

# *The Archdiocese of Boston*

## Guidelines for the Use of Social Media

### Introduction

*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*

Matthew 28:19-20

The Church exists in order to evangelize [Evangeliis Nuntiandi 18]. New technologies, new media, and the Internet in particular, offer tremendous opportunities and an equal number of challenges to those who take seriously the work of evangelization.

In his message for the 44<sup>th</sup> World Communication Day Pope Benedict XVI said:

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 Corinthians 9:16). The increased availability of the new technologies demands greater responsibility on the part of those called to proclaim the Word, but it also requires them to become more focused, efficient and compelling in their efforts.

The use of technology is rapidly growing to form, inform and, with God's grace, transform the adults, teens, and children of our Archdiocese. It is important, however, that we make every effort to ensure the safety of producers and consumers of social media, while at the same time ensure the integrity of the message we proclaim. This requires responsible, focused, and intentional use of new and yet-to-be developed technologies.

Pope Benedict XVI has repeatedly recognized the significance of these new technologies and the benefits that they offer to all individuals and communities. At the same time, he has warned that in using the new digital communications that are available, they must be used in a manner so as to promote "a culture of *respect, dialogue and friendship*." For everyone's further appreciation and understanding of the role such communications play in proclaiming the Gospel, attached to these Guidelines as Appendix A are the Holy Father's messages for the 43<sup>rd</sup>, 44<sup>th</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup> World Communication Days.

These Guidelines spring from the questions and concerns raised by many throughout the Archdiocese and are the product of research and consultation with other dioceses, archdiocesan ministry and administrative offices, and parish ministers. They are offered as a synthesis of best practices, consistent with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Social Media Guidelines. The USCCB guidelines are available at <http://www.usccb.org/comm/social-media-guidelines.shtml> and should also be consulted by anyone engaging in the use of social media. It is our hope and fervent prayer that these Guidelines will assist Church personnel as they use the new tools of technology to proclaim the Gospel.

## **Establishing a Social Media Site**

These Guidelines apply to all Church Personnel within the Archdiocese of Boston who create or contribute to social networking sites, blogs, or any other kinds of social media. Examples of social media sites include YouTube®, Facebook®, Twitter®, Wikipedia®, MySpace®, LinkedIn®, blogs, and comments on any online media stories or articles. Other websites are usually not considered social media, but many of the principles contained in this document should also guide the creation and use of parish, school and ministry websites. For the purpose of these Guidelines, “Church Personnel” are defined as bishops, priests, deacons, religious, seminarians, pastoral ministers, administrators, lay employees, officers, directors, trustees, governors, members, and volunteers (collectively, “Church Personnel”) in our parishes, agencies, schools and organizations sponsored by the Archdiocese or for which the Archdiocese or the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston (the “Archbishop”) has the direct or indirect right (whether alone or in conjunction with others) to elect or appoint officers, directors, trustees, governors and/or members (collectively, “Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations”).

### **Guidelines:**

- All social media sites created on behalf of the Archdiocese of Boston, any of its parishes or schools, any ministry or department of any parish or school, or any other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization must only be created and maintained by Church Personnel or third parties specifically selected and designated by the organization to create and/or maintain such sites.
- There should be at least two site administrators for each official social networking site. Site administrators must be adults and should either be Church Personnel or third parties specifically selected and designated by the organization to maintain such sites.
- To the extent possible, all social media sites established on behalf of the Archdiocese of Boston, any of its parishes or schools, any ministry or department of any parish or school, or any other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization should be created using the official Archdiocesan, parish, school or other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization email address of a site administrator. An official email address may be the email address provided by the Archdiocese, parish, school or Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization, or an email address generally used by the site administrator to receive Archdiocesan, parish, school or Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization communications. Any email address listed on an official Archdiocesan, parish, school or Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization website is normally considered an official email address.
- Passwords and names of sites must be registered in a central location, and more than one Church official should have access to this information. When a social media site is

created and maintained by a parish, parish school or parish or school ministry, the Pastor must have access to the password for the site and all other relevant site information.

