

K. Use of Social Media and All Forms of Electronic Communication

Scope: These standards apply to all Church personnel and volunteers.

Guiding Principle: Personnel, employed or as volunteers, who use the various forms of social media, e-mail, or the Internet should use these forms of communication for appropriate ministry and not to develop personal relationships with those whom they serve, especially minors.

1. Meaning of “Social Media”

a. “Social media,” for purposes of this document, refers to Internet, network, and mobile-based tools for sharing information and communicating in interactive dialogue. Social media is a constantly developing field which currently includes but is not limited to: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, MySpace, LinkedIn, blogs, Yelp, Foursquare, Flickr, Instagram, texting, and various mobile device “apps.”

b. Because technology is constantly evolving, the ethical principles in these Standards of Conduct apply to new forms of communication developed after the issuance of these standards. A change in technology does not exempt Church personnel or volunteers from diocesan principles and standards.

2. No Privacy in Electronic Communications

a. Electronic mail, social media, or Internet communications, and Internet browsing in a school, parish or other diocesan entity are not private. Such communications and Internet use in the course of ministry or with persons served in ministry, that are made using the Internet service, hardware or software owned, leased or licensed by any diocesan, parish, institution or agency of either of the foregoing or any other entity owned or sponsored by the diocese or a parish (hereinafter referred to as “entity”) (with or without permission) are subject to oversight and scrutiny and may be monitored, reviewed or accessed without the knowledge or consent of the sender or recipient.

b. All computers, cell phones and other digital or electronic devices owned or leased by an entity may be inspected at any time without any advance notice, including such devices assigned to an individual for his exclusive use.

3. Open and Transparent Electronic Communication or Use of Social Media by Church Personnel and Volunteers

a. Church Personnel and Volunteers shall discuss with supervisors and pastors their planned use of social media, e-mail communication, or the Internet before applying it to an area of ministry, especially with minors.

b. Church personnel and volunteers shall carefully compose appropriate communication especially communication that is intended for minors, to eliminate any wording that could be interpreted as sexually suggestive and copy an adult who is a ministerial supervisor on the communication so that it is public and verifiable.

c. When the director of a ministry determines that communication via electronic, digital or social media is appropriate to ministry, each entity promoting that ministry should provide all Church personnel and appropriate volunteers in the program with individual email addresses and/or other access accounts which indicate the name of the entity and the specific ministerial function. There are two methods for providing email to church personnel and volunteers.

Preferred method – entities should provide email accounts specific to the domain of their parish/institution web site (i.e. DRE@stgeorge.com).

Other method – supervisors could establish a web-based account (i.e., stgeorgeDRE@gmail.com). The password in this case should be known by the supervisor and the individual church personnel or volunteer.

d. Church personnel and volunteers should use these official ministry e-mail addresses or accounts for communications and social media access rather than their personal addresses or access accounts to communicate with persons related to their ministry, especially minors.

4. Supervision of Electronic Communications

a. A supervisor or other designated person of an entity shall have the ability to access the communications pertaining to work of every church personnel or volunteer. Access should be made available by the system administrator using the system's administrative functions. The sharing of individual passwords is never recommended to gain access to an account. In the event that an individual's official email is web-based (i.e. Gmail, Ymail, AOL, etc.), a common password to that account should be known by the individual and the supervisor.

b. Church personnel and volunteers should not use the entity's hardware, Internet portal, or software for personal communications not related to the entity.

c. The use of personal, as opposed to entity or an employer's, social media may be an occasion for disciplinary action, including termination of employment or status as a volunteer, especially if there is violation of the norms in these Standards of Conduct in relation to parish or entity activity.

d. Evidence of the accessing, storing, or transmitting of pornographic images is cause for immediate disciplinary action, including termination of employment or status as a volunteer.

e. Any evidence of criminal activity, such as suspected child pornography, found on an entity computer by any Church Personnel or volunteer shall be reported to law enforcement officials, as well as to the appropriate supervisor.

5. Guides for the Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media

a. Electronic communication from Church personnel or volunteers should be brief, simple, and clear as to its stated purpose of business.

b. Personal remarks other than common courtesies appropriate in the situation, especially when addressing minors, should be avoided. Excessive familiarity or a purely social relationship is not appropriate in ministry; adults in ministry may develop a cordial and supportive relationship with minors, but must refrain from excessive familiarity or friendship with minors.

c. When using any form of social media, e-mails, or the Internet, all policies contained in the Standards of Conduct apply. This especially applies to rules of confidentiality, conduct with youth, sexual conduct, and harassment. The Church personnel or volunteer should utilize the resources and techniques made available through Virtus training.

d. Church personnel and volunteers are to see that their own personal social networking site does not contain any material that is pornographic, indecent, or inconsistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

e. Church personnel and volunteers shall not post on their own social networking sites any image of a minor with whom they are working or have previously worked in a parish or entity. When sharing a photo that includes a minor on the entity's social networking site, written permission shall be obtained from the minor's parent or legal guardian. The identity of any minor should never be included as part of the picture or description.

f. Church personnel and volunteers should not examine or patrol social networking sites of the minors with whom they work, monitor minors' behavior on those sites, or seek out a minor's personal site for details of his or her personal life.

6. Administrative Matters

a. Copyrighted Material. Use of an entity's system or systems for unauthorized copying of copyrighted software or content is expressly prohibited. Moreover, proprietary information belonging to others must not be placed on an entity's system without the prior written approval of the owner. Any Church personnel or volunteer who violates these rules may be disciplined.

b. If Church personnel or volunteer receives notice, in writing or otherwise, or becomes aware that an entity's system(s) is being used or is proposed to be used to create, disseminate, store, upload or download any messages, communications or other material in violation of copyrights, trademarks, patents, intellectual property or other property rights of any party, such Church personnel or volunteer shall inform the entity director or his or her designee in writing of such use or proposed use. The entity may remove or disable access to any material that is claimed to be infringing or to be the subject matter of infringing activity.

c. The entity may establish a policy or policies to protect information from unauthorized and inappropriate access, publication or modification; such a policy may also supplement, but not contradict these Standards of Conduct, to address particular activities, ministries, staff, expertise in technology, system or site, its own hardware and software.

d. All church personnel and volunteers must adhere to any such policy or policies. Failure to adhere to such policy or policies may be an occasion for disciplinary action, including termination of employment or status as a volunteer.

e. If Church personnel and volunteers do use these forms of communication to communicate with a minor or minors, then a policy should be issued to parents telling them that such communication is likely to occur.

f. Any site or system established by an entity must have an adult as the administrator of the system or site; the administrator is to be selected by the director of that entity.

g. The Office of Communications shall from time to time issue norms and guidelines to provide further guidance for the implementation of this Section of the Standards of Conduct. Parishes, schools and other entities within the Diocese of Cleveland are encouraged to contact the Social Media Coordinator within the Office of Communications for Best Practices in creating, monitoring and educating their audiences about social media use.