



SAFE ENVIRONMENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY USE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION AND MINISTRY SITUATIONS

The Safe Environment program already in place for the Diocese of Bismarck provides guidance that can be applied to both traditional in-person interactions and also those interactions that utilize electronic devices and communications using technology via multiple social media platforms.

The goal is to continue to provide a safe environment for our children, use safe procedures when using electronic communication, and to protect the reputations of employees, educators and volunteers within our churches and schools. To do this, existing guidelines and procedures have been established, and must be implemented and followed so that adults can be clear about all types of proper communication with minors. The use of all resources must be consistent with the mission of the Catholic Church.

Diocesan, parish and school policies are not intended to limit your ability to communicate, but to allow the communication in safe and effective ways that maintain a professional character and organizational focus. It is imperative in keeping with our goal of creating and teaching a safe environment that our communications with minors stay within appropriate boundaries that maintain a professional relationship.

All employees, educators and volunteers must be aware of and follow all existing diocesan, parish and catholic school manuals and/or handbooks at their location. All policies applying to interactions with minors and all communications via the use of technology are to be adhered to.

Diocese of Bismarck Safe Environment Program

<https://bismarckdiocese.com/safe-environment-program>

Diocese of Bismarck Code of Conduct

(Guidelines below are applicable, but the whole document is relevant)

Ministerial Behavior Guidelines

Appropriate Boundaries for Clergy and Church Personnel

The Use of Technology and Social Media

A Guide for Technology Safety through the Eyes of Faith

<https://www.faithandsafety.org/> is provided on the USCCB website and is a valuable source of information for parishes, schools and families.

State of ND Virtual Conferencing Platform Assessment & Guidelines

<https://www.nd.gov/itd/sites/itd/files/Zoom-Risk-Assessment-Final-4.8.2020.pdf>

The following directives are supplemental to all policies already in place in the Diocese of Bismarck, including all parishes and catholic schools. These examples highlight the most important aspects of communications with minors, especially in light of communications using technology while distance education or ministry is utilized. Some are especially applicable to youth ministry.

1. Background check policy still applies.
2. Adult Safe Environment training still applies.
3. Child/Youth Safe Environment training still applies if possible via distance learning and/or providing information to households.
4. Clear communication must be provided to parents regarding all types of communication via technology or social media platforms – dates, times, reasons for contact and an opportunity for the parent/guardian to give permission for their child to participate or not (without penalty).
5. Parent/Guardian must be given the information necessary (links, codes, account access) to participate in all communications at any time.
6. Parishes and schools must document permissions from parents/guardians (yes/no, date given, method used- text, email, etc).
7. Background checked and safe environment trained adults (2 if possible) should be facilitators of two-way live video streaming or conferencing. These adults should be familiar with the means of electronic communication being used, and enable all appropriate privacy measures provided within the platform.
8. Two-way live video streaming or conferencing including minors must be recorded if the platform allows (for the safety of all involved) but never posted publicly online or in any way. All participants must be notified that the communications may be recorded, with the saved version accessible by a facilitator and one other employee of the parish or school.
9. The location of two-way live communications should be a professional setting (not a bedroom or restroom) and the participants should be dressed appropriately and modestly. The background should be free of any offensive or inappropriate audio/visual materials.
10. Communications time frames must be limited to between the hours of 8:00 am - 9:00 pm.
11. Ensure appropriate conduct is observed, including appropriate and respectful language, treating all communications as if they were public.
12. Ensure that the purpose of all types of electronic communications within diocesan parishes and schools is to provide information related to education or ministry, and not for interactions of a personal or private one-to-one nature.
13. Posting of any and all personally identifiable information is prohibited. This includes but is not limited to names, home address, email address, phone numbers, photos, videos, age or grade level and school affiliation.
14. Maintain an age-appropriate means of communication. Youth ministry communications are traditionally appropriate for middle and high school age participants. For younger ages, directly communicating with a parent/guardian is preferred.

Questions about the Diocese of Bismarck Safe Environment or Catechesis and Youth Programs may be directed to Stephanie Hoesel (204-7213) or Christopher Kraft (204-7208).