



DIOCESE OF
OAKLAND
COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

Guidelines for Social Media

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Section 1: Introduction

These Guidelines for the Pastoral Use of Technology and Social Media are designed to aid employees, clerics and volunteers of the Diocese of Oakland and its various institutions and entities in understanding appropriate usage, boundaries and best practices in technology and social media.

Personnel are bound by the professional communication policies of the Diocese of Oakland, including the social media policy [contained](#) therein. In areas where these guidelines do not provide a direct answer for how members of our Church faithful should conduct themselves, personnel should contact their supervisor or The Diocesan Code of Conduct.

Questions may also be sent to the diocesan Communications Office. Pastors and administrators of parishes, schools, and diocesan institutions and entities may implement more restrictive guidelines for the use of social media and technology if they deem it appropriate.



Section 2: **Basic Terms**

Blog:

Contraction of the words “web” and “log,” a blog is an online section of articles.

Podcast:

Audio program distributed online. Contraction of the word “iPod” and “Broadcast”.

Cyber-bullying:

Using digital communications to intimidate, shame, or attack others.

Release:

Signed permission from parents or guardians for use of photographs or video of minors or vulnerable adults.

Administrator (admin):

An individual who has responsibility for a website or social media channel.

SMS:

Acronym for “short message service,” or texting.

DM:

Short for “direct message” – a non-public message sent to and from social media accounts. Do not confuse DM with an email.

Troll:

An account on social media or email that seeks to sow discord, arguments, and misunderstanding — usually by posting inflammatory, malicious and outrageous comments in an attempt to get others to respond.

Meme:

A humorous image, video, piece of text, etc., that is copied (often with slight variations) and spread rapidly by Internet users.

Vulnerable Adult:

A dependent adult; one who lacks the legal capacity of an adult.

Section 3: General Principles

Content

Respect your audience, express your views with appropriate language and civility, and be respectful of the Church and her teachings. Your communications must not offend the teachings of the Catholic Church.

E-mails, text messages, blog postings or comments, and videos are all public forums of which a permanent record can be obtained. As representatives of the Church, those who work with the faithful should be diligent in avoiding situations which might be the source of scandal for themselves, others, or the diocese. When engaging in social media for personal use, the comments of personnel may be viewed as a reflection on that community and the Catholic Church universal.

Oversight

Moderators of parish, school, or diocesan-associated social media accounts are responsible for ensuring compliance with all diocesan policies and codes of conduct, and appropriate application of these guidelines.

All posts and comments should be marked by Christian charity and respect for the truth. They should be on topic and presume the good will of other posters. Discussion should take place primarily from a faith perspective. No promotional content whatsoever for products, private business, events, or commercial activity not directly related to Church business. Posts that do not follow these requests will be removed and contributors may be blocked.

Section 4: Management Guidelines

Creating and Managing Accounts

- Any technological tools that we use as part of our work or volunteering in the Diocese of Oakland, such as websites, blogs, social network sites and the like are the property of the Diocese of Oakland. The web page, or other social media tool, belongs to the parish, school, or diocesan institution or entity, and not to the ministry or group.
- All accounts should be created, and managed, with the direct involvement of the associated ministry/group. New accounts need **written approval** to create **any** outlet of communication bearing Church designation.
- There should be at least two account administrators for each account, of adult age, to allow rapid response and transferring of administrative access.
- All administrative privileges to accounts should be strictly managed. Volunteers or employees that leave their positions should promptly be removed from administrative access from all associated accounts.
- Accounts that are not used, or have been left abandoned, should be deleted.

Access and Passwords

- The pastor/administrator is to receive the login credentials (email and password) and keep it on file. For those parishes, schools, diocesan institutions or entities which already have a web presence, all passwords necessary to establish ownership and control of the web presence should be shared with the pastor/administrator promptly.
- Accounts should never be left without an active administrator that regularly logs in.



Section 5: Interacting on Social

Minors and Vulnerable Adults

- Personnel's mandated reporter obligation extends to all circumstances involving social networking and technology.
- The norms of Safe Environment for Children are applicable in digital communications.
- Parents must receive the same information children and youth receive. For example, if information is posted to a Youth Ministry Facebook page, parents must be able to view that page. If information is sent via text message or email, parents must be included in the distribution.
- Personnel must have permission from a minor's or vulnerable adult's parent or guardian before contacting the minor or vulnerable adult via social media.
- All interactions with minors and vulnerable adults, when conducting Church activity, should be done **strictly** through official accounts. Never interact with a minor or vulnerable adult using personal accounts. Never friend or follow personal accounts of minors or vulnerable adult from a personal account. Never like a post or photo, or comment on a post or account, from a personal account.
- Private messaging between an adult and a minor or vulnerable adult is not allowed. Two adults must always be included in such an exchange, as well as parents or guardians.
- Do not reply to an inappropriate e-mail or direct message from a minor or vulnerable adult. Make a copy of such inappropriate communication and notify your Pastor/Administrator.
- Church communications must always take place over church communication channels, such as parish email or phone services. Adults should not provide their personal communication channels to minors. All Church communication should take place only through official, non-personal accounts.
- Channels that are publicly visible, including websites, must not contain personal and/or contact information about minors or vulnerable adults.
- Written permission must be obtained from parents or guardians before photographs of minors are posted. Always use first names only for identification.

