

The Catholic Diocese of *Victoria in Texas*



Communications & Social Media Policy and Procedures

*Reviewed and Promulgated on 06/29/2018 by
The Most Reverend Brendan J. Cahill, S.T.D., Bishop of The Diocese of Victoria in Texas*

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Introduction

This document contains policies and procedures concerning the Diocese of Victoria in Texas (DOV) and its Agents of the Church (see definition below) with regard to social media and communication under the direction of the bishop of the DOV. The DOV views the internet as an important educational and evangelization tool. The content of electronic communication must not be at variance with the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Church. All communication by means of social media by Agents of the Church is a reflection on the entire diocese. Agents of the Church must understand the principles underlying these policies and procedures and apply them with the highest ethical and legal standards consistent with Catholic teachings and policies of the DOV.

The Office of Communications of the Diocese of Victoria in Texas includes, but is not limited to: the diocesan website and social media accounts; the diocesan newspaper (*The Catholic Lighthouse*); and publication of the official Directory of the Diocese of Victoria. This office is responsible for internal and external communications on behalf of the DOV. The Director of Communications serves as a spokesperson for the DOV, under the direction of the bishop of the DOV, and handles public relations matters and communicates with local and national media regarding stories or issues involving the Diocese of Victoria.

These policies and procedures include material primarily from the United States Catholic Conference guidelines <http://www.usccb.org/comm/social-media-guidelines.shtml> but also from review of the policies of other dioceses including Diocese of Grand Rapids, The Diocese of Dallas and The Diocese of Fort Worth.

Definitions

Adult- An individual who is eighteen years of age or older.

Agent(s) of the Church- Includes all clergy, consecrated religious, seminarians, and those enrolled in the Permanent Diaconate Formation Program, a priest or deacon incardinated in another diocese, employees (whether employed in areas of ministry or other kinds of services by the diocese while ministering for the DOV, its parishes, schools, or other agencies; also, those who contract their services to church and/or school agencies) or any volunteer who offers himself/herself for a ministry/service.

Authentication credentials- User ID's, log-ons, and passwords.

Bishop-The current Ordinary of the Diocese of Victoria.

Church- Church, uppercase, is describing the Roman Catholic Church and the particular Church of the Diocese of Victoria. Lowercase is describing a general church building.

Communication Devices- Includes, but not limited to, computers, computer systems and networks, software and related connections, equipment, telephonic access, and voice mail.

Diocese- Diocese of Victoria in Texas (DOV)

Diocesan Entity- Includes the diocese, each parish, mission, schools, the Emmaus Center, Presidio La Bahia, Spiritual Renewal Center, and any other properties acquired and used by the Diocese of Victoria.

Domain- Website address, also known as a URL.

Minor- Minor means any person under the age of 18.

Other Electronic Communication: Electronic communication technologies that are not defined as Social Media (e.g., cell phone, email, texting, etc.).

Proprietary Information- Used, made, or marketed by one having the exclusive legal right.

Social Media- Mobile and web-based technologies, through which individuals and communities distribute, co-create, share, and modify user-generated content.

User(s)- A person who has access to, responsibility for, and uses any communication devices.

Vulnerable Adult- *For the purpose of the Safe Environment Policy, vulnerable adults will be included in any minor verbiage/reference.*

Persons 18 years of age or older who:

- habitually lacks the use of reason, who are uniquely vulnerable to abuse because of physical or mental disabilities, and/or
- because of physical, mental, developmental, emotional or cognitive impairment, or the effects of recent life experiences are presently unable to exercise a reasonable adult's degree of physical or emotional independence or mental insight and judgment,

Visit the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities website <http://tcdd.texas.gov/> for the full definition of developmental disability.

Website- A website is a set of related web pages typically served from a single web domain. The pages of a website can usually be accessed from a simple Uniform Resource Locator (URL) called the web address.

- **Ministry website:** Website created by *Agents of the Church* for the sole purpose of conducting diocesan business.
- **Personal website:** A social network page, blog, or any internet website/tool created by *Agents of the Church* primarily to share personal communication with friends and family.

