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of  
LAFAYETTE-IN-INDIANA

*Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana*  
*Office of Communications*

## **Social Media and Communications Policy**

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**Social Media and Communications Policy**

**Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to provide clergy and employees of The Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana (henceforth referred to as The Diocese) our volunteers, contractors and vendors with a policy on the practices of social media and other forms of communications that have been established by The Diocese.

Each of us whether clergy, lay employee of The Diocese or volunteer, contractor, or vendor are integral to the ministry of Christ's Church on earth and for the services provided to the people, parishes and schools of The Diocese. The success of our efforts to support and sustain the many ministries with which we are charged is dependent on each of us diligently protecting information and messages that we administer and communicate.

Remaining steadfast in our adherence to practices outlined in this policy give us the confidence that the integrity of the information we communicate and distribute is unquestionable and that the people who entrust us with their spiritual care can be assured every effort is made to protect the confidentiality they entrust us with.

**Scope**

These policies apply to each of the technologies addressed regardless of the manner in which the technology is accessed (e.g. computer, phone, smart phone, etc.) and regardless of ownership of equipment used for such access (Church Organization or personal.) There may be additional supplemental policies for specific roles or organizations that further direct use of these technologies.

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## Background

*“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 43<sup>rd</sup> World Day of Communications**

*"Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ. In the area of communications too, we need a Church capable of bringing warmth and of stirring hearts."* **Pope Francis' Message for the 48th World Communications Day [WCD], 2014**

Social media is fundamentally changing how people communicate. Our Church cannot ignore it; in fact, it is our responsibility as Catholics to bring the Church's teachings into what Pope Benedict XVI called the "digital continent."

As Pope Francis wrote in the **48th World Communications Day message**, *"The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God."*

The Church can use social media to encourage respect, dialogue, and honest relationships—in other words, "true friendship." **Pope Benedict XVI's Message for the 43rd World Communications Day, 2009**

To do so requires us to approach social media as a powerful means of evangelization and to consider the Church's role in providing a Christian perspective on digital literacy.

The National Directory for Catechesis further states that, “using the media correctly and competently can lead to a genuine inculturation of the Gospel” (NDC 21).

Keeping these ideas in mind, the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana has established the following Social Networking / Technology Guidelines for parish leaders in all capacities, especially those

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working with youth either in a paid or volunteer position. The following guidelines for each section will be prefaced with ‘Guiding Principles’ for implementation.<sup>1</sup>

## Definitions

**Minor** – An individual who HAS NOT yet reached his or her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**Adult** – An individual who HAS reached his or her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**Church Organization** – Any official group of the Diocese or a parish or school within the Diocese, including parishes, schools, and the Diocese itself.

**Staff** – An individual who is paid by a Church Organization.

**Volunteer** – An individual who assists a Church Organization but receives no compensation for his or her service other than reimbursement of direct expenses.

**Messaging** – Electronic text based communication, including but not limited to email, instant messaging, direct messaging via a social media platform, or texting.

**Audio/Video Conferencing** – Electronic communication incorporating audio and/or video technologies, including phone conference, diocesan approved video/audio conferencing solutions, webinars, etc.

**Tagging** – Identifying someone by linking their personal social media profile to another account’s post.

## General Policies

1. All use of internet services, including websites and social media, must comply with applicable local, state, and federal laws.
2. Use of internet services by Church Organizations shall be subject to diocesan approval and control and to such other diocesan procedures, policies, and instructions as may be adopted in the future.
3. The official organization logo or standard images should appear on the Church Organization’s website and social media presences to distinguish them as the organization’s official accounts.
4. Church Organizations shall respect the intellectual property rights of others. Making unauthorized copies of licensed software or copyrighted materials (including images found on the internet) is prohibited.
5. A minimum of two adults functioning with an official organizational capacity should have full access to all organizational accounts and sites. Any individual with full access to organization accounts/sites shall refrain from sharing passwords or account information with anyone, including trusted friends or family members.

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<sup>1</sup> The guidelines of the Local Church are compiled and revised from the document *Recommended Technology Guidelines for Pastoral Work with Young People*, Draft 5- May 27, 2010 for Catholic dioceses, parishes, schools, and organizations, ©2010, National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. Used with permission.