- No personal contact information (for example, home phone numbers or addresses) should be listed in the profile fields of official social media sites. Only official email addresses, office phone numbers, and job titles should be listed.
- Although all Catholics are encouraged to be witnessing to their faith at all times, personal social networking sites should never be used for official ministerial purposes. Personal sites may refer people to official sites of the Archdiocese of Boston, any of its parishes or schools, any ministry or department of any parish or school, or any other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization.
- All information displayed on public sites by Church Personnel (whether official or personal) must reflect the values of our Catholic faith and should always follow the teaching of the Church. This includes, and is not limited to, posts, comments, photos, songs, videos, bulletins, blogs, and podcasts on both official Church websites and personal websites.
- Account settings for official sites should be set to maximize privacy.
- The site administrators are ultimately responsible for both the content they create and any other content appearing on the site.
- If you include a section on your official social media site for third party comments, include a Code of Conduct for those comments. For example, the Code of Conduct on the USCCB's Facebook site is: "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." If possible, block anyone who does not abide by the Code of Conduct and delete inappropriate or offensive posts or comments. Whenever possible, pre-screen comments before they are posted and do not post inappropriate or offensive comments.
- Church social media sites should not include advertising for non-Church related websites, events or products, except at the specific direction of the individual ultimately responsible for the site (for example, the pastor for parish sites). Comments that include solicitations or advertisements for non-Church related websites, events or products should be deleted. Individuals that repeatedly include solicitations or advertisements for non-Church related websites, events or products should be blocked, if possible.
- What you write is ultimately your responsibility. Participation in social media on behalf of the Archdiocese of Boston, its parishes, schools, and/or Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations is not a right, but an opportunity; so please treat it with the utmost respect.
- Always remember that you represent the Church.

### **Compliance with Law and Church Policies**

In establishing and managing social media sites, Church Personnel may not engage in any action that may violate federal or state law, the policies of the Archdiocese of Boston, any of its parishes or schools, any ministry or department of any parish or school, or any other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization, or Canon Law. Copyright, trademark, trade secret, and other intellectual property laws prohibit the improper use of others' intellectual property. Do not post copyrighted materials, logos, trademarks, trade secrets, or similar materials without first obtaining the proper permission. If you ever have any question whether material may be protected by intellectual property laws, please contact a supervisor or the General Counsel of the Archdiocese of Boston **before** posting the material.

Church Personnel are prohibited from disclosing information that is understood to be held in confidence by the Archdiocese of Boston, any of its parishes or schools, any ministry or department of any parish or school, or any other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization, including any information that is proprietary. This may include, for example, information about other employees including salaries and disciplinary records, information about ongoing crises and conflicts including ongoing litigation, information about students including educational records, and financial information about the Archdiocese, its parishes or schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization including lists of suppliers or vendors.

#### **Guidelines:**

- In order to protect both Church Personnel and users of official social media sites, all sites and postings must adhere to all policies of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations, including, without limitation, the Code of Ministerial Conduct, the Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Children, Archdiocesan Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy, the Electronic Use Policy, the Anti-bullying Policy, the Anti-harassment Policy, the Sexual Harassment Policy, HIPAA Guidelines, the Massachusetts Data Security Policy and all other applicable published policies, procedures and guidelines as may exist from time to time or as may be created or amended in the future.
- Logos or trademarks of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations may be used on personal websites only with the prior written approval of the applicable organization.

- In many cases, it is necessary to obtain the prior written consent of an individual to use such person's photograph or other likeness on a website. Should you have any questions in this regard, please contact the Office of the General Counsel of the Archdiocese.
- Appropriate photographs may be posted on official social media sites. However, if an individual requests that his or her photograph be removed (or, in the case of a minor, if a parent or guardian ("parent") makes such a request), that request should be promptly honored.
- Before using any images, video, music or other documents, make sure you have looked for and understand the copyrights on that piece of work. The digital rights management issues of the music and film industries are particularly controversial and have led to a number of high-profile lawsuits and fines. It is best to avoid a potential legal problem by using only properly obtained and approved files.
- In addition, it's important to understand the rights of online written content. Just because you found something on Google does not make it free or available for use.
- When in doubt, seek permission from a supervisor or the General Counsel of the Archdiocese of Boston **before** posting.

### **Contact/Communication with Children**

While social media can be a useful asset for the Church and its ministries, it can also be misused. Notwithstanding the informality of social media, it is most important to remember that in using social media, the boundary issues are the same as in person-to-person communication. Anyone using social media should be aware that children are highly likely to view and respond to materials posted online. Therefore, it is imperative that any Church Personnel posting online on behalf of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations be particularly careful in choosing what material to post and how to interact with children online. Most importantly, parents should constantly be made aware of any contact you may have with their children via social media.

#### **Guidelines:**

- Parents should be made aware of how social media is being used by the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations, be given an explanation of how to access such social media sites, and, to the extent possible, be given the option to be emailed a copy of all material available to their children via such social media websites (including through the use of hyperlinks). While parents should be provided with the same material as their children, it does not have to be via the same

technology (for example, if children receive a reminder via Facebook, parents can receive the same message via email).

