

Diocese of Tyler

Social Media Policy

Policy Statement

The Diocese of Tyler and its affiliates recognize that in today's environment, with the increasing prevalence of the Internet, employees, clerics and volunteers will use the Internet to conduct ministry work and to communicate with associates and friends. The Internet provides various ways for individuals to interact and has changed the way we communicate and share information. The Diocese of Tyler views the Internet as an important educational and evangelizing tool to promote school and ministerial programs. The diocese encourages administrators, pastors and principals to support Internet use and to give employees, clerics and volunteers the necessary training and tools to interact safely and responsibly online. Those using the Internet should bear in mind that certain comments and information may have a harmful effect on the Diocese of Tyler, its reputation, its employees and constituents. In light of this possibility, employees, clerics and volunteers are required to adhere to the following policy regarding the use of personal and ministry websites including social networks and blogs and other forms of online communication.

This policy and accompanying procedures are approved on July 6, 2015, the Feast of St. Maria Goretti.

Most Reverend Joseph E. Strickland
Bishop of Tyler

Introduction

The field of social media is rapidly changing. These guidelines are offered as a synthesis of best practices. They include material compiled from church entities, for-profit corporations and non-profit organizations. In the Diocese of Tyler both the Communications Office and the Youth Evangelization Office are available as resources in using Social Media in ministry.

In this document, “church personnel” is defined as anyone – priest, deacon, religious, bishop, lay employee or volunteer – who provides ministry or service or is employed by an entity associated with the Catholic Church. Please see appendix for additional definitions.

Procedures

Respect and Appropriate Boundaries

In the Diocese of Tyler, all online and electronic communications must be done in a way that insures a Safe Environment as we do in physical interactions. These procedures are offered to guide our Church’s effort. In accomplishing this, the Diocese of Tyler can offer assistance through the Communications and Youth Evangelization offices.

Password-Protected Sites

Both ministry websites and personal websites may involve the use of a username/password or other such means to access all or portions of the site. In the event that a cleric, employee or volunteer, subject to approval by the Diocese of Tyler or its affiliate, gives a child access to a website that is not otherwise openly accessible to the public, that same access must also be provided to the child’s parent/guardian, if the parent/guardian so desires.

Ministry Websites

The Diocese of Tyler and its affiliates support the creation of ministry websites as a means to conduct diocesan/affiliate ministry. The use of ministry websites is encouraged when conducting diocesan/affiliate educational and evangelizing programs. Supervisors who approve individuals to create a ministry website for dispersal of information are responsible for monitoring the ministry website. Sites should be set up in a way that is easily sustained and documented. The Communications Office is glad to assist in this effort.

Personal Websites

The Diocese of Tyler and its affiliates recognize that church personnel, employees and volunteers may create personal websites as a medium of self-expression. Clerics and religious are public people and so no website or postings can be for them truly “personal”, all are expressions as public persons of the Church. Employees, clerics and volunteers must recognize that anything published on a personal website is no different from making such information available in any public forum. Any program contrary to the magisterium of the Catholic Church or that causes or has the potential to cause embarrassment to the Diocese of Tyler or its affiliates should be avoided. Note: If church personnel elect to use personal websites to conduct diocesan/affiliate ministry, the personal websites must be approved, and are subject to monitoring, by their supervisor or designee.

Ministry Blogs

The Diocese of Tyler and its affiliates support the use of blogging as a ministry communication tool. It is

an excellent platform for creating and distributing information. Blogging for ministry should be approved by ones supervisor. Although blogging is a powerful communication tool, ministry blogs may not be used for: 1) conducting or promoting outside business 2) defaming the character of any individual or institution 3) causing embarrassment to the Diocese of Tyler or its affiliates or 4) divulging any personal information about children, particularly that which jeopardize their safety or well-being in any way.

Personal Blogs and Personal Profiles on Social Media Platforms

Clerics and religious are public persons and so their online and electronic communications must always be in good taste and reflect Church teachings and values.

