



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS
Office of Communications

**DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

Social Media is now the fastest growing form of communication in the United States, and it is transformational:

“New technologies are not only changing the way we communicate, but communication itself, so much so that it could be said that we are living through a period of vast cultural transformation. This means of spreading information and knowledge is giving birth to a new way of learning and thinking, with unprecedented opportunities for establishing relationships and building fellowship.

I would like then to invite Christians, confidently and with an informed and responsible creativity, to join the network of relationships which the digital era has made possible. This is not simply to satisfy the desire to be present, but because this network is an integral part of human life. The web is contributing to the development of new and more complex intellectual and spiritual horizons, new forms of shared awareness. In this field too we are called to proclaim our faith that Christ is God.”

(Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity in the Digital Age – Message of Pope Benedict XVI for the 45th World Communications Day – June 5, 2011)

Social Media thus presents the Diocese of Grand Rapids, and the Catholic Church generally, with new, and previously unheard of opportunities to “go forth and make disciples of all nations.” But it also creates challenges, particularly with respect to message integrity, source or authorship confusion, and protection of the vulnerable such as Children and youth.

This Social Media Policy is directed at maximizing for the Diocese new opportunities made possible by Social Media, while at the same time doing everything reasonably possible to meet those opportunities and related challenges. All Clergy, Employees and Volunteers of the Diocese are expected to adhere to the policy directives outlined here.

DEFINITIONS:

Bishop: Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak, J.C.D., and his duly consecrated and ordained successors.

Affiliate: any juridic person within the Diocese, including without limitation any diocesan parish, cemetery, school, or organization officially sponsored by the Diocese.

Cleric or Clergy: a person(s) ordained with holy orders under the auspices of the Diocese and directly accountable to the same, for example, a priest or deacon.

Diocese: the Roman Catholic Diocese of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Diocesan Website: a Social Media network page, Blog or any website or tool created by a Cleric, Employee or Volunteer of the Diocese for the purpose of conducting the affairs of the Diocese or registered in the name of the Diocese.

Parish Website: a Social Media network page, Blog or any website or tool created by a Cleric, Employee or Volunteer of the Diocese for the purpose of conducting the affairs of a diocesan parish or registered in the name of a diocesan parish.

Affiliate Website: a Social Media network page, Blog or any website or tool created by a Cleric, Employee or Volunteer of an Affiliate for the purpose of conducting the affairs of an Affiliate or registered in the name of such Affiliate.

Personal Website: a Social Media network page, Blog or any website or tool created by Cleric, Employee or Volunteer of the Diocese for personal purposes, i.e., purposes other than conducting the affairs of the Diocese or Affiliate and not registered in the name of the Diocese or Affiliate.

Blog: a type of website used primarily to offer commentary on specific events or subjects and to facilitate discussion, i.e., a form of web-based dialogue. "Blog" is also used as a verb to describe the act of offering commentary on such a site.

Micro-blog: blogging with size constraints typically by posting frequent brief messages about personal activities. Most examples include text updates, and photo or audio clips, for either general or limited distribution.

Web 2.0: web applications that facilitate interactive information sharing. Contrasts with non-interactive websites which permit only passive viewing of information.

Social Media: interactive platforms of electronic communication (such as websites used for microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other user generated content.

Social Media Presence: a Blog, Micro-blog, Web 2.0, web page, Social Media channels, e-mail account, or any similar vehicle that facilitates internet communication of any kind.

Supervisor: a hiring or supervising agent: for parish staff, the pastor; for parish Volunteers, the pastor or appropriate administrator (including without limitation a director of religious education or a director of youth ministry); for school personnel, the principal or assistant principal.

Employee: any natural person employed by the Diocese or an Affiliate, not excluding Clergy.

Adult: a natural person who is 18 years of age or older.

Vulnerable Adult: persons 18 years of age or older, with physical, mental, emotional or

behavioral conditions, including:

- Adults with an illness, or situation that renders an inability to defend, protect or get help when injured or abused.
- Individuals whose condition or disability impairs their ability to provide adequately for their own care.
- Adults who habitually lack the use of reason.
- Individuals who have a court appointed guardian.
- The elderly, whose various circumstances might make them susceptible to persons or situations that cause them harm.
- Individuals who are residents or patients within hospitals, group homes, nursing homes, day service facilities, day activity centers, Adult foster-care homes, or an Adult who receives care services from a licensed home care or personal care service within their own home.