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6. Church Organizations shall ensure that reasonable technical and security measures are in place to prevent unauthorized access to organizational accounts and sites.
7. Those assigned as administrators of social media accounts are responsible for monitoring any content posted there by users.
8. Staff and volunteers utilizing internet-based communication services, either for ministerial or personal use, should always bear in mind that they represent the Catholic Church in all interactions at all times. Staff and volunteers should avoid using such resources in a manner that could reflect negatively on the Catholic Church. This may include mention of inappropriate use of alcohol, illicit drug use, advocacy of inappropriate media, vulgarity and profanity, inappropriate dress, or the expression of opinions contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church as interpreted by the bishop.
9. The use of gifs, stickers, emoji, and other image-based communications tools should be done with caution. Many such images take on inappropriate or vulgar connotations that are not immediately obvious. Be sure you know what you are communicating before sending your message.
10. Prior written consent must be obtained before posting on any public website personal photographs or personal information of staff, volunteers or minors, including but not limited to family pictures, social events, or personal contact information (such as home phone numbers, addresses, and personal email addresses).

### Electronic Communication with Minors

These policies supplement the Diocesan Child Protection Policy and should be read with them in mind:

1. Because of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), most online services do not allow access by children under the age of 13. Church organizations must review and adhere to any terms of use, age restrictions, and privacy options and controls for each site prior to establishing a church organization presence. With the exception of Catholic schools utilizing online educational services, Church Organizations should not use online services to communicate with anyone under the age of 13 but should instead communicate with their parents or legal guardians. Catholic schools utilizing online educational services, including video conferencing systems, must follow the guidelines established by the Office of Catholic Schools.
2. Written permission from their parents or legal guardians must be obtained prior to posting photographs, audio, video, or other personally identifiable information of minors on the organization's website, blog, or social media presences. When posting photographs, audio, or video clips of minors, it is advisable to caption the photograph using only the individual's first name and to disable photo tagging features.

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3. Parents or legal guardians must be informed of and given access to any electronic communication services used in ministry with minors.
4. Parents and legal guardians should be reminded of their responsibility to monitor and control the use of the internet and social media sites by their children.
5. One-on-one communication with a minor over the internet should be bound by the standards expected in general of one-on-one communication with a minor (e.g., interruptible, open, etc.). Consent must be obtained from parents or legal guardians for one-on-one communication with a minor over the internet, and parents and legal guardians must be copied on any communications (e.g., e-mail, text messages, etc.), if requested.
6. Clear guidelines and parameters should be established with regard to times of communication between adults and minors. While minors may be on the phone or texting late in the evening staff and volunteers who minister with minors should pre-determine a timeframe when it is too late to take a Church Organizational message or call except in the case of an emergency.
7. Communications should be professional and rendered on behalf of the Church Organization to minors.
8. Minors should be discouraged from communicating from private locations, such as their bedrooms, especially if there is a video component to the communication.
9. Care should be taken to maintain professional and appropriate boundaries in all communication. Do not overstep the boundaries of adult/minor relationships.
10. Avoid any communication which might be construed as having sexual overtones. Do not reply to such messages received from minors; instead, make and keep a copy of the communication and notify an administrator/pastor/supervisor immediately.

### Websites

A Church Organization website is an internet website / tool created by staff or volunteers for the primary purpose of furthering the ministry of the Church Organization and conducting related Church Organization business. Such websites generally inform individuals about the resources, ministries, and events of a Church Organization. The guidelines below represent ways to ensure the safe and effective transmission of a Church Organization's mission.

1. The Diocesan Child Protection Policy and the general social media policies listed above pertain to websites as well.
2. Church Organizations should make every effort to establish an organization website and commit to regularly updating the content.
3. The 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.

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4. Website content should consistently represent the views/teachings of the Catholic Church as interpreted by the bishop and pursuant to Canon Law.
5. Communication with visitors should be conducted through official organizational emails, if provided.

### Social Networking Sites

Social media is the fastest growing form of communication in the United States, especially among minors and young adults. The guidelines below provide direction to allow parish personnel to connect with and minister to all people using new forms of media and to ensure that use of social media protects the safety of all people.

