Diocese of Oakland

Communication Department

Guidelines for the Pastoral Use of Technology and Social Media

February, 2014

Table of Contents

About this Document

These Guidelines for the Pastoral Use of Technology and Social Media are designed to aid employees, clerics and volunteers (hereinafter referred to as *personnel*) of the Diocese of Oakland and its various institutions and entities in understanding appropriate usage, boundaries and best practices in technology and social media. They are guidelines only.

Personnel are bound by the professional communication policies of the Diocese of Oakland, including the social media policy contained therein.

In areas where these guidelines do not provide a direct answer for how members of our Church faithful should conduct themselves, personnel should contact their supervisor or The Diocesan Code of Conduct (January 2014). Questions may also be sent to the diocesan Communications Office. Pastors and administrators of parishes, schools, and diocesan institutions and entities may implement more restrictive guidelines for the use of social media and technology if they deem it appropriate.

Credits: We gratefully acknowledge contributions to this document by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Diocese of Rockford, the Diocese of San Jose, the Diocese of Toledo, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Washington, D.C. Additional input was provided by social media consultants David Mitroff, Ph.D. and Jason McDonald, Ph.D. The following texts were also used as resources:

Vogt, Brandon. *The Church and New Media*, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 2011
Rice, Jesse. *The Church of facebook* (sic), David C. Cook, 2009

Section One – Introduction

Jesus communicated in many ways. While he walked among us he listened; he spoke; he told stories and spoke in parables; he shared meals; he healed others. Jesus is the fullest experience of God being in relationship with us. We who desire to communicate God's love for others and be disciples of Jesus must recognize the importance of this task.

Pope Benedict XVI noted the emergence of electronic communication in his message for the 44th World Communications Day (2010):

> *"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)."* [This 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."*

Social media is the fastest growing form of communication in the United States. The Diocese of Oakland can use social media to encourage respectful dialogue and honest relationships. To do so requires us to approach social media as means of evangelization and to consider our role in providing a Christian perspective in this arena.

Technological tools are already used in positive and dynamic ways in many church settings. While use of technology and social media engagement may vary by generation, our competence in technology and social media will only enhance our ministerial endeavors. "Using the media correctly and competently can lead to a genuine inculturation of the Gospel." (*The Church in America [Ecclesia in America]*, no. 72)

Technology and social media should be part of a comprehensive communication effort within the diocese and parishes, and not be the only tools used. They should not become an expedient and convenient means to evade the complicated and integrated work of building human relationships, which usually calls for in-person contact. Technology and social media at times fall short in truly enhancing the connectedness of human-to-human, face-to-face social interaction.

The many benefits of digital communication are not free and unencumbered. We must bring knowledge, diligence and oversight to this arena. It is important that our use of social media be conducted in a manner that is safe and responsible. Please use these guidelines and your own common sense and experience when using technology and social media. Because this field is, by its nature, rapidly evolving, it is impossible to address every possible risk or scenario in this document; however, the guiding principles and recommendations will be applicable to most circumstances that are encountered by diocesan and parish personnel.

Section Two – Basic Terms

- **Blog:** Contraction of "web log." A type of website, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics, audio or video. Similar to a diary. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog. (example: Whispers in the Loggia). Twitter is a micro-blog.

- **Mandated Reporter**: One who may work with children in the course of his or her work duties or volunteer duties. The definition of a mandated reporter contained in the California Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act is adopted herein.

- **Ethical Reporter:** The Policy of Expectations and Guidelines provides a general guideline as to how we should behave when we minister to minors. It does not give us specific answers to all of our ethical questions, but does remind us of our responsibility to be aware of what is happening in our parishes and schools.

- **Ministry/Group**: Any parish, school, diocesan institution or entity, and related subgroups.

- **Minor**: Any person under the age of 18.

- **Pastor/Administrator**: The individual in the highest position of authority at a parish, school, diocesan institution or entity.

- **Personnel**: All employees and volunteers of the Diocese of Oakland and its parishes, schools, diocesan institutions or entities.

