THE DIOCESE of BUFFALO

SOCIAL MEDIA & WEBSITE GUIDELINES

Introduction:

Social media is a means to effectively communicate about Catholic ministry, formation, education, and outreach. These guidelines apply to all Church and school personnel (employees, priests, deacons, members of religious order) and volunteers (hereinafter referred to as "social media users") and their use of social media including social networking sites, blogs and the creation, content and use of parish and school websites. The same responsibilities individuals have to create a safe environment in the physical space of parish/school ministry and written and verbal communications extends to social media sites.

Definitions:

Administrative Access: Access to Website management tools or a Social Media Account/Profile that allows a person to modify, create, delete, or publish content.

Adult: An individual who is 18 years of age or older (see exception under definition of child).

Child/Minor: An individual who has not yet reached the age of 18, or who is age 19, 20 or 21 and enrolled in high school.

Content: Any digital information that communicates a message, including but not limited to text, photos, audio files, and video files.

Personal Social Media: A social network page, blog or Internet website/tool created by an employee, priest, deacon, member of religious order or volunteer to share personnel communication with friends and associates.

Site Administrator: A person who is authorized to have full control over Parish/school's social media and website. An administrator must have written permission of pastor or immediate supervisor.

Social Media Sites: Online sites used for communication purposes include but are not limited to Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Google, LinkedIn, and Tumblr. For purposes of this policy, blogs are encompassed in this definition.

Social Media Users: Church and school personnel (employees, priests, deacons, members of religious order) and volunteers.

Vulnerable Adult: A person who is impaired by reason of mental illness, mental deficiency, physical illness, or disability to the extent that he or she lacks sufficient understanding or capacity to make or communicate responsible decisions concerning his or her person or to manage his or her affairs effectively.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ESTABLISHING SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE:

• Each parish/school should have a minimum of two site administrators, who are adults and have successfully completed Safe Environment training to allow for continuous monitoring and updating of social media sites. At least one of the site administrators must be an employee. In the case of a location with a school, one administrator should be a school employee and one administrator should be affiliated with the parish. At least one of the site administrators must have sufficient knowledge of Catholic doctrine so as to effectively monitor site(s) for proper theological content. Contact information should be published to permit notification of concerns or requests.

• All established social media sites must be approved and registered with the site administrator and have the Pastor's prior approval.

• All social media being used by a parish/school must be clearly branded (logo).

• All social media must be regularly reviewed, preferably daily, by both site administrators to ensure it is not in conflict with current standards, policies, Catholic teachings, and local, state and federal laws and regulations.

• Site administrators must be familiar with the terms of use, age restrictions, privacy settings and controls of any social media site being used by the parish/school.

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES:

- Social media accounts and profiles are pastoral outreach and need to clearly identify oneself by using appropriate title.
- Social media passwords and addresses must be registered with the site administrators.
- Users should be aware of use, age restrictions, privacy options and controls for each site.

Content

- When posting on personal accounts, users should clearly identify themselves and display content in the first person and should not contradict the teachings of the Church
- All posts and comments on social media should reflect Christian charity and respect for the truth. Ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the information before its publication. Once published, Internet and Web content cannot be taken back. Once posted, it has been seen or electronically recorded.
- Ensure that all interactions conducted through social media do not: create scandal, bring disrepute upon parish/school or Diocese, or create an unsafe environment. Foul or abusive language, sexually suggestive language or images and other inappropriate language or behavior must be removed from the parish/school's social media platforms. The offending user's ability to post content or participate in that social media forum must be removed and depending on the extent of control and relationship appropriate corrective action taken may include discipline, termination or removal of volunteer ministry.
- Users must comply with copyright and intellectual property laws.
- Users are prohibited from disclosing confidential or proprietary information on parish/school social media sites or personal sites including but not limited to personal information about a staff or student such as asking for prayers for a child or staff's health condition.
- Unless a user has been officially authorized to speak or act on behalf of a parish/school you are prohibited from using such branding or creating secondary social media sites that give the illusion of being authoritative.
- Users are prohibited from using social media or website for political campaign activity, specifically users should not endorse or oppose candidates, political parties or groups of candidates. Adherence to Faithful Citizenship is required.
- Social media should not be the only way to promote events. All upcoming events promoted through social media should be available in alternate (print) form whenever possible.
- Post an Information Acceptable Use Policy for each social networking site and block anyone who does not abide by the Acceptable Use Policy. These policies should always be brief and immediately apparent to visitors. Visitors should also be made aware of the consequences of violations of the Acceptable Use Policy. The Acceptable Use Policy on the Diocesan Facebook site is as follows: *"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."*

