



***SOCIAL MEDIA  
POLICY  
of the  
DIOCESE  
of  
CAMDEN***

***(Promulgated 9/25/13)  
(Revised 9/17/15)***

# I INTRODUCTION

“There exists a Christian way of being present in the digital world: this takes the form of a communication which is honest and open, responsible and respectful of others. To proclaim the Gospel through the new media means not only to insert expressly religious content into different media platforms, but also to witness consistently, in one’s own digital profile and in the way one communicates choices, preferences and judgments that are fully consistent with the Gospel, even when it is not spoken of specifically...”<sup>1</sup>

In the above statement, Pope Benedict addresses both the message and the messenger of communications. Those who minister within the Church are charged to proclaim the Gospel by their words and with the witness of their lives. The core meaning of Pope Benedict’s words urges us to utilize new forms of social media to further this mission. How we pursue this goal must reflect the profound mission that we share and desire to communicate to others through the media enlisted for our use.

Efforts to engage in new and appropriate internal and external Church-related communications present new challenges, limitations and opportunities. For this reason, the use of communications technology has necessitated the development of policies that advance the Church's salvific mission while facilitating an awareness of boundaries, protecting the integrity of the information being delivered, and working to safeguard all those involved. This *Policy* addresses the acceptable use of internet and social media by employees and volunteers.

This Policy applies to all online and mobile-based communication tools (of every type, kind, nature and description) used for sharing content and discussing information, initiated or participated in by employees or volunteers of the Diocese of Camden, or any constituent Parish or any Parish School, or any employees or volunteers of Bishop McHugh Regional School, Camden Catholic High School, Holy Spirit High School, Paul VI High School and St. Joseph High School (hereafter “Diocese/Parish/School”), or hosted on other platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.). It includes all social networking vehicles owned or operated by the Diocese/Parish/School. Social media is a constantly evolving arena of communication, and so this Policy applies to all new media platforms whether or not they are specifically mentioned.

The Diocese of Camden reserves the right to make changes to this *Policy* at any time and with its sole discretion, and interpret and administer this *Policy* in light of changing circumstances and events. This policy will be reviewed at minimum on an annual basis.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI. *Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age*. On the occasion of the 45<sup>th</sup> World Communication Day, January 24, 2011.

**Failure to adhere to this policy may result in disciplinary action in the case of an employee, and a status review in the case of a volunteer. Such disciplinary action may include dismissal in the case of an employee and, in the case of a volunteer, removal from volunteer status.**

## **II BACKGROUND**

In his message for the 44<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day (2010), Pope Benedict XVI noted that social 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.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the Church can now “use social media guidelines to encourage respect, dialogue, and honest relationships... 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.”

While Pope Benedict XVI strongly recommends responsible use of digital media, he also raises another pastoral concern. Accompanying the reality of easy access to instant communications is the potential risk of losing sight of who our “neighbor” is. There is a new and very real danger “that we may be less present to those whom we encounter in our everyday life.” We may also fall into the trap of not taking “time to reflect critically on our choices and to foster human relationships which are truly deep and lasting. It is important to remember that virtual contact cannot and must not take the place of direct human contact with people at every level of our lives.”<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the internet age, diocesan and church “communication” referred to the transfer of information within the walls of a diocese or parish through parish bulletins, direct mail, education and formation programs, and similar endeavors. In the current milieu of mass media, a broader net can be cast to express the message of the Gospel over multiple channels. Employees and volunteers are required, however, to ensure their responsible use of technology as they use new communication tools that better enable us - as the Vision Statement of the Diocese of Camden states - to grow “ever more into a dynamic community of faith, hope, and love...” as the Catholic Church of South Jersey.

## **III PURPOSE OF THE POLICY**

Social networking is an important educational and evangelizing tool to promote programs and events, as well as to have informal discussions with a great variety of communities and individuals. The Diocese encourages administrators to support the use of social media technologies and to give employees, clerics and volunteers the necessary training and tools to interact safely and responsibly online. However, those

---

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from USCCB, *Guidelines for Social Media*, June 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Message for the 45<sup>th</sup> World Day of Communications, Benedict XVI, from the Vatican, 24 January 2011, Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.

using social media should bear in mind that certain comments and information may have an unintended, but harmful, effect.

