

# Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth

## Social Media Policy

### General Policy

Social media represents a broad group of digital technologies whose content is driven entirely by its members. Individuals are allowed flexibility in privacy settings, in posting text, texting, photos, video, links and other information, and in level of interaction with other members. Examples include Blogging, Wikis, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Myspace, YouTube, Instagram, etc.

The Diocese of Fort Worth respects the right of employees/volunteers to use both professional and personal websites, social networks, wikis, weblogs and other emerging digital technologies not only as a form of self-expression, in their individual capacity, but also as a means to further the work of the church. As Pope Benedict XVI noted in his message for the 44th World Day of Communication, this new form of media "can offer priests and all pastoral workers a wealth of information and content that was difficult to access before, and facilitate forms of collaboration and greater communion in ways that were unthinkable in the past." The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (the "USCCB") embraces the message of the Holy Father and states in their June 2010 *Social Media Guidelines*, "social media provides a tool for building community." The USCCB guidelines immediately caution us of our responsibilities, however, by saying, "membership in communities also requires accountability and responsibility."

Thus, the same rules that apply to our messaging and communications in traditional media still apply in the online and all digital social media space. Simply because the development and implementation of an online social media program can be fast, easy, and inexpensive does not mean that different rules apply. Employees/volunteers should bear in mind that posting of certain comments, photos, links or references to third party websites, social networks and weblogs may have a harmful effect on the church, its people, its reputation, and its employees/volunteers.

In light of this possibility, you are required to adhere to the following policy regarding the use of professional and personal websites, social networks and weblogs. This policy supports other related Diocesan policies, including Acceptable Technology use and the ***Code of Conduct & Behavior Standards for All Clergy, Religious and Lay Ministers***. Unless otherwise noted, this policy's use of the term "Diocese" refers to its central offices, parishes, schools and other related places of ministry.

- Employees/volunteers may only access websites, weblogs and social networks for legitimate professional job-related purposes during the workday with the approval of their direct supervisor. Employees/volunteers should exercise sound judgment and common sense to prevent online social media sites from becoming a distraction at work. Employees/volunteers are not to create, post, or otherwise access weblogs, social networks or personal websites for personal use during normal diocesan working hours.
- If you identify yourself as an employee/volunteer of the Diocese on a personal website, weblog or social network, you must make it clear to your readers that the views you express are yours

alone and that your views do not necessarily reflect the views of the Diocese. In the event that you identify yourself as an employee/volunteer of the Diocese on a personal website, weblog, or social network, to help reduce the potential for confusion, we require that you put the following notice in a reasonable prominent place on your site (e.g., at the bottom of your 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."**

**Volunteer Version**

**"The views expressed on this website/weblog/social network are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Catholic Church, where I volunteer."**

- Employees/volunteers are prohibited from disclosing on personal or professional websites, weblogs or social networks, any information that is confidential or proprietary to the Diocese or to any third party that has disclosed information to the Diocese.
- The Diocese has exclusive ownership rights with respect to certain concepts and developments you produce that are related to diocesan business. Employees/volunteers may not use diocesan trade marks on their personal site or reproduce any diocesan materials or logos. Please consult with your Pastor or supervisor if you have questions about appropriateness of publishing anything that may be related to the Diocese on your site.
- Employees/volunteers may not use the copyrights, trademarks, rights of publicity, and other third-party rights in the online social media, including non-public user-generated content (UGC) such as a copyrighted video, without the necessary permissions of the rights holder(s).
- Employees/volunteers shall not allow any obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory or defamatory comments and images which reflect/discredit or cause embarrassment to the Diocese, its employees/volunteers, patrons, vendors, partners, affiliates, agencies, schools, and others on personal, the school and professional websites, or any other social networks or weblogs.
- The Diocese reserves the right to monitor websites, social networks or weblogs created on diocesan computers at any time.
- Once information is published online, it is essentially part of a permanent record, even if you "remove/delete" it later or attempt to make it anonymous. If your complete thought, along with its context, cannot be squeezed into a character-restricted space (such as Twitter), provide a link to an online space where the message can be expressed completely and accurately.

- The Diocese may require that you confine your personal website, social network or weblog commentary to topics unrelated to the Diocese (or in certain cases, that you temporarily suspend your website or weblog activity altogether) if it believes this is necessary or advisable to ensure compliance with this policy or federal and state laws.

## Social Networking with Minors

The Catholic Church is especially dedicated to the pursuit of keeping Children and Youth safe. When using any form of Social Media, all ministers, both employed and volunteering, will abide by all requirements of civil law and will follow the "Recommended Technology Guidelines for Pastoral Work with Young People" that has been developed and published by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry in Consultation with the USCCB. The National Federation worked with the USCCB's Secretariat for Child and Youth Protection and the USCCB's Secretariat for Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth in 2010 to develop these guidelines.

Specifically, ministers must comply with all aspects of the *Children's Online Privacy Protection Act* (COPPA). It is forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information of any minor under the age of eighteen without parental consent. Personal identifiable information includes name, home address, email address telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a minor. If written verifiable consent is obtained from a parent, it is important that the parent have approved the information and have full knowledge of its use, purpose and how it is to be provided.