1. The Diocesan Child Protection Policy and the general social media policies listed above pertain to social networking sites as well.
2. Adult staff and volunteers are required to establish separate accounts and profiles for personal and professional use. However, all material on the internet should be presumed to be public and nothing should be posted that one considers to be truly private.
3. Parent and legal guardians of minors must be informed that a social networking site is being used as part of the Church Organization. Parents and legal guardians should be informed of their responsibility to monitor and control the use of the internet and social media sites by their children.
4. Church Organization must review and adhere to any terms of use, age restrictions, and privacy options and controls for each site prior to establishing a social media presence.
5. Staff and volunteers should not accept friend requests from minors.
6. No expectation should be made that Church employees or volunteers will monitor the personal profiles of parishioners. However, if a crisis situation comes to the attention of employees or volunteers via social networking, it should be treated the same as any other form of communication.
7. The Church Organization should create and post a “code of conduct” for users and visitors that connect through social media sites; for example:
  - a. “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 advertising or solicitations. Should your content be deemed inappropriate, your comments will be deleted and we will block users from future posting.”

### Messaging Services

Prudent judgment should always be used with text-based communication tools. As with verbal communication, some individuals may misunderstand or misinterpret meaning and emotion.

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These guidelines provide specific methods to help avoid inappropriate communication or miscommunication with those ministering to the faithful.

1. The Diocesan Child Protection Policy and the general social media policies listed above pertain to text messaging as well.
2. Messaging services provided by a Church Organization should be used only for organizational purposes. Any use of such messaging services that interferes with Church Organizational activities and functions, or that does not respect the mission, image and reputation of the Church, is prohibited.
3. Staff and volunteers must maintain separate email accounts for professional and personal communications.
4. Text communications can be logged, archived, and forwarded to other parties. The same boundaries observed in other personal communication should be followed when communicating via text messaging. Avoid engaging in any communications that could be misconstrued or misinterpreted.
5. If provided, organizational email accounts must be used for all professional communications.
6. Write as though others will read what is written. Messages may easily be shared or forwarded to others.
7. There is no such thing as private messaging when using messaging services provided by the Church Organization or when staff or volunteers are engaged in Church Organization activities. The diocese reserves the right to inspect, copy, store or disclose the contents of electronic messages when appropriate to prevent or correct improper use of such services or ensure compliance with diocesan policies, procedures or regulations, satisfy a legal obligation, or ensure the proper operations of diocesan technology.
8. Ask "If my bishop/pastor/principal wanted to see this communication, would I be embarrassed by what I have written?" If the answer is "yes," do not send the message.
9. Text communications can be misinterpreted. Always double check to see if someone reading it might read something into it that is not intended or if your message might be misinterpreted.
10. The following specific actions and use of Church Organization messaging services is forbidden:
  - a. Concealment or misrepresentation of names or affiliations;
  - b. Alteration of source or destination addresses;
  - c. Use of messaging for commercial or private business purposes that have not been approved by a pastor or supervisor;
  - d. Use of messaging for organized political activity or political solicitation;
  - e. Use of messaging to harass or threaten other individuals or groups;
  - f. Use of messaging that degrades or demeans other individuals.

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### Video Messaging and Conferencing

Video communication is increasingly common and often used in situations when face-to-face gatherings are unfeasible or inadvisable.

1. The Diocesan Child Protection Policy and the general social media policies listed above pertain to video messaging and conferencing as well.
2. Streaming video may be used for education, catechesis, communication, and promotional purposes consistent with the ministry of the Catholic Church.
3. Any use of live streaming video or chat rooms that leads to, supports, or encourages exclusive minor-adult relationships is prohibited.
4. Written permission (email or signed statement) must be secured before recording or streaming speakers, preachers, catechists, etc., whether or not the recording will be shared or stored.
5. With the exception of Catholic schools utilizing video conferencing systems for educational purposes, video conferencing should only be used with adults and minors age 13 or older. (Catholic schools utilizing video conferencing systems for educational purposes must follow the guidelines established by the Office of Catholic Schools.)
6. Inform parents and legal guardians if you plan to use remote conference systems with minors and that you plan to record the session. Provide them with the login information and let them know that for the safety of all parties the session will be recorded.
7. Links to video conferences, especially those with minors, should not be posted in public places; they should only be sent to those who are invited to join the conference and, in the case of youth, their parents or legal guardians.
8. Clergy and lay leaders should never be the only adult on a remote conference with youth. Another Safe & Sacred trained adult or the minor's parent or legal guardian should be on the conference.
9. For the safety of the student, Church employees, and volunteers, all streaming sessions involving minors must be recorded. These recordings should be stored on the conferencing platform or, if this is not possible, downloaded and stored on a Church Organization computer and not on an employee or volunteer's personal device.
10. Recordings of video conferencing sessions may be retained until the end of the school year/ministry cycle. At the end of that time the recordings will be deleted. Church Organizations should identify an employee responsible for maintaining and deleting these recordings.
11. Recordings of video conferences may be posted for broader ministerial use, so long as the recording only includes adults, the speaker, and any presentation materials (PowerPoint slides, etc.). If the recording includes audio or video of a minor, written permission from

