

Diocese of Fall River



Technology Guidelines

For Use in Parish Ministry with Young People

Office of Faith Formation and Catholic Social Services



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About This Document:

The Office of Faith Formation and Catholic Social Services collaborated on this document, which provides guidance to those in ministry with young people on the proper use of technology while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

If you have any questions regarding the use of this document or its implications please contact:

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INTRODUCTION

The new communications media, if adequately understood and exploited, can offer priests and all pastoral care workers a wealth of data which was difficult to access before, and facilitate forms of collaboration and increased communion that were previously unthinkable. If wisely used, with the help of experts in technology and the communications culture, the new media can become— for priests and for all pastoral care workers— a valid and effective instrument for authentic and profound evangelization and communion”

~ Pope Benedict XVI

*The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World
New Media at the Service of the Word*
Message for the 2010 World Communications Day

Those who minister and work in parish settings with young people understand that ministry is to be relational. Prosperous ministry is built on relationships and effective communication.

As ministry leaders employ new ways to reach out to young people (and others), questions may arise as to the proper use of such technology and social networking media. Additionally, communication technologies and the Internet will continue to evolve and priest, catechetical leaders and youth ministers will need to keep pace with the latest tools and potential threats.

VALUES TO GUIDE PASTORAL PRACTICE

Development of policies and guidelines that are prudent, reasonable and transparent strike a balance between safety and pastoral effectiveness. *Prudence* encourages forethought and weighs the merit of the technology and its policies in light of pastoral effectiveness and risks. Policies and certain technologies are *reasonable* if the use is practical, sound and considered a normative practice of standard. Lastly, transparency requires that all we do is open to the scrutiny of others and that the use of technology and policies be clear, intelligible and observable.

“The new digital technologies are, indeed, bringing about fundamental shifts in patterns of communication and human relationships. The desire for connectedness and the instinct for communication that are so obvious in contemporary culture are best understood as modern manifestations of the basic and enduring propensity of humans to reach beyond themselves and to seek communion with others, in reality, when we open ourselves to others, we are fulfilling our deepest need and becoming more fully human, loving is, in fact, what we are designed for by our creator.”

~ Pope Benedict XVI

Message for the 2010 World Communications Day

CHURCH AND MINISTRY WEBSITES

- 🏠 Catholic parishes and organizations should make every effort to establish an organizational website and commit to regularly updating content.
- 🏠 Web content must consistently represent the views and teachings of the Catholic Church.
- 🏠 Public websites must not contain personal and/or contact information about young people.
- 🏠 Written consent *must be attained* prior to posting photographs or other identifying information of minors/young people on websites (see Appendix I for sample photo release) When captioning photos, *only first names* may be used with a parent's/guardian's consent. *Last names must never be used.*

BEST PRACTICES:

- 🏠 Two adults (minimum) functioning with an official organizational capacity should have full access to all organizational accounts/sites for the purpose of monitoring and accepting responsibility for site content.
- 🏠 Personal photographs or information of parish or organizational staff, volunteers or other parishioners must not appear on any page/site. This includes family pictures, social events, home phone numbers and addresses, personal email accounts, etc.
- 🏠 Official organizational logo or standard images should appear on the site to distinguish it as the organization's official site and not that of a specific person.
- 🏠 Communication with visitors to the site should be done through official organizational email whenever possible. Parishes should secure and maintain their own websites whenever possible.
- 🏠 Any church site must have a disclaimer stating the site is *NOT* monitored 24 hours and should provide emergency phone and hotline numbers to community resources (see Appendix II for sample disclaimer). However, because 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 legally damaging to the parish and/or organization and dangerous for teens and their families.

SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITES

- 🏠 Adult ministers should establish separate sites and pages for personal and professional use. Personal pages and information should never be advertised or accessible to young people.
- 🏠 Ministry leaders utilizing social networking sites either for ministerial or personal use must be vigilant in representing the Catholic Church in *all* interactions that can be viewed publicly. *Anything that could cause scandal to the ministry must be avoided.* Such may include mention of inappropriate use of alcohol, advocacy of inappropriate music/movies, inappropriate dress or the expression of opinions that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

- 🏠 Parents must be informed in writing that a social networking site is being utilized as a standard part of the ministry (see Appendix III for sample notification) and must sign a written consent form for their children to participate. Parents should also be encouraged to join the social networking site themselves.