Upon request, parents need to have access to anything provided to their minor children. For example parents need to be made aware of how social media is being used, how to access the site(s), and be given the opportunity to be copied on all material sent to their minor children via social networking (including text messages). While parents should be provided with the same material as their minor children, it does not have to be via the same technology (that is, if minor children receive a reminder via Twitter, parents can receive it in a printed form or by an email list). In order to inform parents of their rights and responsibilities, the following notification will be included in permission forms for minor children and youth:

**"I give permission for youth ministry leaders to communicate with my son/daughter using texting, Facebook, email, and other social media. I understand that I may request access to the social media sites, texting and any other electronic communication at any time."**

Information regarding personal blogs is not to be made available to young people.

**Employees/volunteers who violate this Online Social Media policy may be subject to disciplinary action that may include termination. If you have questions about this policy or any matter related to your site that this policy does not address, please consult with the Director of Communications at the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth. All social media being used by diocesan entities must be clearly branded in order to provide institutional authority as well as avoid confusion. The Diocesan crest is a**

**prime example of official branding. Parishes and schools may also have official logos and other brands as well. Unless you have been officially authorized to speak or act on behalf of a diocesan entity, you are prohibited to use such brandings or create secondary social media sites that give the illusion of being authoritative.**

Diocesan entities wishing to establish social media must adhere to the following requirements for both current and future social media, including but not limited to websites, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.

### **Minimum Social Media Requirements**

- All sites established by diocesan entities (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) should be approved and registered with the local administration/pastor/supervisor.
- Site administrators must be adults and approved employees/volunteers of the diocese and/or volunteers who have gone through the approved safe environment training.
- There must be at least two site administrators for each site to allow for rapid response and continuous monitoring and updating of the site.
- All social media must be regularly reviewed by both designated site administrators to ensure it is not in conflict with current standards, policies and Catholic teachings.
- Passwords, names of the sites and the site locations or site addresses shall be registered in a central location in the diocesan entity and at least two (2) adults must have access to this information.
- In establishing a site, know and abide by these policies on social media and acceptable use of technology.

### **General Guidelines**

- Everyone who works in and for the Church should use sound judgment and common sense when taking part in social media.
- Social media interaction should not be viewed as a substitute for face-to-face gatherings.
- 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.

- Ministers and volunteers should use public, official websites and email, to conduct their Diocesan business or ministry to the extent possible.
- Ministers and volunteers should not use personal email or websites, such as Facebook or Twitter, to advertise official church programs or to communicate with those receiving ministry unless they have been preapproved to do so by the Pastor.
- Personal pages and information should be neither advertised nor accessible to young people.
- Anything that could cause scandal to the Church should be avoided. Such may include 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.
- Any communication that might be construed as having sexual overtones is prohibited by the ***Code of Conduct & Behavior Standards for All Clergy, Religious and Lay Ministers***. Do not reply to any such message received, especially from minors; make and keep a copy of any such inappropriate communication and notify an administrator/pastor/supervisor when necessary.
- 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.
- It is recommended that the "no tagging" option be set on any and all social media (or identified by name in a photograph). Visitor's options should be limited to commenting only and not posting of pictures or videos.
- 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 damaging to the parish, school, and/or organization and dangerous for teens and their families.
- Any message, verbal or text, sent to minors should always be from the standpoint of a professional relationship with minors.

## Definitions for the Purpose of the Social Media Policy

**Diocesan Ministry Website, Parish or School Websites:** A website/tool created by employees, clerics and volunteers for the sole purpose of conducting diocesan, school or parish ministry.

**Social Networking Site:** Online websites that are used by groups with a common interest for communication purposes (Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, etc.). Social networking sites are becoming increasingly popular and, if used by a diocesan ministry, parish or school, should be used as a means to effectively communicate about Catholic ministry and education. Every effort must be made to provide a safe and secure environment and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety when using the Internet as a ministry tool. Thus, departments, parishes and schools should keep in mind this diocesan Social Media Policy when considering the use of Social Networking Sites for programs throughout the diocese especially, but not limited to, those involving youth under the age of 18.

(Social Networking Sites include Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Other online applications such as Skype or Google Groups which are not used for public social networking are considered Social Networking Sites for the purposes of this policy. If you have a question about what qualifies as a Social Networking Site, please contact the Director of Communications.

**Personal Website:** A social network page, blog or any Internet website/tool created by employees, clergy and volunteers primarily to share personal communication with friends and associates.

**Blog:** A type of website, usually maintained by an individual, which has a primary purpose of offering commentary or news on events, or subjects (e.g., Church teaching, theology, morals, etc.).

**Supervisor:** The hiring and/or supervising agent: for parish staff, the pastor; for parish volunteers, the appropriate administrator (e.g., Director of Religious Education or Director of Youth Ministry); for school personnel, the principal; for Chancery employees, the Vicar General or Moderator of the Curia.

**Employee:** Any person (cleric, religious or lay person) who is employed by the Diocese of Fort Worth or its affiliated parishes, schools and agencies.

**Cleric:** An ordained priest or an ordained deacon who is incardinated in the Diocese of Fort Worth, as well as a religious priest or deacon, or a priest or deacon incardinated in another diocese, who is engaged in a ministry within or under the control or auspices of the Diocese of Fort Worth.

**Adult:** An individual who is 18 years of age or older.

**Minor:** A person under 18 years of age.

**Volunteer:** One who serves without financial or material gain on behalf of the Diocese of Fort Worth, its parishes, schools or agencies and who is not an employee, a cleric or religious (for example, an intern, catechist, Scout leader, coach, student teacher and others in similar capacities).