Effective Date: October 2026
Review Frequency: Biennial

Communication Policy for the Church Family

1. Purpose and Motivation

- Our communication aims to help us grow in our relationship with God as we seek to be disciples, and to grow in our relationship with each other as members of his community.
- Effective communication enables everyone's active involvement in the life of the church, ensures our resources are used effectively, and helps us grow into a united church.

2. Our Communicators and Audiences

This policy applies to all interactions within the church family, recognising that everyone is both a sender and a receiver of messages:

The scope of this policy includes but is not limited to the following, depending on the responsibility held.

- **Church Leaders:** Sharing vision, plans, direction, and vital leadership information with the congregation.
- **Group Leaders & Organisers:** Providing information about gatherings, coordinating rotas, and enthusing members about special events.
- **Church Members:** Sharing personal news, offering services, and providing feedback to leadership.

3. What We Communicate (Internal Messages)

Our internal messaging focuses on building up the church body through several key areas:

- **Discipleship Training:** Communicating through sermons, small group notes, and youth ministries.
- **Connecting Groups:** Sharing annual reports and group updates so the entire membership retains a sense of the whole church.
- **Personal and Pastoral News:** Sharing testimonies and pastoral updates to care for one another.

- **Activities and Events:** Distributing programme cards, weekly notice-sheets, and digital reminders to keep the family informed.

4. Channels of Communication

To reach our diverse church family, we utilise multiple channels:

- **The Written Word:** Printed notice-sheets, internal newsletters, and emails.
- **The Spoken Word:** Service announcements, group discussions, and one-to-one pastoral conversations.
- **The Demonstrated Word:** Showing commitment through actions, such as leaders participating in standard rotas, which often communicates more powerfully than words.
- **The Digital Word:** Shared diaries, text message reminders and social media groups.
- **Email Etiquette:** When sending mass emails or contacting a group of members who do not intimately know one another, the 'Bcc' function must always be used to protect email addresses.
- **Social Media & Messaging Apps:** Participation in church-affiliated WhatsApp or social media groups requires explicit, opt-in consent. Group administrators must ensure the purpose of the group is clear and that privacy boundaries are respected.

5. Principles for Effective Internal Communication

- **Use Print for Detail, Speech for Effect:** Detailed information (times, dates, names) must be placed in printed or digital formats. Spoken announcements should be reserved for motivating the family and sharing vision; they should not simply repeat printed details.
- **Value Personal Communication:** Whenever possible, use personal approaches — such as handwritten cards or one-to-one conversations — to thank volunteers or request help, as these are highly valued within a church family.
- **Maintain Strict Confidentiality:** Sensitive pastoral information must be safeguarded. We must ensure that personal news is only shared with those who absolutely need to know, preventing private matters from becoming public gossip.

  This is best practice for communicating a pastoral concern about another individual or yourself in one-to-one settings, as it presents the opportunity to understand the matter better and communicate it to the individual concerned.
- **Communication Boundaries for Leaders:**
  - Digital communications must be restricted to text messages, WhatsApp, or email.
  - Every message must include a parent, guardian, or an additional church leader (e.g., via a group chat or copied-in email). Direct one-to-one communication is permitted only with parents' consent, as with Mentor-Mentee communication.
  - Direct telephone calls are only permitted in exceptional circumstances with prior agreement.
  - (See the church's Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy for further guidance.)

6. Mailing Lists and Mass Communication

For ease of communication, the church uses specific mailing lists, including one for the music team and another for the church family to share prayer requests. Individuals must actively opt in to be added to these lists.

Anyone who wishes to withdraw their consent and unsubscribe from a mailing list can do so at any time by informing the church office at hello@countessely.co.uk.

To safely manage and distribute our newsletters and member mass communications, the church utilises third-party email distribution services, such as Mailchimp. Every automated email sent via these platforms will include a clear and accessible link to manage your preferences at the bottom of the message.

7. Opting Out

While we encourage everyone to stay connected, you have the absolute right to withdraw your consent at any time. If you wish to unsubscribe from a specific mailing list, or if you prefer to opt out of *all* church communications entirely, you can do so by clicking the 'unsubscribe' link in our emails, or by contacting the church office directly at ***hello@countessely.co.uk***. Upon receiving a total opt-out request, the church office will ensure your contact details are removed from all active communication channels. Please note this does not mean all your contact information will be deleted from the church's database. To know how we handle your data, please refer to the Church's Data Protection Policy and Privacy Statement

8. Data Breaches and Accidental Disclosures

Despite our best efforts, human error can sometimes occur. A data breach happens when personal information is lost, destroyed, altered, or disclosed without proper authorisation (for example, accidentally sending a mass email using 'Cc' instead of 'Bcc', sending pastoral information to the wrong WhatsApp chat, or losing a printed rota containing personal contact details). If you accidentally cause a data breach, or if you become aware that one has occurred, you must report it immediately to the Minister and the church office (minister@countessely.co.uk).

Do not attempt to conceal the error; prompt reporting allows the church leadership to take swift action to mitigate any harm to the individuals affected and ensures we fulfil our legal obligations under UK GDPR.

9. Responsibility and Oversight

- The Minister, along with the leadership team, holds the role of Communications Co-ordinator and retains overall responsibility for ensuring these internal guidelines are followed.
- All external or media enquiries at all times must be directed to the Minister or the church office.
- The church office will act as the central hub for all internal communications to align programmes, manage the church database, and prevent scheduling clashes across different groups.

Before You Send: A Quick Checklist

Before sending any communication on behalf of the church, or within a church group, please pause and ask yourself these five questions:

1. **Is this information necessary and relevant to the recipient?** Ensure you are only messaging those who truly need to know the information, respecting their time and attention.
2. **Am I using the most appropriate channel?** Consider whether the message is better suited for a detailed email, a brief text, or a verbal communication (remembering to use 'Bcc' for large email groups). Consider also whether the chosen communication channel is accessible for the intended recipient(s).
3. **Does this message respect confidentiality and safeguarding boundaries?** Ensure no sensitive pastoral information is being shared inappropriately and that one-to-one digital boundaries are being maintained.
4. **Is the tone gracious, kind, and reflective of our church family values?** Our communication should always aim to build up the church body and demonstrate care for one another.
5. **Is the format clear and accurate?** Double-check your details, times, and dates.

Policy Revised on: October 2026