When employees and volunteers identify himself/herself as, or is manifestly understood to be, an employee or minister/volunteer of the Diocese of Tyler or its affiliates on a personal blog, a personal profile for a social media platform, or other website with a similar purpose, the employee automatically (even without intention) represents the Catholic Church and it's teachings. To help reduce the potential of confusion, statements like:

“The views expressed on this [website, personal profile, etc] are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer, or the Catholic Church”. This statement does not grant permission for those representing the Diocese officially or unofficially to express themselves contrary to Catholic teaching.

Confidential and Proprietary Information

Church personnel are prohibited from disclosing via the Internet information that is understood to be held in confidence by the Diocese of Tyler or its affiliates.

Employees, clerics and volunteers are prohibited from disclosing via the Internet any information that is proprietary to the Diocese of Tyler or its affiliates, except by explicit permission of the appropriate authority.

Trademarks and Logos

Diocesan trademarks and logos are not to be used on any flyer, mailer, email, video, or publication without written consent from the Diocesan Communication office. Church personnel who have received permission to use such trademarks or logo's, may only use them for publication in ways that clearly promote or call positive attention to diocesan sponsored events, websites or organizations associated with the trademark or logo. Church personnel may not use diocesan or affiliate trademarks or logos on their personal websites, flyers or advertisements in any way that could reasonably suggest diocesan or affiliate sponsorship or agreement with any views expressed.

Inappropriate Language and Images

The Diocese of Tyler and its affiliates will not tolerate employees, clerics or volunteers posting obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory, defamatory or otherwise potentially scandalous comments, links and/or images which reflect discredit or cause embarrassment to the Diocese of Tyler or its affiliates, employees, vendors, partners, agencies, schools and others. Any activity via Social Media or other Electronic Communication that contains any of the above and/or reflects negatively on the Diocese of Tyler or its affiliates, employees, venders, partners, agencies, schools, or others is prohibited.

Right to Review

The Diocese of Tyler and its affiliates reserve the right to review any personal website, social media or messaging systems that are being used for ministry purposes by any church personnel if there are reasonable grounds for believing that this diocesan policy is being violated.

Protection of Children

Church personnel of the Diocese of Tyler and its affiliates will comply with all aspects of the Ethics and Integrity policy of the Diocese of Tyler. Employees, clerics and volunteers are forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information, including photos and/or video, of any child under the age of eighteen without verifiable consent of a parent or guardian. Personal identifiable information includes full name, photos, home address, email address, telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a child. Verifiable consent can take the form of a release/permission form, an email from a parent or guardian, or spoken permission by a parent or guardian in the presence of another adult. The Diocese of Tyler and its affiliates will review alleged violations of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, and the Ethics and integrity Policy of the Diocese of Tyler, on a case-by-case basis.

When Communicating with Children Using Social Media or Other Electronic Communication:

- There must be at least two adults with administrative rights for each Social Media account used specifically for ministry communication.
- When any Social Media accounts are being used for communication, Adults must not initiate or continue conversation with children for socialization purposes.
- The primary purpose of such communication shall be for ministerial purposes, or for providing information related to a ministry or event and not for socialization or other personal interaction.
- Counseling of children through such communication methods is discouraged. In the event social media conversations like this arise, printed or electronic copy must be provided to youth minister, religious education coordinator, pastor or director supervisor and kept on file for your personal records.
- Parents must be notified of the methods of communication which are used in each particular ministry and must be granted access in such communications.
- Social Media, online or other electronic communication may not be used to communicate with children who have not reached the 9th grade, but instead should be directed to their parents.
- Children may “Like” public Facebook pages and other official social media accounts for a ministry where children are involved.
- Church Personnel are not permitted to “friend” or “follow” social media of children without the consent of parents. Adults should limit the access to personal information to young people regardless of consent. This includes home address, cell phone, photos of alcohol consumption or immodesty.
- When children form their own Social Media groups for their own social media gatherings, adults should not join these groups.
- Group messages with multiple “ethics and integrity” trained adults is encouraged over personal messaging. If children contact particular adults engaged in ministry, it is the responsibility of the adult to keep the conversation limited in time, frequency, and only for the purpose of ministry.
- When the contact between an adult and child is not appropriate, becomes frequent, or is done during inappropriate times, the adult is to avoid using social media, or devices to respond. In those cases where Social Media or electronic devices are used to respond to children, adults should maintain copies of all such messages and notify direct church supervisor and parents of the correspondence.
- Acceptable hours for communication with children via other electronic communications shall be between 8a.m. and 9p.m. Communication outside of the acceptable hours may be used only in emergency situations or to communicate time sensitive information related to the ministry or ministry related event.

