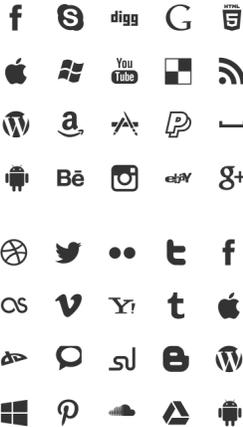


# Diocesan Social Media Policies

**T**he continued growth and use of social media at parishes presents an opportunity for evangelism and Christian witness. However, the opportunity does come with challenges, as parishioners become reporters and children and youth interact and share information in new ways. Due to the rapidly changing technology of social media, making rules is difficult. What started with email and Internet use has now grown exponentially. For instance, services like Snapchat and Facetime have blurred the lines between what is a “photo” and what is a “movie” and what is a telephone call. Parish staffs and lay leaders have instead developed informal guidelines as they navigate an ever changing landscape of technology.

For instance, youth traditionally do not respond or have email accounts, so organizing a youth night is impossible without Facebook and other tools. To assist, the Diocese has compiled some general guidelines for social media. Individual parish staffs should regularly review and discuss their own social media policies, and make them known to their community. These guidelines should not be seen as a substitute for individual written or oral policies used by individual parishes and schools.

No person utilizing electronic media owned by a worshiping community, or accessing media directed to, or transmitted in the name of, the Community has any expectation of privacy related to that access or use; specifically consents to the monitoring of all media use by the Community; and agrees to provide access to any and all social media history and/or content.



**Definition:** The term social media includes email (prayer lists, parish e-blasts), Facebook, Twitter, photo sharing sites (Flickr and Shutterfly), video sites (Vine, Vimeo and Telly), blogs and any other electronic mediums.

**Pastoral and Parent Leadership:** Above all, the church is an institution that serves its people and Christ. Thus issues of social media are intrinsically pastoral, and need to be within the family. Close communication between parents, youth staff and clergy is the centerpiece of any use of social media.

**Email:** Churches should use standard business practices for email addresses. Paid staff-members of parishes and Dioceses should use church-owned or administered email addresses for their church email. Personal email accounts should not be used for church business. For staff email accounts, the vestry or another person at the congregation should have password access to that email. This is especially necessary if a staff member is released from staff, or the staff member dies or becomes ill. Churches may apply to have Google Apps for Nonprofits, which gives email addresses for free, and a master account for each parish.

**Passwords:** Social media accounts for parishes and institutions should have more than one person who has access to the page, in case a staff person leaves. However, passwords should be updated and not given out indiscriminately.

**Usage:** Congregations will have different views on when it is appropriate to use social media in a religious setting; some parishes wish to have services without the use of such devices, and others encourage social media as form of evangelism. The rector or priest and vestry should discuss guidelines.

**Policies:** Parishes should evaluate their social media policies regularly, and converse with staff about appropriate boundaries for staff, parishioners and most particularly youth. Parish staff needs to be aware of the content on various social media sites if it chooses to use each medium; for instance Tumblr and Snapchat each have inappropriate content, as does much of the web. Policies regarding social media need to evolve and come from good common sense.

**Usage:** Congregations should review the social media accounts they are using, and ensure that accounts have not gone dormant, or have been taken over by inappropriate spam. Old, unused accounts should be closed if not useful.

**Community Standards:** Content on official pages that would be inappropriate or offensive if spoken in a parish hall should be removed immediately.

**Laws and Safeguarding:** All applicable laws and diocesan canons apply to social media, including mandatory reporting, safe church boundaries and such. For instance, a staff person should not be “alone” in a chat room with a child, and there should be two administrators on accounts, which parallels safeguarding rules. However, these rules need to be applied regularly as technology changes; texts, for instance, appear in some applications to be more like a chat room than an email.

**Consent:** Those who are featured in social media (photo, video) should be there by consent. One easy way to do this is to include a photo waiver in all registration materials. Another way is to simply ask the person if you can take their photograph.

**Friend requests:** Typically, adults should not send friend requests to youths/children, and adults should be aware about friend requests that they accept from children. For instance, does an adult have friends who post content inappropriate to a child? A safe idea is for adults to establish online “groups” where adults and youth can both post items without having to be friends. Online groups in a church should be monitored so that those adults who are no longer in the group are removed.

**Church/Parishioner Representation:** Clergy, lay leadership and staff, when speaking in social media, take on the voice of the institution, if not in official capacity. Thus a clergy person posting anything involving politics on a personal Facebook page still represents the parish. What is said by staff reflects on the church as a whole. Conversely, what a parishioner writes on their own social media is the position of the individual, and rules about posting between parishioners are between individuals.

**Copyright:** A careful church is aware of rules on copyright, and tries to follow the spirit of the law. For instance, an advertised “movie night” involves small license fees, but a youth who watches a movie on an iPad does not need a license, as they have purchased the movie. However, if that movie is advertised to the parish and played on Apple TV for a large audience, that is not considered fair use. Organist/choirmasters must observe, understand and explain copyright rules for performance and recording.

*Approved January 2016.*



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