SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

For Those Working With Youth
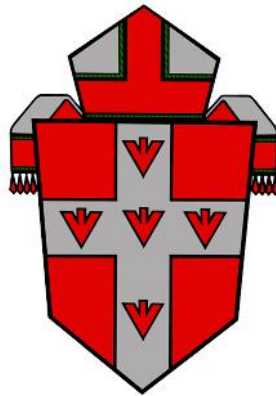
Guiding Principles

"Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ. In the area of communications too, we need a Church capable of bringing warmth and of stirring hearts" (**Pope Francis' Message for the 48th World Communications Day [WCD], 2014**).

The Church can use social media to encourage respect, dialogue, and honest relationships—in other words, "true friendship" (**Pope Benedict XVI's Message for the 43rd World Communications Day, 2009**). To do so requires us to approach social media as a powerful means of evangelization and to consider the Church's role in providing a Christian perspective on digital literacy.

Communicating the Gospel Message

Those who minister and work in pastoral settings with adolescents—youth ministry and catechetical leaders, pastors, teachers, school staff, and catechists—have long understood that our ministerial efforts are to be relational. "In Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Youth Ministry," it is expressed that, prosperous ministry with adolescents is, and has always been, built on relationships and effective communication.   For evangelization to be effective, it must "use their language, their signs and symbols . . . answer the questions they ask, and . . . [have impact] on their concrete life" (EN 63).

Church leaders, including Pope Benedict XVI, articulate the clear need to use new technologies to express the Word of God to all people in all generations. The National Directory for Catechesis states that, "using the media correctly and competently can lead to a genuine enculturation of the Gospel" (NDC 21).

The Internet will continue to evolve and school personnel, religious educators, and youth ministry leaders will need to keep pace with the latest tools and potential threats. It is their responsibility to be educated in this field of technology used by our youth. The development of comprehensive policies that strike a balance between safety and pastoral effectiveness must be guided by three essential values. We must ask ourselves if the use of such technology is prudent, reasonable, and transparent.

Basic Terms

Social Media – Any form of electronic communication

Pastoral Ministers - Any person in ministry

Young Adults - Any person from 18-39

Minors - Any unmarried person under the age of 18

Vulnerable Adult - A dependent adult

Mandated Reporter -   Under Oklahoma State law, all individuals MUST report known or suspected sexual abuse, neglect or exploitation of a minor to the civil authorities.   The Oklahoma Department of Human Services has established a statewide abuse hotline for reporting: 1-800-522-3511.

Boundaries

1 Those who minister and work in pastoral settings should be ever vigilant regarding healthy boundaries with anyone, but especially, minors and vulnerable adults. Minors and vulnerable adults are not the peers of an adult serving within a ministry capacity. It is inappropriate for pastoral ministers to include them within their own social circle, online or otherwise.

2 Ministers should not be accessible to the minors and vulnerable adults they serve on a constant on-call or regular social basis. Clear communication and respect for boundaries is needed at any level of contact with minors and vulnerable adults. As a representative of the Church those who minister to minors and vulnerable adults should be diligent in avoiding situations, which might be a source of scandal for themselves or others. This may include the mention of inappropriate use of alcohol, advocacy of inappropriate music/movies, inappropriate language, inappropriate dress, or the expression of opinions that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Primacy of Parents/Guardians

3 Parents and guardians are the primary educators and the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. Those who minister in pastoral settings must recognize the importance of the role of parents and guardians when dealing with all forms of communication with minors and vulnerable adults. As always, we seek a partnership with parents and guardians in the faith formation of their children.

4 Parents and guardians should be informed in writing and agree to the social media that will be used in ministry with their youth. It is recommended that clear guidelines or parameters be established with regard to times of communication between adults and young people. While young people may be on the phone/texting in the late evening hours, those who minister with young people should pre-determine a timeframe when it is too late to take a professional call or text, except in the case of serious urgency.

Church and Ministry Websites

Guidelines

5 Catholic parishes and schools should make every effort to establish an organizational website and commit to regularly updating the content. Web content should consistently represent the teachings of the Catholic Church.

6 Parents/Guardians should be informed that a social networking site is being utilized as a standard part of the ministry.

7 Those in ministry should be aware of the terms of use, age restrictions, and privacy options and controls for each site prior to establishing a ministry presence.

8 Written permission must be attained from their parent or guardian prior to posting photographs, or other identifying information, of minors/young people on websites. When posting photographs of minors/young people, it is advisable to caption the photographs using only the individuals' first name. Public websites should not contain personal and/or contact information about young people.

9 A minimum of two adults functioning with an official organizational capacity should have full access to all organizational account/site(s). Each parish/school administrator should decide who those people should be. Both adults should be registered to have email alerts of page activity sent to their official organizational e-mail addresses. This allows for a quicker response time to urgent requests and helps to ensure that all postings are appropriate.

10 No personal photographs or personal information of parish, school or organizational staff or volunteers should appear on any ministry related page/site. This includes family pictures, social events, phone numbers, addresses and personal email accounts.