- **Site Administrator**: An individual who has direct responsibility for digital communication.

- **Social Network**: Communities of people who share interests and activities and who connect on the internet in an organized manner. Most services are primarily web-based and provide various ways for users to interact, such as chat, messaging, email, video or voice chat, file sharing, blogging, and discussion groups. (examples: Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Flickr, LinkedIn, etc.)

- **Text Messaging:** Sending text messages via telephone.

- **Video Chatting:** Means of connecting with others for live video conversation. (example: Skype)

- **Vulnerable Adult**: A dependent adult; one who lacks the legal capacity of an adult.

- **Website**: A group of pages on the internet that are connected and controlled by an administrator, to serve a purpose or organization. (example: oakdiocese.org).

Section Three – General Principles

Commitment

A social networking site or web page is an extension of the ministry or group; that is, the web presence of the parish, school, or diocesan institution or entity by which it is sponsored, administered and monitored. A parish, school, or diocesan institution or entity which establishes a web presence must make a commitment to this vehicle of communication.

A key question that faces our church personnel when deciding to engage technology and social media is: *how will we engage*? Careful consideration should be used in determining the particular strengths of each form of media (blogs, social networks, text messaging, etc.) and the needs of a parish, school, and diocesan institution or entity. The strengths should match the needs. Simply establishing a digital presence is not enough. The parish, school, or diocesan institution or entity should set expectations regarding how often social media content is updated/posted and what content is updated/posted. Web pages, especially the index, main page(s) and calendar of events, should be regularly updated; social media should have current posts and information. There should be an intentional plan and set of goals regarding establishing, maintaining and updating a digital presence. This plan should be clearly communicated to the staff, employees and volunteers of the parish, school, or diocesan institution or entity.

Content

Respect your audience, express your views with appropriate language and civility, and be respectful of the Church and her teachings. Your communications must not offend the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Personnel must comply fully with copyright, fair use, and IRS financial disclosure regulations.

Discretion

We must take great care to be consistent in representing the worth of our character on-line. Clear communication and respect for boundaries is required at any level of contact-- especially with minors and vulnerable adults.

E-mails, text messages, blog postings or comments, and videos are all public forums of which a permanent record can be obtained. We must not fear this reality, but rather be educated on the public nature of such communication. As representatives of the Church, those who work with the faithful should be diligent in avoiding situations which might be the source of scandal for themselves, others, or the diocese.

Even when engaging in social media for personal use, the comments of personnel may be viewed as a reflection on that community and the Catholic Church universal. Personnel should

use prudent and reasonable judgment when engaging in social media activities and should be on guard against actions and discussions that could harm the interests of themselves, the community, or the Church.

Safeguard the privacy interests of others. In particular, personally identifiable information (that is, name, phone number, address or email address), should not be disclosed without the prior consent of the person identified or a parent/guardian. In cases where an individual has consented to the publication of such information, appropriate privacy settings should be utilized. Personnel using social media are required to abide by the confidentiality policies of the Diocese of Oakland.

Oversight

Best practices dictate that each social media vehicle in a parish, school, or diocesan institution or entity have two adult moderators. Moderators of parish, school, or diocesan institution or entity social media are responsible for ensuring compliance with all diocesan policies and codes of conduct, and appropriate application of these guidelines. All comment and blog response areas must be moderated. Those responsible for such areas should not post any comment which misrepresents the position of the Church, offends the faith or morals of the Church, is not civil, or includes inappropriate language or speech. Anonymous comments should not be permitted. All moderator functions should reserve the right to ban offenders.

Sample disclaimer:

> *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 ads, please. Posts that do not follow these requests will be removed and contributors may be blocked.*

Ownership

Any technological tools that we use as part of our work or volunteering in the Diocese of Oakland, such as websites, blogs, social network sites and the like are the property of the Diocese of Oakland.

Section Four – Specific Guidelines

1. The decision to have a web presence or not is that of the pastor/administrator of the parish, school, diocesan institution or entity. The ministry/group must have approval from the pastor/administrator for the actual ministry/group page: i.e., for that choice of vehicle, the layout and design, and content of the page. The web page or other social media tool belongs to the parish, school, or diocesan institution or entity, and not to the ministry or group. The pastor/administrator has the sole discretion to modify or close the web presence.