The purpose of the *Policy* is four-fold:

1. To maximize best practices for wide-ranging delivery to and reception of the Good News through mass media and electronic communications channels.
2. To be respectfully and responsibly present to those whom we encounter in ministry on every level and in every form of communication.
3. To balance our digital presence with our real-life presence to all people in the Diocese of Camden and beyond.
4. To minimize the risk to the reputation of the Church that can be caused by improper and unauthorized external communications.

**Any use of social media that violates this Policy should be brought to the attention of the Director of Communications of the Diocese of Camden. In areas where this Policy does not provide a direct answer as to how employees or volunteers should answer social media questions, this question must be referred to the Director of Communications.**

## **IV SPECIFIC POLICIES**

1. This Policy applies to all employees and volunteers. It should be distributed or otherwise made available to all employees and volunteers.
2. A social network account for Church purposes will be independent of any individual's personal social networking account. The logon information will be documented and kept on file accessible to management.
3. The Moderator of the Curia or his designee will approve any media project of the Diocese, evaluate its appropriateness in ministry and determine who will develop it, as well as designate who will oversee its use. This authority lies with the pastor for a parish or a parish school and with the president for other schools.
4. All those using social or networking media will inform all interested and/or affected parties of this particular form of communication in order to be inclusive and fully transparent. This information may be published through a bulletin, newsletter, website, etc.
5. While engaged in social networking activities for the organization, employees and volunteers must adhere to the highest ethical, pastoral and legal standards. The content of any and all communications is subject to review and monitoring. There is to be no expectation of privacy in or to any such communications (including password-protected email accounts), or files, or any other matter, stored in, created on, received from or sent through any

system maintained, provided by, funded or paid for by the Diocese/Parish/School, and the retrieval and review by the Diocese/Parish/School of all electronic communications so stored (whether on a hard drive or otherwise), created, received or sent, regardless of whether such communications are in the course of being transmitted or are in storage, is authorized.

6. No pictures, images, videos, or other releases, except those which are newsworthy or of general interest, may be identified or linked without permission of the person or persons depicted, and no picture or image of any minor may be posted without the specific permission in writing of the minor's custodial parent or guardian.
7. All social networking sites will be configured so that no comments can be made by the public or unauthorized managers of the site. If a site does not allow for comments to be disabled, the following disclaimer must be displayed prominently on the site:

*"Thank you for being a member of our online community. As a community of faith, we strive to uphold the dignity of each and every individual.*

*This site permits readers to post comments although we are not responsible for the content of those comments. Opinions and views expressed in those comments reflect the thoughts of the individuals who post them and do not necessarily reflect the views of this organization.*

*As a condition of posting comments, you agree not to post any inappropriate comments – including, but not limited to obscenities, foul language, spam, personal attacks, bashing, bullying, intimidation, harassment, verbal abuse, threats, insults, commercial solicitations, repetitive or fraudulent comments, comments irrelevant to the post under which they are written, comments which are morally objectionable, and comments which are otherwise inconsistent with Catholic teaching. We welcome your questions and comments; however, we will not respond on this site. Please direct questions and comments to us via email at <address>@camdendiocese.org.*

*We reserve the sole right, but are not obligated to, review, edit and/or remove any and all comments. We reserve the right to block any user who posts inappropriate comments.*

*Links to external websites should not be interpreted as an endorsement of those organizations or the opinions of those organizations. We are not responsible for the content of external web sites.*

*Thank you for your contributions to our site and for your help in creating a courteous, safe and energetic place for discussion."*

8. The administrator of a networking site reserves the right to monitor conversations, postings, images and behavior of members of the group and may challenge, educate, intervene and/or delete as necessary. Employees and volunteers are to use discretion when establishing a connection with others.
9. Employees and volunteers are expected to write knowledgeably, pastorally, accurately, and professionally. Employees need to communicate their official location-related email address, not their own personal email address.