- On line “chatting” for social reasons with children is not permitted.
- Communication with children using social media should only be done for ministerial purposes, with the consent of parents and church personnel. Only those who have “Ethics and Integrity” training, and are holding an official position as a youth minister, catechist, or trained adult working with teens, are permitted to communicate with minors.
- Anyone using social media to contact minors within the Diocese of Tyler should be open and willing to undergo search of social media messaging systems. As a general rule, adults should not engage children in social media in ways they would not allow any adult to view their profiles, messages, texts or other forms of communication.
- Posting inappropriate text, pictures, videos or other media content, where minors of the Diocese of Tyler are present is never acceptable. This includes inappropriate language or content, photographs of alcohol consumption, illegal activity, scandalous behavior, excessive violence, discriminatory words or actions, immodesty, or anything which may be offensive. These items posted in youth accessible areas of social media are subject to removal.

Social media accounts in which minors have access to and communication with should be monitored frequently and with multiple “Ethics and integrity” trained users who have a current ACS. Multiple adults monitoring a social media account will help prevent breakdowns in communication and assure that an important message is responded to in a timely fashion.

Guiding Principles

“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) – Pope Benedict XVI, 2010 World Communication Day message

Social media is one of the fastest growing forms of communication in the United States, especially among youth and young adults. Our Church cannot ignore it, but at the same time we must engage social media in a manner that is safe, responsible and civil.

As Pope Benedict XVI noted in his message for the 44th World Day of Communication, this new 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.”

The Church can use social media to encourage respect, dialogue and honest relationships – in other words, “true friendship” (43rd World Communication Day Message). 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 to digital literacy.

You may want to read both the [43rd](#) and [44th](#) World Day of Communication messages. These are available by Googling Pope Benedict Communications

The Church and Social Media: An Overview

The online encyclopedia Wikipedia defines social media as “ ... media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Social media use web-based technologies to transform and broadcast media monologues into social media dialogues”¹.

A longer and perhaps more philosophical definition is offered by Jon Lebkowsky, a longtime social media specialist, on his site, weblogsky.com:

Social Media is a fundamental transformation in the way(s) people find and use information and content, from hard news to light entertainment. It’s an evolution from broadcast delivery of content – content created by a few and distributed to many – to network delivery, where content can be created by anyone and published to everyone, in a context that is “many to many.” Said another way, publication and delivery by professionals to mass audiences has changed – now publication and delivery can be by anyone, professional or not, to niche audiences through networks of many channels. This is because the means of production are broadly accessible and inexpensive.

As a result of all this, attention and mindshare are fragmented, there’s emphasis on relationship, new forms of media are conversational, and transaction costs for communication approach zero.

Social media offers both opportunities and challenges to Catholic organizations. These can be grouped into three primary categories:

- Visibility
- Community
- Accountability

Visibility

Online social media communities are vast and growing at a rapid pace². Given the size and scope of these communities, they offer excellent forums for the Church's visibility and evangelization.

The key question that faces each Church organization that decides to engage social media is: “How will we engage?” Careful consideration should be made to determine the particular strengths of each form of social media (blogs, social networks, text messaging, etc.) and the needs of a ministry, parish or organization. The strengths should match the needs. For instance, a blog post may not be the most effective way of reminding students of an event. However, a mass text message to all students and their parents telling them that the retreat begins at 9 a.m. may be very effective.

1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

2 For example, the number of active users on Facebook is greater than the population of the United States. (<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>).

