

Social Media

**Principles, Policies and Guidelines for Parishes,
Schools and Programs of the Archdiocese of
Seattle**

Archdiocese of Seattle

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Introduction

This document contains policies and guidelines concerning the presence of parishes, schools and programs of the Archdiocese of Seattle in Social Media (the online social networking world). Creating detailed or specific policies is unrealistic considering the dynamic nature of social media. Therefore, all Church Personnel must understand the principles underlying these policies and guidelines and apply them with thoughtful judgment and careful consideration to each particular situation.

These policies and guidelines 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, for-profit corporations and non-profit organizations.

For the purpose of these guidelines, “Social Media” includes social networking, blogs and podcasts. “Official archdiocesan sponsored social media” refers to any social media approved for and representing any archdiocesan parish, school or program.

As defined in the *Policy for the Prevention of & Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment*, “Church Personnel” includes all clergy, religious, candidates for ordination, employees and any volunteer with ongoing unsupervised contact with minors or vulnerable adults.

Guiding Principles

The world of digital communication, with its almost limitless expressive capacity, makes us appreciate all the more Saint Paul's exclamation: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16)

– Pope Benedict XVI, 2010 World Communication Day message

Social media is the fastest growing form of communication in the United States, especially among youth and young adults. Our Church cannot ignore it, but at the same time we must engage social media in a manner that is safe, responsible and civil.

As Pope Benedict XVI noted in his message for the 44th World Day of Communication 2010, 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 Church can use social media to encourage respect, dialogue and honest relationships – in other words, "true friendship" (43rd World Communication Day Message, 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 to digital literacy.

As the Archdiocese of Seattle continues its mission of bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to the people of Western Washington, social media can be increasingly helpful in promoting the faith with a broad cross section of individuals and communities. Social media and services can be helpful tools for Church Personnel to keep in contact with a wide range of individuals as part of their ministry.

However, the following Guiding Principles should be kept in mind at all times:

- The line between private and professional activity can be blurred when using these tools and personal messages intended for friends and family can affect the Archdiocese of Seattle. **It is important to remember that all principles/guidelines of maintaining appropriate boundaries in person-to-person communication must be applied to electronic communication as well. Appropriate professional judgment is to be utilized when dealing with specific matters regarding social media.**

- All Church Personnel must act with the understanding that their professional activities and conduct extend the ministry of the parish/school and Archdiocese of Seattle. All public activities and professional or personal conduct by Church Personnel can affect the reputation of the Archdiocese of Seattle. **In general, the same professional and ethical rules apply to information shared online as in any other forum.**
- As Church Personnel, those who make use of social media and services for archdiocesan ministry are responsible and accountable for their activities online just as in other areas of professional communication.

The following policies and guidelines are intended to be common sense rules and reminders for those approved to make use of these communication channels. The policies and guidelines provided below are intended to provide greater clarity for Church Personnel when using social media and services for archdiocesan ministry and apply to all Church Personnel of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

General Policies

1. The pastor or assigned pastoral leader must approve all Church Personnel access to official archdiocesan sponsored social media based upon a clear ministerial or business need tied to the individual's position and responsibilities.
2. In regard to an archdiocesan parish, school or program's presence in social media, all content must be consistent with authentic Church teaching.
3. Social media content and interaction must respect and preserve the dignity of the human person.
4. Church Personnel in any archdiocesan parish, school or program who wish to communicate with minors must first have the express approval of the pastor or assigned pastoral leader. All communications with minors must be public and appropriate. Individual communication with minors is prohibited by individual Church Personnel on personal profile pages. (See "Social Media with Minors" for more information.)

