps" which means they can be used on a mobile phone as well as on a computer.

Some people can feel more comfortable communicating from behind the 'safety' of a screen. Connecting through a mobile phone or computer allows the potential for communication and fellowship beyond Sundays, especially for those who do not live near the church.

Communicating with groups and holding virtual gatherings via online platforms also presents challenges that should be considered before giving access to your virtual environment to those who you may not know.

Young adults, young people and children are used to engaging digitally in every area of their lives, including for their education and for social contact with friends and family. For many in younger generations, the distinction between 'online' and 'offline' worlds is an artificial one.

Digital Media and Safeguarding Risks

There are particular risks associated with digital & online forms of communication, including:

- The opportunity for grooming/sexual exploitation (including peer-to-peer abuse by young people)
- Sharing of personal contact details of young people and youth leaders, ministers or church officers which enables private digital communication
- Inappropriate conversations or sharing of photos/videos between young people and youth leaders, ministers or church officers
- Potential for misunderstanding in tone or intent of digital communication
- Potential allegations against youth leaders, ministers, or church officers
- Use of apps with minimum age restrictions
- Enabling abusive or unkind behaviour (cyber-bullying)
- Particular risks associated with children in care or those known to children's services

Responding well to safeguarding concerns

In accordance with the Church of England Safeguarding Policy, our church is committed to responding well to safeguarding concerns. This includes:

- promoting a safer environment and culture in digital and online communications
- safely recruiting, training and supporting all those with any responsibility related to children, young people and vulnerable adults within the church, to recognise the signs of online abuse.
- responding promptly to every safeguarding concern or allegation by reporting it to the Parish Safeguarding Officer, a member of clergy or churchwarden, or the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor.

- caring pastorally for victims/survivors of abuse and other affected persons
- caring pastorally for those who are the subject of concerns or allegations of abuse and other affected persons
- responding to those who may pose a present risk to others

Digital media best practice

- Youth leaders, church officers and ministers must ensure all digital communications are done with safeguarding in mind.
- Risk assessments for church activities and events should include safeguarding of digital media.
- Adults should behave in the online world as they would offline: do not post links to offensive or inappropriate content, make comments about someone's appearance that could be interpreted as either sexual or offensive, or 'like' inappropriate content on social media.
- Clergy and church ministers should, where possible, use a work mobile when communicating with young people or members of the congregation.
- Youth leaders, church officers and ministers should maintain appropriate boundaries in the online world as in the offline world by keeping a distinction between private lives and work within the church, and pay attention to dynamics of power and influence.
- All adults should avoid 'lone working' in the online world: this means avoiding one-to-one chat (eg direct messaging or video calls) between individual adults and children/young people.
- Adults should not use personal social media accounts to contact children or young people. Youth leaders, ministers and church officers should not be 'friends' with young people on social media platforms. If a child or young person tries to contact an adult privately via their social media, the adult should not respond but report it to the safeguarding officer for advice.
- Consent must be sought from both parents and young people about the taking and use of images and videos. Photos and videos must be stored securely with consent.
- Phone numbers of young people should be stored in the Children & Youth Ministry folder of the church Google Drive, which is only accessible by those who have been safely recruited.

WhatsApp

- The WhatsApp Group Agreement (see appendix) contains full guidelines for using WhatsApp.
- If an adult needs to communicate directly with a young person (over 13), they should set up a WhatsApp group with the young person and their parent/carer (after parental consent)
- Young people may join a church WhatsApp group (for young people and youth leaders or other safely recruited adults only) if the following conditions are all met:
 - the parent/carer has given consent to share the young person's mobile number with church leaders (usually via the youth ministry registration form)
 - the young person is over 13 and has given consent themselves
 - the young person has read and accepted the WhatsApp Group guidelines
- Young people should **not** be members of a mixed WhatsApp group with adults, unless they are youth leaders, other safely recruited adults or graduating members of the current youth group.

Zoom

- Zoom calls are generally used for meetings between church adults, but youth leaders, ministers and church officers should be aware of safeguarding implications of video calls.
- Equivalent safeguarding procedures should be followed as for the WhatsApp Group Guidelines.
- Children or young people should not be in a mixed age Zoom call with church adults unless a parent/carer is present, unless every adult on the call has been safely recruited.
- A group of children or young people on a Zoom call must have parent/carer consent to take part; two safely recruited adults must be on the call at all times; no other adults should attend; a register of attendees must be kept; all participating must use their real names (or the name of their parent/carer) on their Zoom profile; the waiting room function must be enabled to ensure only known participants can attend; one adult should continuously monitor for any inappropriate content that may be shared (on purpose or by accident); the private message function between participants should be turned off.

Each person who works within this church community will agree to abide by this policy and the guidelines established by this church.

Parish Safeguarding Officer: **Pam Francis**
Incumbent: **Mother Ellen Eames**
Churchwarden: **Biyi Odusanya**