Publications

When creating flyers, documents, and/or written communication and publications to promote an event relating to the Diocese of Victoria, all diocesan offices should refer to the [*Diocese of Victoria Style Guide*](#) in order to maintain consistency within the diocese.

Procedure:

1. It is recommended that parishes and schools refer to the *Diocese of Victoria Style Guide* in order to maintain consistency within the diocese.
2. Anything to be published on the website or social media platform should follow the *Diocese of Victoria Style Guide*. See **Appendix 2** for [*Style Guide*](#).

Social Media

It is important to remember that all policies/procedures of maintaining appropriate boundaries in person-to-person communication must be applied to electronic

communication. Communication devices are not to be used in any way that may be immoral, illegal, unethical, disruptive, invidious to others, harmful to morale or contrary to the doctrinal moral teaching of the Church. Nor will they lure, entice, or groom minors for illegal, immoral or unethical purposes.

Agents of the Church are prohibited from disclosing on personal or professional websites, weblogs or social networks, any information that is confidential or proprietary to the diocese or any third party that has disclosed information to the diocese.

All media/video materials should be reviewed by an Agent of the Church before using them publicly with minors.

An agent of the Church who identifies himself/herself as an employee/volunteer of the DOV on a personal website, weblog or social network, must make it clear to his/her readers that the views expressed are that person's alone and that the views do not necessarily reflect the views of the diocese. In the event that an Agent of the Church identifies himself/herself as an employee/volunteer of the diocese on a personal website, weblog, or social network, to help reduce the potential for confusion, we recommend that the following notice be put in a reasonable prominent place on his/her site (e.g., at the bottom of their personal profile page) in at least a size 12 font bolded:

Employee Version

"The views expressed on this website/weblog/social network are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer or of the Diocese of Victoria."

Volunteer Version

"The views expressed on this website/weblog/social network are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the entity where I volunteer or of the Diocese of Victoria."

Agents of the Church have a responsibility to report any violation of the Communications/Social Media Policy to one of the following persons: the CFO/ diocesan business manager, bishop, vicar general.

Procedure:

1. It is recommended that every Agent of the Church who has a website have its own appropriate domain (website address, also known as a URL). Example: www.hsparish.org for Holy Spirit Parish.
2. It is recommended that any electronic communications coming from an Agent of the Church be on a domain for the corresponding parish, school, or affiliate. Example: Secretary@hsparish.org, Info@hsparish.org.
3. It is recommended that clergy use an email with the parish domain.

4. It is recommended that parish, school and staff eliminate the use of free domains such as Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo, and other such services when representing the parish/school via email correspondence. Adherence to this recommendation will establish an authenticity of the correspondence and reduce the potential for misrepresentation/impersonation.

Password-Protected Sites & Websites

The website must be approved by the pastor, principal, or that person's designee. Each site must have at least two adult individuals, a primary and a back-up, who can monitor and, if necessary, respond timely to communication on the site. One site administrator must be an employee or an approved contractor. Passwords and names of sites should be stored by the pastor, principal, or that person's designee in a secure and central location. The pastor, assigned pastoral leader, or principal and all appropriate supervisors must have full access and administrative rights and privileges to authentication credentials.

The DOV retains the right to monitor and log any and all aspects of its accounts and authentication credentials including, but not limited to, internet sites visited by users, chat rooms, newsgroups, file downloads, and all communications created, stored, sent and received by users through any diocesan entity-provided communication device.

Site administrators should be familiar with all applicable diocesan policies and be aware of the following:

- The official position of the organization or the teachings of the Church is being represented.
- Pseudonyms or the name of the parish, program, etc. as your identity may not be used.
- Abide by copyright, fair use, and financial disclosure laws.
- Confidential information may not be divulged.
- Photos, videos, audio or media may not be posted without prior written consent. ***The diocesan approved consent form must be signed by a parent or guardian. (See Appendix 1 for [Social Media Release Form](#).)***
- Private information (e.g., social security numbers, bank accounts, etc.) may not be sent over an unsecured site.
- Pictures of minors with identifiers may not be "tagged".
- Geo/gps-tagging must be disabled.