Policies Specific to Authorized Church Personnel Use of Social Media

1. Church Personnel who have been granted access to official archdiocesan sponsored social media, representing any archdiocesan parish, school or program, must adhere to all applicable policies. The following are policies that Church Personnel must review and understand:
 - Policies of the Safe Environment Program: *Policy for the Prevention of & Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment* and *Code of Professional Conduct for Church Personnel*.
 - Computing Services and Security Policy
 - Internet Use and Security Policy
 - *Many Gifts, One Spirit*: Electronic Communications, Human Resources, Archives and Records Management policies
 - Digital Records Management Policies
2. Church Personnel must sign the Social Media Use Agreement Form which is placed in their personnel file.
3. Church Personnel who have been granted access to official archdiocesan sponsored social media must recognize that everything written or received on social media is public.
4. Authorized Church Personnel must abide by the following **Code of Conduct**: *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.*
5. Any Church Personnel who do not abide by this Code of Conduct or other social media policies and guidelines may lose this privilege and may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.
6. The main purpose in participating in social media is for general communication about ministry, programs and/or group events rather than for chatting or socializing.
7. Do not post any photos or videos without prior written consent. Do not “tag” any pictures of minors with any identifiers.

8. Church Personnel authorized to participate in official archdiocesan sponsored social media must remember they are posting for a broad audience. Social media is a global platform. Online content is visible to anyone in the world who comes to their site.
9. As is true for all internet use, local technology policies will be followed to monitor official archdiocesan sponsored social media use and report any misuse to the appropriate supervisor.

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Establishing a Presence in Social Media for Archdiocesan Programs

Websites or social media “sites” such as Facebook (profiles and pages), YouTube Channels, blogs, Twitter, etc., are the centerpiece of any social media activity. The following are guidelines for the establishment of a supported Social Media presence:

1. The site must be approved by the pastor or assigned pastoral leader.
2. The pastor or assigned pastoral leader and all appropriate supervisors must have full access and administrative rights and privileges to authentication credentials.
3. There must be at least two site administrators (preferably more) for each site, to allow rapid response and continuous monitoring of the site.
4. Accounts and authentication credentials (i.e., User ID’s, log-on’s and passwords) must be afforded the same importance as any other sensitive information.
5. Passwords and names of sites should be maintained in a central location and at least two employees, of which one must be a supervisor, should have access to this information.
6. Site pages that facilitate the exchange of money (e.g., fundraising, events registration, advertising, causes and impact pages) should always be coordinated with the Pastoral Assistant for Administration or Business Manager with approval from the pastor or assigned pastoral leader.
7. All official archdiocesan sponsored sites must include a clearly visible **Code of Conduct** for visitors: *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 advertising please.*
8. Site administrators must be familiar with all applicable archdiocesan policies noted above and be aware of these key “Rules of the Road”:
 - Even personal communication by Church Personnel reflects the Church.
 - Write in first person. Do not claim to represent the official position of the organization or the teachings of the Church unless authorized to do so.
 - Identify yourself. Do not use pseudonyms or the name of the parish, program, etc. as your identity, unless authorized to do so.
 - Abide by copyright, fair use and financial disclosure laws.
 - Do not divulge confidential information of others.

- Do not post any photos or videos without prior written consent. Do not cite others or link to their material, etc., without clear documented approval.
 - Do not “tag” any pictures of minors with any identifiers. All “geo-tagging” must be disabled.
9. Snapshots of the web site are to be periodically archived, at least once a month, in order to capture the public records of the archdiocesan parish, school or program.

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Social Media with Minors and Vulnerable Adults