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a parent or legal guardian must be obtained before posting the recording. (Videos may be edited to remove audio and video from minors.)

### Blogging

A blog is a website, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are typically displayed in reverse chronological order. These guidelines clarify the ministerial use of blogs and safety precautions for those utilizing blogs in ministry.

1. The Diocesan Child Protection Policy and the general social media policies listed above pertain to blogs as well.
2. Professional, ministry-based blogs should only be utilized to promote upcoming events or programs and for the purposes of evangelization, catechesis, and ministry communication. Blogs are an efficient method for disseminating fliers for upcoming activities, permission / consent forms, calendars, and ministerial updates.
3. Organization blogs should not be used to conduct or promote outside businesses or personal activities and should not divulge any personal information regarding those to whom ministry is being given.
4. Posted information, opinions, references, and resources should reflect and be consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Communication should be professional and rendered on behalf of the Church Organization to the intended audience.
5. If minors are to engage in blogging as a part of an educational or catechetical activity, such activity must be monitored by at least two adults.

### Online Registration and Information Security

Protecting the identity and personally identifiable information of those served by schools, parishes and other organizations is of utmost importance. These guidelines provide methods to ensure that any secure communications have proper documentation and protection, particularly those of a financial nature.

1. The Diocesan Child Protection Policy and the general social media policies listed above pertain to online registration as well.
2. If the explanation of these technologies and the recommendations accompanying them are beyond the technical competence of the webmaster or staff person responsible for registration forms, that should be taken as a sign that the organization should not be using online forms and information collection.
3. The creation and maintenance of secure web forms should be entrusted to a qualified web solution provider or IT professional.

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4. Sensitive or personally identifiable information (defined for purposes of this policy to include but not limited to) financial information, credit card numbers, checking account numbers, and secure identifiers (e.g. information that can be used to identify a person, such as their name, family members' names, home address, personal identifier such as a social security number, email address, student ID number, list of personal characteristics, date of birth, or any other information that would make the individual's identity easily traceable) should never be transmitted through email, web pages that convert form information into email, or non-secure web forms.
5. No sensitive or personally identifiable information should be transmitted over 'Secure Sockets Layer' (SSL) unless the user can receive assurance that the communication with the server can be verified through third party services (Verisign, etc.).
6. Financial transactions should be handled in real time – that is, on a platform that can process credit card transactions online, assuring that financial data is not being communicated to or stored by the Church Organization.
7. All information collected through online registration systems should be stored and disposed of in accordance with the Diocesan Records Management, Data Retention Policy and Schedule.
8. The collection of health-related information (e.g., on permission forms) should be kept to the minimum needed to adequately ensure the safety and accessibility of events. Contact the diocese for sample forms.

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**Policy Approval**

By these directives, I hereby affirm that the processes and policies adopted to manage the technologies deployed within the offices of The Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana are in accord with Catholic Moral Teachings and Principles.

I also affirm that these directives are adopted with the intention of being prudent and diligent caretakers of the technology platforms, and the information housed on these platforms, used to support and sustain the ministry of the Church.

Given at the Chancery of The Diocese on this 13th date in July, in the year of Our Lord, 2020.

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Most Reverend Timothy L. Doherty, S.T.L., Ph.D.  
Bishop of the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana

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Very Reverend Theodore C. Dudzinski, J.C.L.  
Vicar General / Chancellor / Moderator of the Curia