10. Employees and volunteers using social media, for organizational or for personal purposes, must be vigilant in representing themselves as representatives of the Church in all interactions that can be viewed publicly. Statements which are contrary to Church doctrine or teachings or which could cause scandal to the Church are to be avoided. Such statements, even if made on personal sites, could compromise the ability of a person to continue as an employee or volunteer.
  - a. No one may attribute personal statements or opinions to the organization. No one may speak for the organization unless specifically authorized to do so.
  - b. Any employee or volunteer who expresses personal opinions in a context where he or she may be associated with the Church must post the following notice: “The views expressed are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of any other person or entity.”
11. Employees and volunteers who serve in a leadership role need to consider whether or not it is appropriate to establish a connection on a social networking page of an individual with whom there is interaction only through this leadership role.
12. Any use of the name, logo, insignia or coat of arms of the Diocese/Parish/School must be specifically approved in writing prior to use. Any uses in existence at the time of adoption of this Policy are not grandfathered and should be specifically authorized pursuant to this Policy, and such may be revoked at any time.
13. Employees and volunteers must comply fully with copyright law when posting and uploading copyrighted materials. Any posting of materials from diocesan employees or the diocesan website will not be copied or uploaded to other forums without the prior written consent of the Director of Communications.
14. All users of social media must safeguard the privacy interests of others. In particular, personal contact information may not be disclosed without the prior signed written consent of the person. In cases where a user has consented to publication of such information, appropriate privacy settings and levels must be considered.
15. **Use of social media or other forms of electronic communication which involves minors is also subject to Appendix A – Adults Interacting with Youth.**

## **V**

### **UNACCEPTABLE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

Examples of unacceptable use of social media include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Creating or issuing personal communications that appear to be official communication of the Diocese/Parish/School.
2. Transmitting or disseminating material that is defamatory, abusive, obscene, profane, sexually suggestive, pornographic, harassing, intimidating, threatening, racially offensive, illegal, fraudulent, or otherwise inappropriate.
3. Using organizational sites or accounts for purposes unrelated to your organizational duties or in an unprofessional manner.
4. Disclosing confidential information except as necessary for valid work purposes. Confidential information includes all information that is not generally available to the public, including but not limited to, financial information, and/or personnel files.
5. Violating copyright laws, including the acquisition, use or distribution of pirated software.
6. Using someone else's username or password.
7. Attributing personal statements, opinions or beliefs to the Diocese/Parish/School. Making statements on behalf of the Diocese/Parish/School unless specifically authorized to do so.
8. Transmitting material threatening to another person.
9. Using the technology to bully or harass another individual or group.
10. Using a site for personal financial gain, a business activity or any illegal activity.
11. Creating, transmitting or introducing computer viruses.
12. Deliberately trying to degrade or disrupt system performance.
13. Political activity.
14. Violating any local, state or federal rule or regulation.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **ADULTS INTERACTING WITH YOUTH**

In its 1999 document *Family Guide for Using Media*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reminds us of four Christian values that are applicable to how adults and youth interact via the Internet and other forms of electronic communication: (1) respect life; (2) respect human beings and the family; (3) apply Gospel values and (4) use your intelligence. All use of the Internet or other electronic communication should be consistent with these values. It is also important for all adults working in schools, parishes and other settings to maintain appropriate boundaries both to protect youth and also to make sure that the adult's role is clearly established and understood. With these principles in mind, the following rules are established with respect to the use of the Internet and other forms of electronic communication in connection with activities for minors.

#### **1. General Principles Applicable to Communication with Minors**

- a. For purposes of this Policy, "minors" and "youth" include people who are under 18 years of age and those over 18 years of age who are still in high school.
- b. Parents or legal guardians of youth participants must be notified of all methods of communication the school or Church group uses to contact or provide information to the youth participants.
- c. To the greatest extent possible, parents or legal guardians must be given the opportunity to access any and all communications to the same degree as their children. With respect to communications sent directly to youth participants (such as email correspondence, text messages, or other communications), parents or legal guardians must be made aware that such communications may be sent so that they may monitor their children's accounts. Where possible, parents or legal guardians should be copied on these communications.
- d. The pastor (in the case of a parish), the principal (in the case of a school) and the department head (in the case of diocesan activities) must be advised of any and all websites and other forms of communication to be used. Employees and volunteers must comply with any and all supervision or monitoring procedures established by the pastor, principal, or department head.
- e. A minimum of two adults functioning with an official organizational capacity must have full access to all organizational sites/accounts.
- f. Employees and volunteers may not direct private, one-to-one messages to youth. All communications directed to youth must be copied to a parent or legal guardian of the youth and/or another adult employee or volunteer.