BEST PRACTICES:

- 🏠 Be aware of the terms of use, age restrictions and privacy options and controls for every social networking site prior to establishing a ministry presence.
- 🏠 Two adults (minimum) functioning with an official organizational capacity should have full access to all organizational accounts/sites for the purpose of monitoring and accepting responsibility for site content.
- 🏠 Both adults should be registered to have email alerts of page activity sent to their official organizational email addresses. This allows for a quicker response time to urgent requests and helps to ensure that all postings are appropriate.
- 🏠 Any church site must have a disclaimer stating the site is NOT monitored 24 hours and should provide emergency phone and hotline numbers to community resources (see Appendix II for sample disclaimer). However, because 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 legally damaging to the parish and/or organization and dangerous for teens and their families.
- 🏠 There is a difference between *initiating* a “friend request” and *accepting* one. Friend/connection requests should be initiated by the young people and NOT the adult representative or the parish and/or organization.
- 🏠 Ministry leaders who notice or suspect cyber-bullying on the social networking website must report such bullying to the site administrator and/or parish administrator.
- 🏠 Youth must not be “tagged” or identified by name in any photographs taken during youth activities. It is required that the “no tagging” option be enabled on the original social networking site.
- 🏠 Personal photographs or information of parish or organizational staff, volunteers or other parishioners must not appear on any page/site. This includes family pictures, social events, home phone numbers and addresses, personal email accounts, etc.
- 🏠 Official organizational logo or standard images should appear on the site to distinguish it as the organization’s official site and not that of a specific person.

EMAIL & TEXT/INSTANT MESSAGING

- 📧 Parents must be informed in writing that email or instant messaging for communication purposes with minors is being utilized as a standard part of the ministry (see Appendix III for sample notification) and must sign a written consent form for their children to participate. Parents should also be encouraged to provide their own email addresses, and when they do, should be copied on all messages.
- 📧 It is required that ministers and volunteers maintain separate email accounts for professional/ church and personal communications.
- 📧 The same boundaries observed in oral/ personal communication must be adhered to when communicating via email/ text messages. E mail, text messages and instant messages can be logged, archived and forwarded to other parties. Avoid engaging in any postings/communications that could be misconstrued or misinterpreted.
- 📧 E mails, text messages and instant messages must not occur after 8PM!!! Clear parameters and boundaries must be maintained at all times. Parents must also be notified in writing of this timeline (see Appendix III).

BEST PRACTICES:

- 📧 Use a parish or organizational email account when communicating parish or organizational business and NOT home accounts whenever possible.
- 📧 Communications must be professional and are rendered on behalf of the parish or organization to young people.
- 📧 Care must be taken to maintain professionalism and appropriate boundaries in all communication. Do not overstep the boundaries of adult/ student relationships.
- 📧 Avoid any communication which might be construed as having sexual overtones. DO NOT reply to any such email from teens. Make a copy of any such inappropriate communication and notify an administrator/ pastor/ supervisor.
- 📧 Write as though others will read what is written. Messages may be easily shared or forwarded with students and others.
- 📧 Ask, “If my bishop/pastor/principal asked to see this communication, would I be embarrassed by what I’ve written?” If the answer is “yes” DO NOT send the message!
- 📧 There is no such thing as a private email, text or instant message! All such communications are organizational in nature and may be viewed by the organization at any time and may be subject to legal action.
- 📧 E mails, texts and instant messages can be misinterpreted. Always double check messages to see if someone reading it might read something into it that is not intended or if your message might be misinterpreted. If you think a message might somehow be misunderstood, DO NOT send it.
- 📧 NEVER send or reply to messages in haste when emotions are involved!

BLOGS

- 📌 Parents must be informed in writing that blogs are being utilized as a standard part of the ministry (see Appendix III for sample notification) and must sign a written consent form for their children to participate. Parents should also be encouraged to join the blog themselves.
- 📌 Professional, ministry-based blogs should only be utilized to promote upcoming events or programs for the purpose of evangelization. Blogs should provide resources and information within the ministry setting and should not be used to conduct or promote outside business and/or personal activities. Personal information of young people, staff and volunteers must never be divulged!
- 📌 Blogs are an efficient method for communicating daily Scripture passages, prayers etc., and for disseminating fliers for upcoming activities, permission/ consent forms, calendars and ministerial updates.
- 📌 Extreme care must be taken so that personal blogs are not made available to young people.

BEST PRACTICES:

- 📌 Any church site must have a disclaimer stating the site is NOT monitored 24 hours and should provide emergency phone and hotline numbers to community resources (see Appendix II for sample disclaimer). However, because 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 legally damaging to the parish and/or organization and dangerous for teens and their families.
- 📌 As in all professional/ ministerial settings, posted information, opinions, references and resources must reflect the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- 📌 Communications must be professional and are rendered on behalf of the parish or organization to young people.
- 📌 If youth are to engage in blogging as a part of an officially sanctioned organizational activity, such activity must be monitored by at least two adults! No young person should be identified by name whenever possible. *Last names must never be used!* All blog content must be in compliance with Catholic Church teaching and values.
- 📌 When designing and establishing a parish or organizational blog, be sure to *enable any filter* providing the ability to approve or deny blog posts/ comments prior to publishing on the blog.

