To magnify Christ by making disciples in Clare and beyond

Online Usage Policy

1. Purpose and Scope

This policy sets out the standards and expectations for the use of the internet, email, social media, and all digital platforms on behalf of Clare Presbyterian Church. It applies to anyone acting in an official capacity for the church, whether using church-owned equipment or personal devices.

Our aim is to use digital technology in a way that reflects our values, protects our community — especially children, young people and adults at risk — and glorifies God in all we do.

2. Core Principles

All online activity carried out in connection with the church should be:

- Christ-honouring — content should reflect the character and teaching of Christ, in tone as well as substance.
- Truthful and accurate — we do not spread misinformation, unverified claims, or misleading content.
- Respectful — all communication should treat others with dignity, whether members, visitors or those outside the faith.
- Safe — we take active steps to protect children, young people and adults in every digital space.
- Transparent — church-affiliated accounts should be clearly identifiable as such; individuals should not represent personal views as official church positions.

3. Use of Church Equipment and Networks

Church computers, tablets, Wi-Fi networks, and other digital resources are provided for ministry purposes. Incidental personal use is permitted, but users must not:

- Access or share content that is illegal, offensive, or contrary to Christian values.
- Install unauthorised software or applications.
- Circumvent security settings, firewalls, or parental controls.
- Use church equipment to conduct personal business for profit.

The church reserves the right to monitor activity on its networks and devices where there is reasonable cause for concern.

4. Social Media

1. Official Church Accounts

Only authorised individuals may post on behalf of the church. Those with administrative access to official accounts should:

- Post content consistent with the church's doctrinal position and values.
- Obtain consent before posting images or personal information about individuals (see Section 7).
- Avoid sharing unverified news, political commentary or divisive content.
- Respond to comments and messages promptly and graciously, referring complex matters to the Minister or another member of the Kirk Session.
- Never delete complaints or critical comments without pastoral consideration and leadership oversight.

2. Personal Social Media

Staff and volunteers are free to use personal social media but should be mindful that, as representatives of the church, their online conduct reflects on the wider community. In a personal capacity, individuals should:

- Make clear when opinions are personal and not the church's position.
- Avoid public criticism of fellow church members, leadership, or other churches.
- Not share confidential pastoral information under any circumstances.
- Exercise caution when connecting with minors online (see Section 5).

5. Safeguarding

The safety of children, young people and adults is paramount. All online interaction with minors or individuals at risk must comply with the church's Safeguarding Policies, which take precedence over this document. Key requirements include:

- Adults must not communicate privately online with children or young people without parental knowledge and consent.
- All youth and children's ministry communication should take place through official, visible and monitored channels (e.g., group chats with at least two leaders present).
- No photographs or videos of children may be shared publicly without explicit written parental consent.
- Any safeguarding concern identified online — including grooming, exploitation or harmful content — must be reported immediately to the Designated Person and, where appropriate, to the relevant statutory authorities.

6. Email and Messaging

Email and messaging services used on behalf of the church should be professional and courteous. Users should:

- Use a church email address for official communications where one is provided.
- Avoid sending sensitive or confidential information through unencrypted channels.
- Not use church communication channels to forward chain messages, unsolicited marketing, or political content.
- Exercise particular care when emailing large groups, using BCC where recipient privacy is required.
- Retain emails relevant to pastoral matters, safeguarding, or legal issues in accordance with the church's data retention (GDPR) guidelines.

7. Privacy and Data Protection

The church is committed to handling personal data responsibly and in accordance with applicable data protection law (including UK GDPR). In digital contexts:

- Consent must be obtained before collecting, storing or sharing personal data.
- Photographs, videos, and testimonies may only be published with the individual's knowledge and permission.
- Special sensitivity must be applied to the data of children, young people and adults at risk.
- Any suspected data breach — including accidental sharing of personal information — must be reported to the Data Protection Lead within 24 hours.

8. Online Worship, Streaming, and Content Creation

Where services, events, or teaching are broadcast or recorded:

- Members of the congregation should be informed that recording is taking place.
- Care should be taken not to capture identifiable images of children without parental consent.
- Copyright must be respected; music streamed or used in recordings requires appropriate licensing (e.g., CCLI streaming licence).

9. Conflicts, Complaints and Discipline

Disagreements, disputes or concerns should not be aired on public or semi-public online platforms. Repeated or serious breaches of this policy will be addressed by the Kirk Session and may lead to removal of access to church systems or accounts.

10. Review

This Policy will be reviewed every two years by the Kirk Session. If there is a legislative change that requires the Policy to be updated or reviewed within that time, the Kirk Session will ensure that this update or review takes place, in accordance with any advice from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

It is the responsibility of the Kirk Session to ensure changes are communicated in a timely and effective manner to leaders and the congregation.

Approved by the Kirk Session at its meeting on 21 June 2026.

Policy End