Section 5: Interacting on Social (continued)

Commenting, Liking and Interacting

- Communication by Church personnel is a reflection on the Church. Practice what you preach.
- Accounts, posts, forums, or any other feedback medium must be regularly and frequently (daily, at a minimum) monitored by the site administrators.
- Personnel must maintain professionalism and appropriate boundaries in all communication.
- Never interact as a representative of the Church from a personal account. Communicate as the Church from Church accounts only.



Moderating Comments, Interactions and Platforms

- All posts and comments should be marked by Christian charity, empathy, and respect for the truth. Any comment that does not follow this simple core principal should be moderated.
- **Do not interact** with hostile, rude, inappropriate, or political comments — either from the channel's account or a personal account.
- It is *OK* for a commenter to disagree with or dislike a post, and voice that disagreement. It is *not OK* for a comment to mislead, misinform, malign, attack, insult, or belittle.
- Before taking any action, bring the post or comment to a supervisor. Never react instinctually, even if the comment is upsetting. Remaining objective, calm, and thoughtful is paramount.
- Hostile, mean, or inappropriate comments should be hidden when the option is available. If the option to hide a comment is not available, the hostile comment should be deleted.
- Outwardly political comments, of every side, should be hidden. Christ's love extends to everyone, and Church platforms should never be used in any partisan fashion, for any reason.
- Regularly aggressive accounts should be banned, but only with a supervisor's written permission.

Section 6: Language Style Guide

Language and Translation

Posts should optimally include a verified Spanish translation (not Google Translate). As part of the mission of the Diocese, we should strive to meet the faithful in the language they read social media in, at all times possible.



Character Limits



Facebook posts have a character limit of 63,000. Translations can be provided separately by using the “translate” feature. As a general rule, you should not post any material that goes beyond 10,000 characters on social media, as it will not be read by most users. Longer, more in depth, articles, should be linked to — preferably to the Oakland Diocese website.



Instagram posts have a strict character limit of 2,200, including the Spanish translation, for any post. Any post that goes beyond 2,200 characters (not words, characters) needs a link to further information (link is included in character limit).



Twitter posts have a 280-character limit. Please be aware of the limitations of lower characters.

Section 7: Graphic Style Guide



Image size

Image quality is one of the single most important factors in audience engagement. A low-resolution image not only disengages readers, but actively discourages future posts from being read. It is very important to have full resolution images.

- Minimum resolution of 1080x1080 pixels is needed on any post.



Video

Each social media platform has different length caps for video — please be aware of resolution and length restrictions. Please note these restrictions

- Video resolution should be a minimum of 720p.
- Videos on Instagram have a 60-second limit.
- Videos on Twitter have a 2-minute limit.
- Videos on Facebook have a 240-minute limit.



Posters and PDFs

Posters and PDF announcements should be kept to a bare minimum, if used at all. A graphic image with text information for the post is needed in almost all cases.

Posters with information inside of the image cannot be read by content algorithms, or shared easily by users. They also are not automatically translated, which locks out a huge number of readers from the Diocese.

Section 8: Language Style Guide

Best Practices

- Abide by copyright, fair use and IRS financial disclosure regulations.
- Do not divulge confidential information. Nothing posted on the Internet is private.
- Do not cite others, post photos or videos, or provide a link to any material that is inappropriate or offends the faith and morals and/or teachings of the Catholic Church.

Be Church Oriented

- All posts should be authored to come from the voice of the ministry, parish, or organization posting it. If reposting an event from another group, addendum text or framing language should be added.
- Context for posts should be included (who, what, when, where, and WHY), so all audiences can understand each post, individually, with no further explanation.

Information and Involvement

- Double check all information. All information — links, dates, times and contact information — should be verified before posting.
- Calls to action should be simple, clear, and obvious. Deadlines or requirements should be clearly and openly disclosed in the post text (not the image).

- Any action links from calls to action (sign up, enroll, learn more, RSVP, call in, donate, etc.) should be clickable, functioning. Use embedded action buttons whenever possible.

Media Environment & Frequency

- The media environment should be considered before posting. Posts that might touch on ongoing media events, or sensitive subjects, might need to be further edited or delayed.
- Posting too much within a single window can cause reader fatigue, lower engagement, and loss of audience. Posting frequency will also need to be considered before posting.

Hashtags and Memes

- Hashtags are wonderful ways to increase visibility for posts, and the use of them is encouraged. Never use a hashtag whose entire context is not immediately clear to you. Grave misunderstandings can easily occur by using the wrong hashtag. If you have any doubt, always err on the side of not using the hashtag.
- Never use a meme for any official church account. Memes are deeply variable, and often controversial, forms of content that are not appropriate for any Church account.
- Never use a meme on any official Church platform, for any reason.