

WhatsApp Use Guidelines - June 2026

These guidelines form part of our Data Protection Policy.

Key Points

- WhatsApp is a great tool that offers an immediacy and informality of contact and for this reason needs to be used wisely, with groups being used for the purposes that they are set up for.
- There are many messaging platforms available. At this time HTG will use WhatsApp as it is the most widely used and will make communication more accessible.
- Refer to Safeguarding Policy & Social Media Policy in regards to children under 18 years of age.

What is the difference between a 'personal' and 'official' WhatsApp group?

Personal

People at HTG (including staff) may set up or be a part of a WhatsApp group that could include other people from HTG. Examples of personal groups are shared interest, hobby or special occasions. HTG is not responsible for the running, privacy or management of these groups, even if the group discusses HTG related content. These groups are not shared by HTG for others to join; if they are, then they are 'Official'.

Official

Official HTG WhatsApp groups are set up by the church to communicate HTG information and to provide a platform for people to share information. Home Groups may be set up by the leader or a designated member of the group. The Church Office should know about all Official groups and the admins of each group. Members of groups should be listed in the Hubb Contact List, Event or Group where they have agreed to the Privacy Notice. The HTG Admin team will keep a list of all WhatsApp groups/Communities including who admins are and purpose of group, as well as any criteria for members of the group.

This document will set out the best principles to follow.

Content

- All communications should be respectful, relevant, and appropriate.
- Information about events or interests can be shared.
- It is advised that people should not share sensitive personal data or confidential information (e.g. prayer requests about medical issues, bank details) through WhatsApp groups containing people they do not know personally.

Data Protection and Privacy Principles

- Consent: obtain explicit consent from individuals before adding them to any WhatsApp group or sharing their contact information. This is best done by the use of a joining link.

- Data Minimization: only collect and share the minimum amount of personal data necessary for the intended purpose.
- Retention: Regularly review content and groups in line with our Data Protection Policy
- Access Control: Limit access to WhatsApp groups and messages by use of WA Communities and/or admin controls

Security Measures

- Encryption: Use WhatsApp's end-to-end encryption to protect messages.
- Device Security: Ensure that devices used for WhatsApp communication are secured with a password, PIN, or biometric authentication.
- App Updates: Keep the WhatsApp application and the device's operating system updated to the latest versions.

Types of WhatsApp Groups

WhatsApp Communities

A WhatsApp Community is a way to gather and organise various WhatsApp groups that exist in church life in one place. This will help to facilitate communication, make groups more accessible, and add extra privacy protections & better GDPR compliance.

It is recommended that HTG WhatsApp groups are part of the Community when the group isn't defined to just a small group of people or for a very specific purpose.

Privacy and Communities

To protect member privacy, a phone number is only visible to community admins, people who already have the number in their contacts, or those who have a number from other chats/groups and in Community sub-groups that they join. Members can always see admin phone numbers.

Setting up a Community

- Decide if a Community or other type of group is needed: Staff Team to advise
- Purpose: The purpose of a group must be clearly stated in the description along with data protection guidance. (Info from Admin)
- Manage Groups: Within the community, ensure each sub-group follows the same data protection and consent principles.
- Invite Members: Members must join the community or sub-group using an invite link/QR code
- Moderate Content: Appoint moderators (Admins) for each community and group to ensure that communications remain respectful, relevant, and in line with HTG aims/values and these guidelines. Personal conversations should be kept separate.

Invitation to Join a Community

- Initially, existing HTG members will be added to the HTG Community by WhatsApp groups they belong to being added to the community.
- Subsequently, members will join the Community using a link / QR Code either to the main community or to a sub-group.

- Once they've joined, they can see groups that they can request to join e.g. Notice Board
- When an admin for that group receives a request, they will approve or reject it, having checked the church database: *Is the person known to HTG? Are they on the Hubb Contact List?* - follow up with them before approving

New Community Groups within HTG Community

Only Community Admins can add new groups. Members can suggest groups for admin approval. (see above *Setting up a Community*)

Recommendations and Permissions

Admin Permissions

The admin has permission to

- remove people from the community/group immediately if they are sending messages or material which could cause offence or distress.
- remove content which is offensive or not in keeping with HTG aims and values.
- remove members who are no longer part of HTG, if they haven't already left the group.
- Reviewing Content in line with HTG Data Protection Policy on review and retention of data:
 - Review "Media, links and docs" (found in Group Info)
 - Content can be deleted

Under 18s and Serving Teams

Many of our young people are serving in the church. It is recommended that the parent is added to a WA group on their behalf / as well as the young person.

Disappearing Messages and Deleting Content

Disappearing Messages **will not** be used on any HTG WhatsApp group

Recommendations to Group Members to reduce content/storage:

- Save to Photos - set as "Default (off)" or Never
- Check personal notification settings - to stop notifications
- Delete message? - select "Delete for me" **not** "Delete for everyone"

Finishing a Group/Community

A group will be closed/shut down when it is no longer needed, which will be determined by the Staff Team. The admin will then communicate with the group and allow a reasonable time period of at least 1 week before closing the group. Finishing a group will be in line with our Data Protection Policy.

Staff WhatsApp Groups

- Groups are used within the Staff Team as a means of quick communication.
- Please respect working hours boundaries and do not send non-urgent messages on Saturdays or after 9pm. Use emails after this time.

- If you leave the role for which you were added to the group, you should remove yourself from the group straightaway. Admin reserves the right to remove without notice if you have not done so.