ONLINE VIDEOS & CHAT ROOMS

- 📌 Parents must be informed in writing that online videos and/or chat rooms are being utilized as a standard part of the ministry (see Appendix III for sample notification) and must sign a written consent form for their children to participate. Parents should also be encouraged to join view online videos themselves.

- 📌 It is recommended that streaming video be used for education, communication and promotional purposes of the parish, diocese or Catholic Church whenever possible.
- 📌 *Any use of live streaming or chat rooms that leads to, supports or encourages exclusive youth-adult relationships is strictly prohibited!*
- 📌 At no time is one-on-one video or chat room interaction appropriate or permitted between adults and minors.
- 📌 Chats and streaming video conducted by an authorized leader for the purposes of education, formation and evangelization for a *group of young people* is permitted.
- 📌 When presenting personal opinions and engaging in chats/discussions, it is essential for pastoral ministers to remember that even on the World Wide Web, others may recognize them as representing the values of the Catholic Church.

ONLINE REGISTRATION TECHNOLOGIES & SECURING PRIVATE INFORMATION

Gathering information from online registration forms, surveys, etc. involves a higher degree of technical understanding and implementation than simple websites or blogs. Online forms on web pages can use any number of technologies to record and transmit information and the transmission of that information can be made more or less secure through the technical decisions and requirements used to develop that form. In simplest terms, *no sensitive information should be transmitted through basic web interactions* represented by using “http://” in the URL. Only secure, encrypted transmissions “https://” (also known as SSL or “Secure Sockets Layer”) should be used.

In addition, though secure transmissions (“https://”) can happen through any web server, most modern browsers will display strongly worded warnings when the identity of the web server cannot be verified (particularly through third party verification services like Verisign or GeoTrust). Therefore, registration processes that will capture sensitive data usually involve the additional expense of securing a third-party secure certificate.

- 📌 No sensitive information – particularly financial information (credit card numbers, checking account numbers) and secure identifiers (i.e. social security numbers)—should ever be transmitted through email, web pages that convert from information into email or web forms using regular hypertext transmission (“http://”).
- 📌 No sensitive personal information should be transmitted over SSL (“https://”) unless the user can receive assurance that communication with the server can be verified through third-party services (i.e. Verisign, etc.).
- 📌 If the explanation of these technologies and the recommendations accompanying them are beyond the technical competence of the webmaster or staff person responsible for online registration forms, it should be taken as an indicator that said person should not be creating

such forms. Those leaders should contact a technology/web solution provider for assistance.

BEST PRACTICES:

-  Leave the creation and management of secure online web forms to a qualified web solution provider unless you understand the demands of secure transmissions and can assure that your website can accommodate such security.
-  If possible, handle all financial transactions “in real time.” In other words, on a commerce website that can process credit card transactions online, thus assuring that no financial data needs to be communicated to the parish/organization.
-  Even if an online form will not include financial information, all security protocols described above must be followed if other sensitive personal data is transmitted (such as social security numbers, passwords, unlisted phone numbers, etc.).
-  Acquire a third party secure certificate (for example, Verisign, GeoTrust, etc.) for any web server that will handle SSL (“https://”) transmissions.

APPENDIX I: Sample Photo Consent and Release

Permission is granted to the parish and/ organization to modify and duplicate the photo release written below. Photo releases must be renewed each year (usually at the start of each formation year).

PHOTO RELEASE INFORMATION:

I grant to the parish of <INSERT PARISH OR ORGANIZATION NAME HERE>, the right to take photographs of my child, _____ and his/her property in

(Print Name of Child)

connection with parish and organizational activities for the <INSERT YEAR HERE (i.e. 2013-2014 academic year)>. I authorize <INSERT PARISH OR ORGANIZATION NAME HERE> and/or the Diocese of Fall River, its assigns and transferees to copyright, use and publish the same in print and/or electronically.

I agree that the <INSERT PARISH OR ORGANIZATION NAME HERE>, and/or the Diocese of Fall River may use such photographs of my child with or without his/her FIRST name and for any lawful purpose, including but not limited to such purposes as publicity, illustration, advertising, and Web content.

I have read and understand the above photo release statement. ___ NO ___ YES

(Printed Name of Parent/ Guardian)

(Date)

(Signature of Parent/ Guardian)

APPENDIX II: Sample Website Moderation Disclaimer

Permission is granted to the parish and/ organization to modify, duplicate and/ or post the disclaimer listed below to any parish or organizational website, social networking site or blog. Each parish or organization should list local resources and hotline phone numbers. If assistance is needed in obtaining such resources, contact Catholic Social Services at (508) 674-4681.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Although this site will be occasionally monitored, it is impossible to monitor 24 hours per day. If you feel suicidal or threatened; feel violent; or are being abused, dial 911 immediately!!!

If you need additional assistance, refer to the following list of hotline numbers and resources (parishes to insert their own lists of local resources).