2. The pastor/administrator is to receive the password and keep it on file. For those parishes, schools, diocesan institutions or entities which already have a web presence, all passwords necessary to establish ownership and control of the web presence should be shared with the pastor/administrator promptly.

3. There should be at least two adult site administrators for each site, to allow rapid response, continuous monitoring, and updating of the site.

4. Forums or any other feedback medium must be regularly and frequently (daily, at a minimum) monitored by the site administrators.

5. Personnel must maintain professionalism and appropriate boundaries in all communication.

6. Communication by church personnel is a reflection on the Church. Practice what you preach. Identify yourself. Do not use pseudonyms. Practice Christian charity.

7. Do not claim to represent the official position of the parish, school, or diocesan institution or entity, or the teachings of the Church, unless authorized to do so.

8. Abide by copyright, fair use and IRS financial disclosure regulations.

9. Do not divulge confidential information. Nothing posted on the Internet is private.

10. Do not post photos or videos of minors or vulnerable adults, without the permission of their parent/guardian.

11. Do not cite others, post photos or videos, or provide a link to any material that is inappropriate or offends the faith and morals and/or teachings of the Catholic Church.

12. Do not post or otherwise use a picture or video that might be considered embarrassing or unflattering. If an individual in a particular photo or video is uncomfortable with its posting, it should be immediately removed from the website.

13. Personnel must have permission from a minor's or vulnerable adult's parent or guardian

before contacting the minor or vulnerable adult via social media or and before posting pictures, video, and other information that may identify that minor or vulnerable adult. This may be obtained via annual permission slip, as is done with photographs.

14. There is a difference between initiating a Facebook "friend request" and accepting one. Minors and vulnerable adults should "friend request" the ministry/group site first.

15. Personnel should maintain a clear distinction between professional and personal online activities.

16. Personnel using social networking sites should avoid *MySpace* due to its lack of user controls.

17. Personnel's mandated reporter obligation extends to all circumstances involving social networking and technology.

18. Before sending an e-mail or text message, ask yourself if someone might "read something into it" that you did not intend. Be cautious when sending an e-mail or text message, especially either in haste and/or when emotions are involved. If you think an e-mail or text message might somehow be misunderstood, do not send it. If there is any potential for embarrassment or harm, do not send the email or text message.

19. Always avoid any communication (written, audio or video) that is or might be construed as being inappropriate or having sexual or romantic overtones.

20. Do not reply to an inappropriate e-mail or text message from anyone, especially a minor or vulnerable adult. Make a copy of such inappropriate communication and notify your Pastor/Administrator.

21. Do not use parish or diocesan digital communication platforms to conduct or promote outside business activities, or to derogate any individual, organization or institution.

Section Five - Additional Resources

- NETSMARTZ411:
  Parents' and guardians' online resource for answering questions about
  Internet Safety, computers, and the Web. netsmartz411.org

- CyberTipline:
  The Congressionally mandated CyberTipline is a reporting mechanism for cases of
  child sexual exploitation including child pornography, online enticement of children for
  sex acts, molestation of children outside the family, sex tourism of children, child
  victims of prostitution, and unsolicited obscene material sent to a child. Reports may be
  made 24- hours per day, 7 days per week online at cybertipline.com or by calling
  1-800-843-5678.

- Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC)
  The ICAC Task Force Program was created to help State and local law enforcement
  agencies enhance their investigative response to offenders who use the Internet, online
  communication systems, or other computer technology to sexually exploit children. The
  program is currently composed of 59 regional Task Force agencies and is funded by the
  United States Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. icactaskforce.org.

Diocese of Oakland
Department of Communication & Community Relations
2121 Harrison Street, Suite 100
Oakland, CA   94612

Mike Brown, Director
Jan Potts, Administrative Assistant
510-267-8309   jpotts@oakdiocese.org