



THE SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY



For the following questions, please refer to the Diocesan Social Media Policy. Click on the title above to view the full document online, excerpts are included in this document for quick reference.

Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

Any online post, comment, photo, song, video, blog, or podcast by Church and School personnel on an official ministry site, or which connects the employee or volunteer to a Diocesan entity, **must reflect the values of our Catholic faith.**

- 1. Anything associated with your name on social media must reflect values of our Catholic faith. Why? Does this apply to you even if you are not Catholic?**

When creating a social media site for your parish, ministry or school:

- **Establish and utilize official social media accounts for parish, ministry or school communication** – Official Church and School social media accounts and other official communications channels should be the first and primary source for official parish and school news (e.g., event invitations, parish announcements, etc...) and not the personal account of a Church or School employee or volunteer.
- **Get to know the social media network** - Be aware of the terms of use, age restrictions, and privacy options and controls for each site prior to establishing a ministry presence. Keep in mind that, in certain circumstances, the Diocese or a Diocesan entity may be bound to terms of use which apply to an official social media account.
- **Choose at least two administrators** - Two Safe Environment cleared adults should be granted access and trained to act as administrators for each official website/social media account. One of the administrators must be a parish or diocesan employee. Administrators must have full access to all account or site settings and must have complete access to all communications to and from the official site or account.
- **Get approval** – Make sure to get approval from a [Supervisor](#) before creating a new social media site for a ministry, parish, school, or other Diocesan entity.
- **Monitor and review sites on a regular basis** - Administrators should monitor all engagement and comments on social media posts, and respond promptly to issues and questions. Keep Supervisors in the loop when issues arise that may need action by parish, school, or Diocesan staff.

2. Before creating a new social media site for your class, you need approval from your principal. What other items should you do before using any type of social media in a school setting?

COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN

The primary purpose of communications between Church and School personnel and [children](#) engaged in ministry on social media is to **provide information related to a ministry, school or event** and to **encourage online engagement and evangelization**, and not for personal or private interaction between adults and children.

Church and School personnel should **always be considerate of boundaries** and ensure they are observed, particularly in communications with young people and with use of social media in a youth ministry or school setting.

- Private channels and private communication create an environment that puts both children and adults at risk. To help ensure that all communication on social media channels remains positive and safe, **channels used by Church and School personnel to communicate with children regarding ministry activities must be public and all communication on or through them must be public.** This enables administrators to monitor all communication and helps ensure there is no inappropriate communication between adults and children or between children themselves. Therefore, **no private channels** (e.g., *private Facebook groups or invite-only YouTube channels*) **are acceptable as channels for communication between Church and School personnel and children who are connected in any way to ministry or school related activities.**
- Official ministry, school and personal social media accounts **should not be used to contact children privately** (e.g., *Facebook Messenger, Twitter Direct Message*). Online “chatting” with children is not permitted (*Google Hangouts, etc.*).

3. Can you have a private social media group page for your classes?

- **Use of [Smartphone and tablet messaging apps](#)** (*Snapchat, WhatsApp, Kik, etc.*) and **“anonymous” apps** (*YikYak, Whisper, etc.*) **are forbidden** for use as communication tools for parishes, schools and ministries due to the lack of accountability and ability to retain records of communications on these apps. This policy also prohibits the use of any such apps for communications between any Church or School personnel and any child connected to any ministry or school related activity.
- Church and School personnel **must not initiate or accept “friend” requests** with children connected to ministry or school related activities using their personal profiles on Facebook or other social media platforms or apps. **Children should instead be encouraged to “Like” and participate in public discussions on ministry and school Facebook pages** and other public social media for parishes, schools or ministries.

4. Should you use the messenger feature of any app (twitter, WhatsApp, snapchat, LinkedIn, WordsWithFriends) to communicate with students? Why not?

5. Some apps allow you to follow someone and not be their “friend”, should you follow a student?

6. Should students follow you on Pinterest, Twitter, or other social media platforms? What can you do to limit people “following” you?

- If a child directly contacts Church or School personnel engaged in ministry through a personal social media account, **the ministry or school account should be used to reply.** In unusual cases where a personal account is used to respond, such as an emergency situation which requires urgent communication, Church and School personnel should **maintain copies of all such messages and must promptly provide copies of the communication to a Supervisor.**
- **Parents must have access to everything provided to their children** and be made aware of how social media is being used to communicate with their children as well as how to access the sites.
- **Church personnel are forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information** of any child under the age of eighteen. Personal identifiable information includes but is not limited to: full name, home address, email address, telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a child or that would jeopardize their safety or well-being in any way.
- As an exception to this policy, a child whose parent or other legally responsible adult has signed a current Video/Image Release form may be identified by name in photographs or videos posted to an official social media account unless the child or his/her parent has requested otherwise.
- When sharing photographs or videos of children, **verifiable consent should always be obtained from the parent or guardian before images are shared online.** Verifiable consent can take the form of: a Video/Image Release form, an email from a parent or guardian, or spoken permission by a parent or guardian in the presence of another adult, preferably an employee of the Diocese, School or Diocesan entity.

7. You arrive at your school and they are looking for a teacher to help post on the school’s social media pages. You are pretty good at it, so you volunteer. You take lots of pictures and are ready to start sharing, but what do you need to do to make sure you follow the social media policy?

POLICY ENFORCEMENT

Ultimately, although Church and School personnel are solely responsible for materials they post online, social media activity by Church and School personnel can have adverse consequences for the Diocese and its entities. Church and School personnel must refrain from any actions, through public or private social media or other online communications, that could be an embarrassment, cause scandal, or bring discredit to the Diocese or a ministry, parish, school, or other Diocesan entity. Inappropriate postings, which may include discriminatory remarks, harassment, threats of violence, or similar unacceptable or unlawful conduct, will not be tolerated, whether such postings are made using official or personal social media accounts.

Before creating online content, Church and School personnel should consider some of the risks and rewards that are involved, bearing in mind that any online conduct that adversely affects job performance or otherwise adversely affects other Church or School personnel, the Diocese or a Diocesan entity, parishioners, students, or others involved in a Diocese or Diocesan entity ministry may result in disciplinary action.

8. What are the implications regarding your postings in your private social media accounts when you are a teacher in a Catholic school? Check your school handbook for guidance. Some schools prohibit teachers from friending current school families and students. Think about it, do you trust an angry parent to not use your “private posting” against you?