



# **Diocese of Steubenville**

## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

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## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The use of technology is rapidly growing to form, inform, and, with God's grace, transform the adults, teens and children of our diocese.

Every day, countless conversations take place online about the Catholic faith on social media, and the Diocese of Steubenville encourages Church and School personnel to join these conversations to proclaim the Gospel. The Diocese of Steubenville also respects the rights of Church and School personnel to use social media as a form of self-expression.

It is important that we make every effort to ensure the safety of producers and consumers of social media, while at the same time ensuring the integrity of the message we proclaim. This requires responsible, focused, and intentional use of new and yet-to-be-developed technologies.

These guidelines apply to all Church and School personnel (employees, clergy and all volunteers), and to their use of social networking sites, blogs, or any other kind of social media. Other websites are usually not considered social media, but this policy also applies to the creation, content and use of parish, school, and ministry websites, as well as to online discussion by any Church and School personnel of matters pertaining to ministry.

The Diocese of Steubenville would like to thank the following organizations for excerpts of their Social Media policies included in this document:

Archdiocese of Boston

Archdiocese of Chicago

Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Archdiocese of Melbourne (Australia)

Boy Scouts of America

Diocese of Dallas

Diocese of Fairbanks

Diocese of Grand Rapids

New York City Department of Education

## ENGAGING ONLINE WITH THE LOVE OF CHRIST

*“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.

*“Faith comes by what is heard.” (Romans 10:17)*

Church and School personnel should be sensitive to being clear about the intended audiences for social media conversations on personal social media accounts. Conversations containing personal views intended for a specific limited audience should not be misinterpreted as a representative viewpoint of a larger institution.

To prevent this type of confusion, it is important to cultivate relationships online so that professional and personal boundaries are clear. Church and School personnel who use social media in a personal capacity should not present themselves in a way that could be misinterpreted as having the same authority as a social media account used by church or school leadership in a professional capacity (e.g., a Facebook public figure page for the pastor of a parish, the Twitter account for a school principal).

*“Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.” (Galatians 4:5)*

When participating on social media, be sure to use sound judgment and common sense. Don’t forget that anything published on a personal website is no different from making such information available in any public forum. Use discretion when posting about sensitive topics and events.

Care should always be taken in accepting or adding ‘friends’ on personal social media accounts. Be sensitive to activity and engagement on social media, as many social media networks share your “Likes,” comments and other actions with your friends and followers.

*“The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones.” (Luke 16:10)*

Make sure you are always honest and accurate when posting information or news, and if you make a mistake, correct it quickly. Be open about any previous posts you have altered. Remember that the Internet archives almost everything; therefore, even deleted postings can be searched. Never post any information or rumors that you know to be false, especially regarding parishioners, students, other Church and School personnel, or the Diocese or a Diocesan entity.

*“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39)*

Do not post obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory, defamatory, trolling, cyberbullying, or otherwise potentially scandalous comments, links, and/or images, or materials which could discredit or cause embarrassment to the Diocese of Steubenville or its affiliates, employees, vendors, partners, agencies, schools, or others.

# **ESTABLISHING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR A PARISH, MINISTRY OR SCHOOL**

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. Supervisors are ultimately responsible for the administration and content of official social media sites, and should maintain a list of all social media accounts within their particular ministry, parish, school, or other Diocesan entity. Supervisors are also responsible for regularly monitoring social media sites for their organization.
- Obtain permission before posting content – Just because content is available on the Internet does not mean that the content can be freely used for any purpose. Do not post any non-original content (e.g., photographs, artwork, articles, etc.) unless and until you have obtained written permission from the copyright owner to do so. This also extends to posting videos or recordings of Masses or other events that contain performances of copyrighted music or other copyrighted material. Church and School personnel should not post a recording of anything connected to their duties as employees or volunteers unless the parish or school has given permission for the posting and has obtained the appropriate releases.