11 Communication with visitors to the site should be done through official organizational e-mail whenever possible.

12 If adult ministers use social media for personal use, they should establish separate sites and pages for personal and ministerial use. Personal pages and information should be neither advertised nor accessible to young people.

13 Ministry leaders utilizing social networking sites, either for ministerial or personal use, must be vigilant in representing themselves as ministers of the Catholic Church in all interactions that can be viewed publicly. Anything that could cause scandal to the ministry should be avoided.

14 There is a difference between initiating a "friend request" and accepting one. Friend/connection requests should be initiated by the young people, not the adult representative of the parish, school, and/or organization.

15 Because of the potential of teen crises or time relevant information, the page should be monitored frequently by official organizational personnel. A plea for help that goes unanswered can be dangerous for teens and their families and legally damaging to the parish, school, and/or organization.

16 The official logo of the organization should appear on the web site.

E-mail, texting and video chatting etc.
(Keep in mind that new forms of social media and communication are constantly being created and developed. Apply procedures and policies to any and all forms of communication.)

17 Keep conversations brief, to the point and in line with Archdiocesan Safe Environment.

18 It is recommended that ministers and volunteers should maintain separate email accounts for professional and personal communications.

19 Avoid engaging in any postings or communications that can be misconstrued or misinterpreted.

20 Ministers should save copies of communications whenever possible, especially those that concern the personal sharing of a teen or young adult. Communicate only about matters relative to the ministry.

21 Encourage the young people not to use their phones to communicate with others concerning illness or injury at youth events/activities until appropriate contacts, including parents and guardians have been made by those in charge.

22 Care should be taken to maintain professionalism and appropriate boundaries in all communications. Do not overstep the boundaries that should exist between adult and youth relationships.

23 Remember that messages can easily be shared or forwarded with students and others. There is no such thing as a private message.

24 Emails can be misread. Always double check messages to make sure that your message is clear and won't be misinterpreted. Do not send messages in haste or when angry.

Blogging, Chat Rooms, Online Video and Gaming

25 Ensure that blogs are being used for ministry purposes such as for promoting events, disseminating sacramental preparation information, or sharing resources.

26 Any use of live streaming or chat rooms that encourages exclusive youth-adult relationships is not appropriate. The content must be in compliance with Catholic Church teachings.

27 When posting videos online, extreme care must be taken to protect the privacy of minors and such videos should only be used to advertise ministry related events and activities with parental permission.

28 Pastoral ministers should take care to protect online gaming identities in order to maintain appropriate boundaries.

In conclusion

The prudent principle should always guide a pastoral minister. Common sense should be the guide in all circumstances. Those who minister and work in pastoral settings must take great care to be consistent in representing the values and teachings of the Catholic Church.

Reporting
Remember, in Oklahoma all individuals are Mandatory Reporters and the abuse, neglect or exploitation of a minor, including abuse, neglect or exploitation involving electronic communications or the use of electronic or social media must be reported using the Oklahoma Department of Human Services statewide abuse reporting hotline: 1-800-522-3511.

In addition, if Archdiocesan or Parish personnel (priests, deacons, religious, employees, volunteers) are involved, the abuse, neglect or exploitation must be reported through the Archdiocesan Hotline: 1-405-720-9878.

To report abuse of these guidelines, contact the appropriate diocesan office. Catholic School employees and volunteers should call 405-721-5651 and ask for the School Office. Religious Education employees and volunteers should call 405-721-5651 and ask for the Religious Education department. Youth Ministry employees or volunteers should call 405-721-5651 and ask for the Youth Office.

Summary of Guidelines

Note: This form must be executed by all Archdiocesan Personnel hired or accepted as a volunteer.

I acknowledge that I have received, read and understood the attached Guidelines adopted by the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. I understand the guidelines and agree to abide by each. I agree to conduct myself in complete accordance with the Guidelines for Social Media as follows:

- o   As in all professional/ministerial settings, posted information, opinions, references, and resources must reflect the teachings of the Catholic Church.

- o   All sites or forms of media must be approved by the Pastor or Supervisor.

- o   Parents must be fully aware of all mediums being used to keep in contact with their children for ministerial purposes.

- o   Utilize social media to communicate only on matters of ministry. In all cases, we must keep communications transparent. Save copies of conversations if possible.

- o   Pictures of minors cannot be used without parental consent. There should be no tagging pictures of minors on Facebook or put to use on other media without consent.

- o   Avoid exclusivity. Check sites and texts regularly to insure the safety of young people.

- o   Set time limits and boundaries for on-line and electronic communication. Notify youth and parents of the limits.

- o   Have someone access, monitor, supervise, and evaluate your site.

- o   Keep personal information and ministry related sites and blogs separate.

- o   Good judgment should always be used with text based communication tools.

- o   Provide continuing educational opportunities for parents and youth concerning the latest social media concern.

Please note: (Violations may result in disciplinary action.)

Please complete and return to your Program Director. Please print.

Name_____Position_____

Parish/School/Other_____City_____

Signature_____Date_____