Posting Pictures and Videos

- Tagging of individuals should be avoided unless the person is clearly a public figure. Visitor options should be limited to commenting only and not posting of pictures or videos.
- On Facebook, care should be taken in deciding whether to permit non-administrators or unauthorized users from writing or posting content. If comments are allowed, administrators must monitor sites daily and remove inappropriate posting as necessary.
- Written permission in the form of a media release must be obtained before any photos or videos are used on a parish/school social media site or website for all minors, vulnerable adults, volunteers and employees of the parish/school. Specifically, there is a "Media Release" form which is to be used by all parishes and Catholic Schools giving parents the right to allow or disallow images of their children to be used in print media and social media. These forms are to be distributed each year and maintained on file. It is strongly suggested that parents be made aware when a photo of their child is about to be posted. Media release forms are also to be used for employees/volunteers and maintained on file.
- For social media sites that include content from sites such as YouTube, administrators should be aware that it is not possible to control the videos which pop up after the intended video, or suggested videos, or advertisements. Serious consideration should be given before allowing advertisements (monetization) on YouTube channels. Notify users by including language such as the following: *"The inclusion of links to other websites does not imply any endorsements of the material, postings, advertisements or comments on those websites. Parish/School reserves the right to remove objectionable content if and when we become aware of it."*

Reporting Process & Monitoring

- The parish/school should reserve the right to monitor websites, social networks and blogs created on parish/school computers at any time. There is no expectation of privacy.
- Users should report unauthorized use of parish/school logo to the site administrator.
- Users should report inappropriate content or postings to the site administrator.
- Users should report any unofficial sites that carry the Diocesan logo to the Office of Communications (716) 847-8717.

Accountability & Enforcement:

• Employees/volunteers may access websites or social media sites of the parish/school for legitimate professional job related purposes during the workday with the approval of their direct supervisor.

• Employees/volunteers are not to create, post or otherwise access social media sites or websites for personal use when working or volunteering.

• Employees/volunteers who violate the parish's/school's Social Media policy may be subject to termination of employment/removal as applicable. The creation of a social media presence or a disclaimer does not in any way limit the parish/school's ability to discipline or terminate an employee or remove a volunteer based on their actions or social media content.

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES WITH MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS:

• Parents need to be made aware of how social media is being used, how to access the site(s) and be given the opportunity to be copied on all material sent to their minor children via social networking (including text messages)

• Signed and written media consent from a parent/guardian is required before any photos or videos are used. Although school and faith formation programs have media releases from many parents allowing "blanket" permission of their child's image to be used, it is strongly suggested that parents be made aware when a photo of their child is about to be posted.

• If inappropriate content is posted by a minor/vulnerable adult, his/her parents/guardians must be notified.

• Personal identifiable information of a minor/vulnerable adult cannot be posted without parent/guardian consent. Personal identifiable information includes name, home address, email address, telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a minor/vulnerable adult. If written verifiable consent is obtained from a parent, the parent must have full knowledge of its use, purpose and how it is to be provided.

• Minors/Vulnerable Adults should not be tagged on parish/school website accounts or parish/school social media sites.

• Parish/School personnel and volunteers and parish/school administrators should not initiate first contact with a potential follower online who is a minor/vulnerable adult. Online "friend," "follower" or other similar requests for inclusion with social media networks should be made by the minor/vulnerable adult and approved by the site administrator with ongoing supervision of the communications.

• Save copies of conversations whenever possible, especially those that concern the personal sharing of a teen or young adult. (This may be especially important with text messaging.)

• Be aware of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act which is federal legislation that oversees how websites interact with children under age 13.

• Users should be mindful that communication via social media or texting should not occur during irregular hours (after 9:00 p.m. and before 8:00 a.m.)

PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA:

• Personal social media accounts should never be used to originate an advertisement or communication on behalf of the parish/school. Users should only use accounts and pages/profiles specifically created for the parish/school and specific ministry to generate a communication with the awareness that it may "shared" by personal accounts.

• Personal social media should not have content or positions contrary to Catholic teaching or debate or equivocate official Catholic teaching. Personal social media sites may not engage in any action which creates an unsafe environment; bring scandal or disrepute to the entity where you are employed or volunteer.

• Ministry personnel, priests, deacons and members of religious orders should separate their personal social media profiles from any profiles they use for ministry. Notwithstanding, personal postings are an extension of the pulpit. Personal social media should not have content or positions contrary to Catholic teaching or debate or equivocate official Catholic teaching. Ministry personnel, priests, deacons and members of religious orders should not engage in political campaign activity, specifically users should not endorse or oppose candidates, political parties or groups of candidates. Adherence to Faithful Citizenship is required.

• Photos or videos from parish/school ministry programs cannot be uploaded to a personal social media profile/page. Such videos or photos can instead be "shared" from an authorized parish/school/ministry page.