Communication with Minors

The primary purpose of such communication shall be for providing information related to a ministry or event and not for socialization or other personal interaction. Any counseling of minors through such communication methods is not permitted. Personal social media accounts must not be used for ministry communication. Communication not directly related to an approved parish/school activity is considered inappropriate.

Written parental/guardian permission to communicate via social media or other electronic communications with a minor must be obtained. ***The diocesan approved consent form must be signed by a parent or guardian. (See Appendix 1 for [Social Media Release Form](#).)*** Parents must be notified of the methods of communication being used by the ministry to communicate with minors, and MUST BE COPIED AND INCLUDED IN SUCH COMMUNICATIONS. Acceptable hours of communication with minors shall be between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m.

When using ministry social media accounts, adults must not initiate “friend” requests with minors or “seek” friends. If minors form their own social media groups, adults should not join these groups. Online “chatting” and tagging pictures with minors is not permitted.

All communication with minors (in person, via social media, websites, text messages, etc.) must adhere to:

- The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People <http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/charter.cfm>
- The Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act <http://www.ftc.gov/ogc/coppa1.htm>
- The Diocese of Victoria in Texas, Safe Environment *Code of Pastoral Conduct and Policy Regarding Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Adults Handbook*.

Usage/ Privacy/ Reporting

There is to be no expectation of privacy in anything created, stored, sent, viewed, or received using diocesan communication. Anything created using diocesan communication devices is the property of the diocesan entity and is subject to review at anytime with or without notice.

Accessing, downloading, possessing, or transmitting child pornography is absolutely prohibited. In accordance with applicable state and federal laws and DOV policy, Agents of the Church will not possess, access, download, or distribute child pornography. All Agents of the Church are obligated to immediately notify the DOV and law enforcement of a violation of any of these laws.

Communication of Confidential Material Unless expressly authorized to do so, a user is prohibited from reproducing, copying, sending, transmitting, or otherwise distributing proprietary information, data, or other confidential information belonging to a diocesan entity. Unauthorized reproduction or dissemination of such material may result in

disciplinary action, including possible termination of employment and /or volunteer services, as well as possible civil penalties under state and federal laws.

Protection of Children Agents of the Church will comply with all aspects of the Safe Environment Policy of the diocese. Agents of the Church are forbidden to post photos of any minor under the age of 18 without verifiable consent of a parent or guardian. You may not disclose the full name, home address, email address, telephone number, or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a minor. ***The diocesan approved consent form must be signed by a parent or guardian. (See Appendix 1 for Social Media Release Form.)*** The DOV and its affiliates will review alleged violations of the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act and the Safe Environment Policy of the Diocese of Victoria, on a case-by-case basis.

Copyrights

It is illegal and immoral to reproduce copyrighted text or audio material including, audiotapes, videotapes, laser discs, computer disks and programs, etc. by any means without written permission of the copyright owner. The fact that these duplicated materials are not for sale but for private use does not alter the legal or moral situation of copying without permission.” *(MCW n. 78; BCL 4/69).

This policy would also include any technologies that have been developed since that time. It is the intent of the Diocese of Victoria to comply with the provisions of the current copyright laws and Congressional guidelines from the Copyright Act of October 19, 1976 (Public Law 94-553). Teaching professionals and parish ministers have the responsibility to know the “fair-use” copyright law.

The diocese recognizes that unlawful copying and use of copyrighted materials contributes to higher costs for materials, lessens the incentives for development of quality educational materials, and fosters an attitude of disrespect for law which is in conflict with the teachings of the Church and policies of the DOV.

*MCW: Music in Catholic Worship, Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy BCL: Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy Newsletter (USCCB)

Enforcement Verification Statement

The DOV and its respective administrators agree to enforce the policy set forth here and expect Agents of the Church to comply. Failure to comply with any of the provisions of the Social Media Policy will be grounds for discipline, up to and including termination of employment and /or volunteer services.

The DOV reserves the right to make changes to this policy at any time, and at its sole discretion.

Appendix

- 1 Social Media Release Form**
- 2 Style Guide**