Social media also requires constant input and monitoring to maintain visibility and awareness of the Church's presence through that particular social media. To keep members, a social networking site needs to have new content on a regular basis. In the case of social media, the axiom "build it and they will come" is not applicable. It would be important to set internal expectations regarding how often posts will be made, so that your "followers" can become accustomed to your schedule.

Community

Social media can be a powerful tool for strengthening community, although social media interaction should not be viewed as a substitute for face-to-face gatherings. Social media can support communities in a myriad of ways: connecting people with similar interests, sharing information about in-person events, providing ways for people to dialogue, etc.

A well-considered use of social media has the ultimate goal of encouraging "true friendship" (43rd World Communication Day Message) and of understanding the human longing for meaningful community.

Accountability

Social media provides a tool for building community. Membership in communities also requires accountability and responsibility. Users of social media expect site administrators to allow dialogue, to provide information and to acknowledge mistakes. The explosion of information available to social media consumers has meant that they often only use information from trusted sites or sites recommended by those whom they trust.

While not every demand or inquiry can be met, it is important that creators and site administrators of social media understand how different social media is from mass media and the expectations of its consumers. Many communication experts are describing the adaption of social media as a paradigm shift in how humans communicate, as important a development as that of the printing press and the discovery of electronic communication.

Definitions

Definitions provide clarity and a common language.

Blog: A blog (a contraction of the term "web log") is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.

Examples: There are many types of blogs on sites throughout the Internet. They are common for celebrities, writers, journalists, etc. WordPress is one of the more popular tools used to create blogs.

Micro-blog: A form of multimedia blogging that allows users to send brief text updates or micromedia such as photos or audio clips and publish them, either to be viewed by anyone or by a restricted group which can be chosen by the user. These messages can be submitted by a variety of means, including text messaging, instant messaging, E-mail, digital audio or the web. The content of a micro-blog differs from a traditional blog in that it is typically smaller in actual size and aggregate file size. A single entry could consist of a single sentence or fragment or an image or a brief, ten second video.

Example: Twitter – A form of micro-blogging, entries are limited to 140 characters.

Social Media/Network: A Web 2.0 site that is entirely driven by content of its members. Individuals are allowed flexibility in privacy settings, in posting text, photos, video, links and other information, and in level of interaction with other members.

Examples: Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace. Twitter, YouTube and Flickr are often also included in lists of social networking sites, although sometimes YouTube and Flickr are designated as multimedia sharing sites, while Twitter is currently more often designated as a micro-blogging application.

Ministry website³: An Internet website/tool created by employees, clerics and volunteers for the sole purpose of conducting diocesan/ affiliate business.

Personal website: A social network page, blog or any Internet website/tool created by employees, clerics, and volunteers primarily to share personal communication with friends and family.

Other Electronic Communication: Electronic communication technologies that are not defined as Social Media/Network (e.g., cell phone, email, texting, etc.)

Supervisor: the hiring and/or supervising agent: for parish staff, the pastor; for parish volunteers, the appropriate administrator (e.g., Director of Religious Education or Director of Youth Ministry); for school personnel, the principal.

Employee: any person who is employed by the Diocese of Tyler or an affiliate. An employee may be a cleric or a lay person who may also be a member of a religious institute.

Cleric: an ordained priest or an ordained deacon who is incardinated in the Diocese of Tyler, as well as a

3 Definitions for ministry website and personal website are from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's Social Media Policy

religious priest or deacon, or a priest or deacon incardinated in another diocese, who is engaged in a ministry under the control or auspices of the Diocese of Tyler or an affiliate.

Adult: an individual who is eighteen years of age or older.

Child: a person under 18 years of age or a physically or mentally disabled person under 21 years of age.

Volunteer: an adult who works without financial or material gain on behalf of the Diocese of Tyler or its affiliates who is not an employee or a cleric (for example, an intern, catechist, scout leader, coach, student teacher and others in similar capacities).

Affiliate: a joining member that has ties to or relationship with a larger entity. This could include parish or diocesan groups, volunteers, organization leaders, members of a community or anyone with known association or connection.