



Policies of the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Policy # 210.7

Policy for Use of Social Networks, Electronic and Online Communications by Diocesan Employees and Volunteers

Approved By: Most Reverend Robert W. Finn, DD

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Revised:

Introduction

Social and business networking tools – such as Facebook, Google+, Linked-In, and Twitter – provide broad, efficient and economical avenues for collaboration and communication. Social media opens alternative channels to establish strong relationships and to engage in global conversations related to the work of the Church and its core beliefs.

As employees and volunteers explore ways to integrate social media tools into communications, the diocese must ensure that its representatives act in ways that are consistent with the mission of the Church. Employees and volunteers should understand that messages and other information posted to social sites – whether of a personal, educational or work-related nature – are public comments or can become public comments that are attributable to the author.

As with other forms of social interaction, these guidelines affirm a diocesan commitment to communicate by means of social networks with:

- clarity about Church teachings and beliefs,
- honesty, integrity and charity,
- regard for the best interests of the Church, and,
- conformity with diocesan safe environment guidelines and the *Codes of Ethical Conduct*.

It is expected that this policy and these guidelines will evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge.

Policy for Employees and Volunteers

Employees who communicate by means of social media are representatives of the Church and should give witness to the values and teachings of the Church. (See Employee Handbook:

Policies for *Computer and Information Systems* and *Internet / Electronic Communication Usage*). Ultimately, the responsibility for personal and professional content resides with the employee. Supervisors have responsibility for making known the *Policy for Use of Social Networks* and addressing concerns about such use.

Volunteers also are representatives of the Church and perform an essential service to the community. Volunteer service is a privilege and not a right. Accordingly, volunteers who fail to comply with these guidelines may forfeit future opportunities to volunteer.

Public Information

Recognize that information posted to a social network site or online community is or can become public information. Remind other members of your social network or community of your position with the Church. Do not post inappropriate material or comments to your own or any other site and act promptly to remove inappropriate material or comments from your site that are posted by others.

Model Appropriate Behavior

Exercise discretion when using social networks or other online communities for professional and personal communication. Engage business colleagues, community contacts, parishioners, students, and personal acquaintances in a manner befitting the Church. There are fine lines between healthy debate and unhealthy arguments. Frame responses that represent the Church and respect differing points of view. Do not post or send material containing content that is discriminatory, offensive, obscene, threatening, harassing or intimidating to any person.

Group Associations

Associate with social networking groups and online communities that are consistent with the mission and activities of the Church.

Personal Responsibility and Transparency

A personal social media or other online site created or hosted by a diocesan employee should reflect Catholic values. The very nature of social networking implies that comments are public statements and are attributable to the individual. Employees using social networks and online communities should do so using their own names, not pseudonyms.

Use of Electronic and Web-Based Media With Youth

Recognize that adults should maintain appropriate boundaries when using electronic and web-based media to communicate with youth. Because youth are using texting and instant messaging as preferred methods of communication, youth ministers, coaches and teachers may need to utilize these and other new platforms of communication as well, subject to the restrictions described here and below in Sections 1 through 14.

Social network communication between diocesan employees or adult volunteers with youth who are or were under the adult's care or supervision in an official activity should occur only on official sites of the diocese, parish or school or through parent- or guardian-approved contact methods, ministry, parish or school. No site shall be operated without the prior written permission of the pastor, principal, or supervisor of the employee or volunteer.

Be transparent in all electronic interactions. Exercise sound judgment when communicating and establishing relationships with youth, and do not place yourself into a position which could

be viewed as compromising or which could have the appearance of impropriety. Remember to follow safe environment guidelines and Codes of Ethical Conduct always. Adults must be vigilant to protect God's children.

Employees and volunteers should set personal profile pages to a "private" setting so that youth do not have access to personal information.