1. Parents must be informed of how social media is being used to communicate with their children and be given the opportunity to limit the means through which Church Personnel communicate with their children. Church Personnel must not knowingly communicate with a minor via any social media that has been restricted by the child's parent or guardian.
2. Parents must have access to everything provided to their children – including how to access the site(s) – and be given the opportunity to be copied on all materials sent to their children via social media (including text messages). While parents should be provided with the same material as their children, it does not have to be via the same technology. For example, if children receive a reminder via Twitter, parents can receive it in a printed form or via email.
3. Any Church Personnel who becomes aware of information that a minor or vulnerable adult has been abused or is under threat of harm, through public domain of a website, blog or social media must report this information to local law enforcement or DSHS within 48 hours.
4. Any Church Personnel with a personal social networking presence, or otherwise involved in social media, must not advertise that page to or “friend” any minor or vulnerable adult with whom they minister to/work with in a pastoral setting.
5. Parent or guardian permission must be obtained before any picture/video of a minor or vulnerable adult may be posted on any website, blog or social media site.
6. Absolutely no pictures/videos of minors or vulnerable adults may be “tagged” with any identifiers.
7. Facebook and similar social media are understandably popular methods of communicating with friends and acquaintances. However, Church Personnel should understand the difference between being “friendly” and being “friends” with children and youth. Young people to whom we minister are not our peers and appropriate ministerial boundaries must be maintained online at all times.
8. Church Personnel should not be accessible to the young people they serve on a constant on-call basis except in cases of emergency. Publishing personal contact information is not permitted. Such disclosures of personal information, while intended to give the sense of pastoral availability, do harm to the maintenance of the professional boundaries required by Church Personnel.

9. Church Personnel are encouraged to save copies of conversations whenever possible, especially those which concern the sharing of personal information by a teen or young adult. This may be especially important with text messaging. All communication should be copied to a supervisor or parents.
10. Church Personnel should familiarize themselves with the Children's Online Private Protection Act, which is federal legislation that oversees how Web sites interact with children under age 13. A summary and links are available at <http://www.ftc.gov/privacy/privacyinitiatives/childrens.html>. It is important to note that many social media sites, such as Facebook, do not allow any child under age 13 to have a presence on their sites.
11. When this document references a "minor with whom you work in a pastoral setting" it excludes those with whom you have an appropriate other relationship with prior to knowing them through ministry (e.g., a child who is a member of your family), and it includes minors with whom you have had previous ministerial contact. Once you have been in a position of authority with a minor, the sense of authority continues so the professional relationship and appropriate boundaries must also continue while the child is still a minor.

Privacy and Confidentiality

1. Privacy tools are no guarantee that messages and information intended solely for private use will not become public. Activities in social media should reflect an understanding that they may become public even when they are intended to be private.
2. Church Personnel must take proper care not to purposefully or inadvertently disclose any information that is confidential or proprietary to the Archdiocese of Seattle.
3. When in doubt about the use of social media, Church Personnel should consult with their supervisor and the policies listed in GENERAL POLICIES.

Personal Sites

Personal sites of Church Personnel should also reflect Catholic values. While employees have a right to privacy and confidentiality regarding what their employer knows about them, the employee's use of social media – because of its very nature – means he/she relinquishes some privacy and their postings could be construed as representing the Church's ethics and values. Church Personnel should be aware that they are witnessing to the faith through all of their social communication, whether "public" or "private."

Church Personnel should consider including a disclaimer on their personal sites, especially if the employee/church personnel is highly visible in the community and/or posts material related to Church work/ministry on their personal site. One example: "The views expressed on this site are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer."

Absolutely no contact with any minor or vulnerable adult with whom they minister to/work with in a pastoral setting is permitted on a Church Personnel's personal site. Please see "General Guidelines" and "Social Media with Minors" for more information.

How to Report and Monitor

Church Personnel are asked to report "unofficial" sites that represent themselves as an officially sanctioned site of the Archdiocese of Seattle. This might include displaying the archdiocesan coat of arms or displaying the logo or name of an archdiocesan parish, school or program. These sites may be reported to the Office of Communications.

Church Personnel should contact the Office of Communications if they find misinformation on any site. This is especially important when responding to an incorrect online post, such as Wikipedia, Masstimes.org, etc.

Church Personnel should report defamatory, libelous or slanderous comments to Office of Communications rather than respond themselves.

Policy Updates

The archbishop reserves the right to periodically review and modify these policies as the need arises.