



DIOCESE OF WORCESTER

Guidelines for the Use of Social Networking Sites in Parish Programs

“Social Networking Sites” are online websites that are used by groups with a common interest for communication purposes. Social networking sites are becoming increasingly popular and, if used by a parish, should be used as a means to effective communication for ministry and education rather than for befriending people or socializing. 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, parishes should keep the following guidelines in mind when considering the use of social networking sites for programs that involve youth under the age of 18. Note: The use of social networking sites is *not recommended* for groups that include students younger than high school age.

- Always obtain the pastor’s permission before using a social networking site for a parish program.
- Inform parents in writing that the parish is planning to use a social networking site.
- Establish a parish account; never use a personal account.
- The site administrator must be an adult. The site administrator is considered to work with minors and thus should have completed all safe environment requirements per diocesan policy.
- It is recommended that the site be set up as a public rather than private site in order to allow for transparency in all communications and postings. The administrator should pre-approve or regularly monitor all comments and postings. Any inappropriate content should be deleted and the person who posted it should be contacted and reminded that improper content is not acceptable.
- Post rules of conduct on the site.
- The main purpose of the site should be for general communication about group events rather than for chatting or socializing.
- All information displayed on the site should reflect the Catholic faith.
- Write as if you are certain others will read it. Communications can easily be shared with others for whom they are not intended.
- Whenever possible, keep copies of any communications sent to youth. Consider sending copies of all communications to parents as well as youth members.
- Do not invite a minor to be a “friend.” The minor must make the request.
- Always request permission of parents or guardians regarding taking and posting photographs. Do not “tag” any pictures.

August 1, 2011