Child: a natural person who is not 18 years of age or older.

Volunteer: a natural person who works without financial or material gain on behalf of the Diocese or an Affiliate (including without limitation an intern, catechist, scout leader, coach, student teacher and others in similar capacities).

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY:

I. Policy Coverage.

The Diocese recognizes that Clerics, Employees and Volunteers use the internet to conduct the affairs and pursue the mission of the Diocese and its Affiliates; the Diocese supports and encourages this practice. It does so with the expectation of newfound missionary success. All who pursue the Diocese's mission on the internet must remain mindful, however, that they are the face of the Diocese to a now much broader world, and must therefore take care to represent the Diocese in a Christ-like way. This means, of course, avoiding any comments or conduct that might reflect poorly on the Diocese or the Catholic Church, go against (or “run contrary to”) Catholic teaching, damage the reputation or stature of the Diocese or Catholic Church, or that would harm or reflect poorly on the people who work for and serve the Diocese or the Catholic Church.

The Diocese reserves the right to change this policy at any time per (at) its sole discretion.

II. Authorization.

Christ said: "He who hears you, hears me." (Luke 10:16)

To be heard on the internet, however, is not simple or easy. Being heard requires those who would be heard to consider and act on the following:

- The relative strengths of the various forms of Social Media (Blogs, texts, networks, etc.);
- The needs of the ministry;
- The need for sustained input and updating, to provoke interests and to make one's message stand out;
- The need for a carefully thought-out search engine optimization strategy; and
- The need to combine Social Media with face-to-face and other traditional forms of interaction.

Competition for attention on the internet is fierce and success goes to those who plan carefully, think clearly and work diligently. Absent this kind of commitment and execution, Social Media is likely to be unproductive or even counterproductive. This suggests that Social Media proposals be carefully planned, vetted and approved prior to activation.

Therefore, no Diocesan Website or Diocesan Social Media Presence may be created or activated absent prior approval in writing by the Bishop (or by such person designated by the Bishop in writing). No Affiliate Website or Social Media Presence may be created or activated absent prior approval in writing by the parish priest or Supervisor.

Personal Websites and personal Social Media Presences may be created and activated by Clerics, Employees and Volunteers without diocesan approval.

Clerics, Employees and Volunteers shall not, in a Personal Website or personal Social Media Presence (i) disclose information held in confidence by, or that is proprietary to, the Diocese, Affiliates or the Catholic Church, (ii) use trademarks or logos of the Diocese, Affiliates or the Catholic Church, or (iii) disparage, slander or make false statements about the Diocese, Affiliates or Catholic Church.

III. Transparency, Honesty and Discretion in the Use of Social Media.

Employees and Volunteers are responsible for the information they post on Social Media and are subject to the following rules when posting information in connection with the Diocese or an Affiliate:

- Diocesan or Affiliate computers and time on the job are reserved for diocesan or Affiliate affairs and ministries.
- Do not claim to represent the official position of the organization or the teachings of the Church unless authorized to do so by an appropriate Supervisor or administrator.

- Do not include any information about any person or entity that is confidential or personal. Adhere to all Diocesan or Affiliate privacy and confidentiality policies. Employees and/or Volunteers who share confidential information do so at the risk of disciplinary action or termination.
- Do not disclose information protected from disclosure by law, such as medical information about third parties or a third party's social security number.
- Be mindful of the copyright and intellectual property rights of others. When in doubt about such matters, seek assistance from a Supervisor before acting.
- Be familiar with and obey all terms of service, privacy policies and settings for the Social Media platform used.
- Think twice before posting or sharing. Think about what might happen if the information becomes public. In cases of doubt, seek assistance from a Supervisor before acting.
- Ensure that all content and links comply with the Children's Internet Protection Act which, among other things, prohibits content that is obscene, pornographic, or otherwise harmful to minors (<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/childrens-internet-protection-act>).
- Take care when posting photographs. Consult the Diocese or Affiliate's media release policy prior to posting or sharing images. Make sure that the subject has signed a media release form and it is on file before posting their picture.
- Strive for accuracy. Get the facts straight before posting or sharing.