## **2. Websites and Social Networking Sites/Accounts**

- a. No names or other identifying information of a minor may be posted without the prior written consent of a custodial parent or legal guardian.
- b. No photographs, videos, or other images of minors may be posted without the prior written consent of a custodial parent or legal guardian of any minor depicted.
- c. No contact information may be posted for any youth.
- d. Employees and volunteers may not use organizational websites, social networking sites, social media platforms, accounts, or other communications systems for personal purposes.
- e. Personal sites may not be used for organizational purposes. Volunteers and employees may not post information regarding youth or images of youth obtained as a result of organizational activities, on personal websites.
- f. Communications must be consistent with the doctrine and teachings of the Church, as interpreted and applied by the Bishop of Camden. Employees and volunteers using websites or social networking sites, for organizational or personal use, must be vigilant in representing themselves in all interactions that can be viewed publicly. Employees and volunteers may not advocate or promote anything which is contrary to Church doctrine or teachings or which could cause scandal to the organization or to the Church.
- g. Unless specifically authorized to do so, no one may directly or indirectly represent their views or actions as those of the organization or the Church.

## **3. Websites**

- a. Parishes, schools and other youth-serving entities which establish an organizational website should commit to updating the content regularly.
- b. Web content must consistently represent the doctrine and teaching of the Catholic Church as interpreted and applied by the Bishop of Camden.
- c. Any site operated by an employee or volunteer that is oriented toward youth must require registration for all users and must be password-protected so that only registered, approved users may access the site. Registration for such a site must require the use of a legal name and valid contact information, such as an operational email address.

## **4. Social Networking Sites/Accounts**

- a. Social Networking Sites/Accounts may be used to communicate such things as the organization's activities, notifications about upcoming events, information about church teaching and/or catechesis, scriptural passages, and newsworthy matters.

- b. If social networking sites/accounts are to be used, then they must be organizational sites/accounts. Employees and volunteers may not use personal sites/accounts for matters related to organizational activities or to communicate with youth involved in those activities. Personal sites may not be advertised to, nor accessible by, youth participants.
- c. Communications to youth through social networking sites must be directed to the group or to those involved in a particular group activity. Employees and volunteers may not communicate with youth privately.

## **5. E-Mail, Text, Instant Messaging and Other Electronic Communication**

- a. Employees must use organizational accounts for communications with youth. Whenever possible, volunteers should use organizational accounts for communications with youth. If a volunteer uses a non-organizational account, then all communications sent to youth from that account must be copied to a designated organizational account. Organizational accounts are subject to monitoring by the parish, school, and/or Diocese, as applicable.
- b. Communications to youth through email, instant messaging, and other forms of electronic communication must be directed to the group or to those involved in a particular group activity. Employees and volunteers may not communicate with youth privately.
- c. Employees and volunteers may not communicate with youth using private forms or methods of communication. In the rare event that it is necessary to communicate individually with a student or youth participant, the employee or volunteer must send a contemporaneous copy to the pastor, principal, or supervisor (or to another adult designated by the pastor, principal, or supervisor). If possible, a copy should also be sent to a custodial parent or legal guardian of the youth recipient.
- d. All communications must be professional and directly related to the activities of the organization.

## **6. Online Video and Chat Rooms**

- a. Streaming video is to be used only for reasons consistent with and appropriate for the organization's mission and purpose.
- b. Any use of live streaming or chat rooms that leads to, supports, facilitates or encourages direct or one-on-one adult to youth relationships is not allowed.

## **7. Reporting Harmful Communications**

- a. Any employee or volunteer who becomes aware of communications or activities which may be illegal, abusive, harassing, intimidating, or bullying should report the matter to the pastor, principal, or a supervisor as soon as possible and preserve the communication(s) at issue to the extent possible. If there is an immediate threat, imminent danger, or emergency, contact law enforcement immediately and then notify the pastor, principal, or a supervisor as soon as possible thereafter.
- b. Anyone who has reasonable cause to believe that a minor has been or is being abused, sexually abused, endangered, or neglected – by anyone – is legally obligated, under New Jersey law, to report to the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP) immediately. The number is 877-652-2873. An employee or volunteer who is uncertain whether a report should be made should seek direction from the pastor, principal, or a supervisor. Any employee or volunteer who makes such a report should notify the pastor, principal or a supervisor as soon as possible after making the report.
- c. In accordance with the Policy in Response to Complaints of Sexual Abuse, an employee or volunteer who becomes aware of sexual abuse – of a minor or an adult – by a priest, deacon, employee, independent contractor, volunteer, or any individual engaged in ministry, work, employment, or service of any kind in the Church, should report the situation to the Diocesan Response Officer. If the victim is a minor, a report must also be made to DCPP (see above).

## **8. Acceptable Use Policy for Technology**

These directives are in addition to, and do not replace, any applicable acceptable use policies for technology.