- Make sure a minor’s parent is always aware of any contact you may have with his/her child via social media. Parents can be informed either through written notice (for example, email) or personal contact (for example, face-to-face or over the phone).
- Ask parents, in writing, which forms of communication they prefer be used to contact their children. When communicating with minors electronically, obtain permission from parents to do so. If parents request their child not be contacted electronically, cease all electronic communication with the child.
- Do not request email addresses and phone numbers from children; this information should only be provided by parents. In the case of young children (i.e., elementary school and middle school students), only parents should be contacted directly.
- In the event minors are contacted directly by Church Personnel via email, parents must be copied on the content of all messages.
- Never post any information about a minor without the explicit permission of his/her parent.
- While the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations are free to publicize their presence on social networking sites, minors should not be specifically sought out as “friends” (in other words, individually invited via site communication tools to associate with the group or page).
- Church Personnel should be encouraged to save copies of online conversations whenever possible, especially those that concern the personal sharing of a teen or young adult. If there is ever any doubt whether a conversation may be inappropriate, a supervisor should be contacted immediately, and the conversation should be terminated. If you receive an inappropriate personal communication from a minor, keep a copy of the message and inform your supervisor immediately.
- When communicating with a minor, write or speak as if you are also communicating with their parents. The boundaries that must be respected in oral communication extend to electronic communication. All communication must conform to Archdiocesan Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Children, the Code of Ministerial Conduct and the Archdiocesan Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy. Communication that violates these policies will not be tolerated, regardless of the medium used to convey it and may lead to discipline, up to and including termination.

### **Personal Websites**

Church Personnel from time to time may create on their own initiative personal websites as a medium of self-expression. Church Personnel must recognize, however, that anything published on a personal website is no different from making such information available in any

other public forum. Personal sites should reflect Catholic values. Any information that causes or has the potential to cause scandal or embarrassment to the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations must be avoided.

If any Church Personnel choose to identify themselves as such on their personal website, many readers may assume they are speaking on behalf of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or another Archdiocesan Affiliated Organization. In order to avoid any confusion, it is appropriate to include a brief disclaimer explaining that your website is personal and does not reflect the views of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations. For example, one may include:

**“The views expressed on this website are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Archdiocese of Boston or [NAME OF PARISH/SCHOOL/ ARCHDIOCESAN RELATED ORGANIZATION].”**

Even with this notice, any information that causes or has the potential to cause embarrassment to the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations should be avoided and may, under certain circumstances, lead to discipline, up to and including termination.

#### **Guidelines:**

- Personal social networking sites should not be used for official ministerial purposes. Official sites of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations should not be used for personal purposes.
- Personal use of social media must be separate from business use.
- Logos or trademarks of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations may be used in an appropriate manner on personal websites only with prior written permission.

#### **Monitoring and Discipline**

The Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations should continually monitor all their official social media sites to ensure their consistency with Church teachings. The Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and other Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations may, under certain circumstances, have the right to review the personal websites of Church Personnel. Inappropriate posts, comments, photographs, songs, videos, bulletins, blogs and podcasts on official sites may, under certain circumstances, subject the poster or the site administrator to discipline, up to and including termination.

**Guidelines:**

- Official social media sites must be frequently monitored for inappropriate posts. Inappropriate posts and comments should be promptly removed/deleted. A specific site administrator should be responsible for regularly monitoring such sites and removing inappropriate content.
- If third parties create unofficial groups or fan pages about the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations, site administrators should, if legally permitted to do so, periodically review them for inappropriate content (for example, inappropriate use of logos, bullying, harassing, or defamatory language, etc.). You may report these pages/groups/users to the hosting site and ask that they be removed.
- Church Personnel should report to a supervisor any inappropriate use of organizational logos of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations.
- The Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations will not tolerate Church Personnel posting obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory, defamatory or otherwise potentially scandalous comments, links and/or images which could discredit or cause embarrassment to the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations, or any of their employees, volunteers, staff, vendors, partners, agencies or schools. The posting of any such inappropriate material on official sites (or, under certain circumstances, on personal sites) may subject the individual posting such material to disciplinary action, up to and including, termination.
- The Archdiocese of Boston reserves the right to make changes to these Guidelines at any time at its sole discretion. The Archdiocese, its parishes and schools and any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations shall interpret and administer these Guidelines in light of changing circumstances and events.
- All Church Personnel who may create, monitor, add to or otherwise utilize official social media sites of the Archdiocese, its parishes and schools or any Archdiocesan Affiliated Organizations should sign an acknowledgment stating that have received and read these Guidelines for the Use of Social Media

APPENDIX A.

*Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI For the 43<sup>rd</sup> World Communications Day –  
“New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and  
Friendship.” –2009*

*Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI For the 44<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day –  
“The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word.” –  
2010*

*Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI For the 45<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day –  
“Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age.” - 2011*