IV. Accountability.

Each approved Diocesan or Affiliate Website or Diocesan or Affiliate Social Media Presence must have at least two site administrators, a primary and a back-up, who can and will monitor and, if necessary, respond in a timely manner, to communications on the site. All such administrators must be Adults, must be identified by name in the website proposal and then on the website itself, and must have been screened and background checked, in the manner established by the Diocese for all Employees and Volunteers. Passwords and names of websites must be maintained in a secure location (which must be disclosed in the website proposal) and more than one Adult must have 24-hour access to this location.

V. Official Sponsorship.

Digital communications relating to Diocesan or Affiliate business or affairs may be transmitted only through internet services (e.g., email accounts or Social Media accounts) owned by or registered to the Diocese or the Affiliate. In furtherance of this policy:

1. Every Affiliate, to the extent that it has a website or Social Media Presence, must have its own self-identifying domain (e.g., website address or URL).

- Example: www.hsparish.org for Holy Spirit Parish
2. Any electronic communication emanating from the Diocese or an Affiliate must be on an officially sponsored domain of the Diocese or the Affiliate.
 - Example: Secretary@hsparish.org, Info@hsparish.org
 - All Affiliates must eliminate the use of free domains such as Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo! and other such services not registered to the Diocese or the Affiliate. This will help establish the authenticity of diocesan and Affiliate correspondence and reduce the potential for misrepresentation or impersonation.
 3. Email accounts or Social Media accounts owned personally by Clerics, Employees, or Volunteers may not be used for official Diocesan or Affiliate communications.
 4. Diocesan and Affiliate communications are to be archived in a manner consistent with established Diocesan or Affiliate practices and policies.
 5. Diocesan and Affiliate Websites must incorporate a conspicuous code of conduct for visitors to the page. If the website administrator encounters anyone not abiding by the code of conduct, he or she must take immediate and appropriate action as established by the Diocese or Affiliate Code of Conduct and Acceptable Use Policy.

VI. Adult Electronic Interaction with Minors.

Electronic communication with minors must not be undertaken lightly. School, parish and other Affiliate Employees and Volunteers must consistently adhere to Catholic values and transparency with respect to such communications.

Many Web 2.0 tools commonly used for instruction and communication have Social Media components to them which allow for sharing, collaboration and commenting. Some of these sites can be set up for a particular group, thus limiting comments to recognized participants. Others are more public in nature, allowing interaction from a wider audience.

1. All internet communications with minors must, to the greatest extent practicable, be undertaken in conformity with:
 - The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (<http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/charter.cfm>)
 - The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (<http://www.ftc.gov/ogc/coppa1.htm>)
 - The Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection policies (<https://grdiocese.org/protecting-gods-children/safe-environment-training/>)

2. Adults must not be in electronic communication with minors unless the parents/guardians have authorized the communication.
 - Such authorizations can be accomplished, for example, at the beginning of a school year on forms presented to all parents as part of the enrollment process, or if need be on a case-by-case basis.
3. All Adults who communicate with a minor via the internet must practice 'due care.' Due care refers to the level of judgment, care and prudence a person would reasonably be expected to use under particular circumstances, to avoid harm to the minor.
4. Schools receiving federal funding for computer technology through E-Rate must comply with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) (<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/childrens-internet-protection-act>) 47 U.S.C. § 254(h)(5), which requires monitoring internet use by minors; the use of filters to restrict access to obscenity, Child pornography or other material harmful to minors; and educating minors about appropriate online behavior, social networking safety and cyberbullying.

VII. Adhering to the Church's Doctrines and Teachings and to Diocesan/Affiliate Policies and Guidelines.

The content of electronic communications must not be at variance with the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Catholic Church. All communication by means of Social Media by Diocesan or Affiliate Employees or Volunteers is a reflection on the Diocese, its Affiliates, as well as on the Catholic Church generally. As a result, this communication must be representative of the policies and practices of the Diocese of Grand Rapids. The following rules have been adopted to support the foregoing policy:

1. Write in thoughtful language consistent with the message of the Diocese of Grand Rapids and the Catholic faith.
2. Do not use insults, slurs, or obscenities. Do not post anything that might be viewed as pornographic, proprietary, harassing, abusive, or creating a hostile work environment.
3. Do not disparage other individuals, other community groups, or other faiths.
4. Understand that electronic communications and Social Media activities are subject to other personnel policies, including non-discrimination/non-harassment and electronic communications policies.
5. Report Social Media activities that potentially violate this policy.