Requirements for Establishing Social Networks or Online Communities for the Diocese, Ministry, Parish or a School

Participating in social networking or an online community on behalf of the Church is not a right, but rather an opportunity to serve the Church. Establishing a social network or online community or engaging in other forms of electronic or online communications with youth in the name of the diocese, a parish, or a school ministry requires accountability and responsibility.

Specifically, adult employees and volunteers may engage in communications covered by this policy only if each one of the following terms is met:

1. Sites must display the required *Online Code of Conduct for Community Members*. (See below).
2. Adults should administer and monitor sites established in conjunction with diocesan, church or school ministries.
3. All social networks must have at least two site administrators to ensure monitoring and continuity.
4. Employees and volunteers must not use personal sites: (a) to conduct or view communications with minors who are or were under their care or supervision in an official activity; or, (b) as the official site for diocesan, parish or school ministries.
5. Sites must display a logo, image or text identification that associates the site with the diocese, organization, parish, school or office. This identifier should appear on the site to distinguish it as the organization's official site and not that of an individual.
6. Passwords, site names and names of site administrators must be registered in a central location at the diocese, the parish or the school. Each location – Chancery, parish and school – must appoint an individual to maintain a record of all sites, passwords and site administrators.
7. Postings to sites must comply with copyright rules.
8. Sites must be designated for work-related or ministry purposes. (See Paragraph 5 above).
9. Minors may initiate contact with diocesan sites or through organizational social networking sites only if and after the minor's parent or guardian has executed a written consent form that substantially conforms to the attached model form. (See *model consent form*).
10. One-one-one or private electronic communications -- including but not limited to e-mail, texting, Facebook post, text or audio/video chat room communications, or instant messaging --

by employees or adult volunteers with minors is prohibited except to the extent that such communications are explicitly permitted in a written consent form that substantially conforms to the attached model form that has been executed by the minor's parent or guardian prior to any such communications. Consent forms shall be maintained in a central location at the diocese, the parish, or the school and shall be executed no less than once per year for each activity, program, class, team or event which utilizes or expects to utilize electronic communications between minors and adult employees or volunteers.

11. Diocesan and organizational sites should set permissions to prevent the "tagging" of pictures or images.

12. Narrations written by site administrators should not use the surnames of minors.

13. Official social networking site and online community administrators are responsible for monitoring the site on a reasonably regular basis depending on the frequency and volume of communications. Administrators are not responsible for monitoring the content of students' or other minors' personal pages or other extraneous material that is accessible only through one or more links or other portals to the official site.

Required Text for Online Codes of Conduct

The following must be posted to any social networking or online community site developed in the name of the diocese, parish or school:

All posts and comments to this site should express Christian charity and respect for the truth. Comments should be on topic and presume the good will of other commentators. Discussions should take place from a faith perspective. No advertising is permissible on this site unless it directly relates to diocesan, parish or school ministries or officially sanctioned events.



The Diocese of
Kansas City - St. Joseph

Parental or Guardian
Permission for
Direct Contact with Minors

This form allows you to identify who may communicate with your minor children and by what means.

Parents and guardians will be copied into all written or text-based communications except those that occur on an official social networking site or online community administered and maintained by the ministry, parish, or school pursuant to the terms of diocesan policy and approved by parents or guardians on this form.

➤ **Diocesan Ministry, Organization, Parish or School Completes**

(Ministry / Parish / School / Organization) communicates via:

(This section must be completed by diocesan ministry, organization, parish or school.)

◇ cellular number _____

◇ email address _____

◇ social networking site(s) _____

➤ **Parent or Guardian Completes**

◇ **You MAY NOT contact my children directly. (Sign and return).**

◇ **You MAY contact my children directly. (Sign, complete all sections and return).**

Name (parent / guardian) _____

of minor children _____

Contact with my children is permissible via the following methods:

◇ phone call / voice message to this telephone number _____

◇ SMS / text message to this telephone number _____

◇ social networking site sponsored by group named _____

◇ email at this address _____

Signature _____ **Date** _____