Certain content is not allowed on official social media sites:

- Confidential and Proprietary Information – Church and School personnel are prohibited from disclosing any information that is understood to be held in confidence by the Diocese of Steubenville or its entities, except by explicit permission of the appropriate authority. This specifically includes personal information regarding parishioners, students, or others involved in a Diocesan or Diocesan entity ministry which you learn in the course of your ministry work but have not received specific permission from the subject of the information to disclose using a specific online forum. For example, it is a violation of this policy to post to a parish

Facebook page information regarding a homebound parishioner's medical condition disclosed to a visiting minister unless the parishioner has specifically authorized sharing of the information on the parish Facebook page.

- Unauthorized Use of Trademarks and Logos – Do not use Diocese or Diocesan entity trademarks or logos in any way that could reasonably suggest official Diocesan or Diocesan entity sponsorship or endorsement unless you are specifically authorized to do so. Do not use trademarks or logos of any other person or organization without the permission of the owner.
- Outside Businesses – Official social media sites may not be used for conducting or promoting outside business. Church and School personnel should avoid conducting outside businesses through personal social media accounts or websites in a way that implies sponsorship or endorsement of the business by the Diocese or a Diocesan entity. For this same reason, clergy should avoid conducting outside businesses through social media accounts or websites which identify them as clergy of the Diocese of Steubenville.

## 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.*).
- 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.
- 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.
- When children form their own social media groups, adults should not join these groups.
- Counseling of children through social media is not permitted.
- Electronic communication is not intended to be the primary means of communicating with minors. In extraordinary circumstances when using email, text messages or other electronic communication with a minor, a second safe environment cleared adult must be included. Except in emergency situations, this communication can only take place between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m.
  - Communications technology – One-on-one or private electronic communications—including but not limited to e-mail, texting, Facebook posting, Snapchat, text or instant messaging: by employees or adult volunteers with minors is prohibited except that such communications are explicitly permitted in a written consent form that has been executed by the minor’s parent or guardian prior to any such communications. Adults shall limit the use of personal cell phones when communicating with minors to “business only” text messaging. Use of personal cell phones for voice phone calls/voice phone messages shall be restricted to emergency situations (a minor who is late for an athletic event/practice or a sudden change in a scheduled event DOES NOT CONSTITUTE an emergency situation). Parents and guardians shall be copied on all electronic or text-based communications with minors.

## **PROTECTING CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS ONLINE**

Church and School personnel of the Diocese of Steubenville and Diocesan entities are expected to comply with this policy, the Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of Steubenville and all other applicable law.

Consistent with the Diocese of Steubenville Safe Environment Program, communications with vulnerable adults should follow the same guidelines as communications with children.

Please visit these websites for more information about the protection of children online:

- Diocese of Steubenville Safe Environment Program – <https://www.diosteub.org/child-protection>
- The USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People – <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/charter.cfm>

## **AUTHORIZATION TO SPEAK FOR DIOCESE OR A DIOCESAN ENTITY**

All matters of the employing entity that require news releases or public statements must be reviewed and coordinated with the Director of Communications.

Communication in Crisis Situations: In the event where media inquiries are urgent or in a crisis situation, the Director of Communications will serve as spokesperson for the Diocese. The Vicar General acts as spokesperson when the Director of Communications is not available. No statement may be made on behalf of the diocese or any employing entity unless it has been approved by the Director of Communications of the Diocese.

## **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.

Violations of this policy, the Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of Steubenville or other applicable law may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination, for an employee or cleric, or removal from position, if a volunteer.

By acknowledging receipt of this policy and accepting employment or a volunteer position with the Diocese of Steubenville or any of its entities, each employee and volunteer agrees that he or she will, upon request, provide the Diocese of Steubenville access to any social media account which the Diocese of Steubenville reasonably believes has been involved in a violation of this policy, the Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of Steubenville or other applicable law, policy, or standard.

The Diocese of Steubenville reserves the right to make changes to this policy at any time and at its sole discretion, and interpret and administer the policy in light of changing circumstances and events.