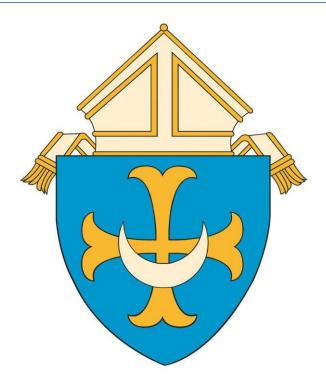THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF TRENTON

# Social Media Policy and Resource Guide

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## Introduction

*"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 Cor 9:16)."—Pope Benedict XVI, 44th World Communications Day message (2010)*

Social media are some of the most popular forms of communication in the United States, especially among youth and young adults. As such, our Church requires us to approach social media as both a powerful means of evangelization and an opportunity to provide a Christian perspective on digital literacy in a manner that is safe, responsible and civil.

For this reason, the Diocese of Trenton, which within this document is referred to as "The Church," has developed social media guidelines that will support diocesan personnel, parish and Catholic school employees, volunteers and all those involved in ministry, in using social media to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and create community, while encouraging respectful, honest dialogue.

These guidelines are meant to provide a framework for the proper use of technology and social media which may serve as world-wide tool for building the Kingdom of God, but which also includes a number of potential threats. "The development of comprehensive policies that strike a balance between safety and pastoral effectiveness must be guided by three essential values. We must ask ourselves if the use of such technology is prudent, reasonable, and transparent."

**Prudence** – encourages forethought and weighs the merit of the technology and its attending policies in light of pastoral effectiveness and potential risks.
**Reasonable** – the use is practical, sound, and considered a normative practice or standard.
**Transparent** – requires that all we do is open to the scrutiny of others and that the use of technology and subsequent policies be clear, intelligible, and observable.

*(excerpted and adapted from "Recommended Technology Guidelines for Pastoral Work With Young People," developed by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry in consultation with the USCCB Secretariat for Children Youth Protection and the Secretariat for Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, 2010)*

## What is Social Media?

Social media is defined as a transformation in the way information is created, used and delivered, using web-based technologies for social interaction. Social media includes a variety of platforms for sharing content: blogging, social networking, crowd sourcing, content sharing and mobile and Web applications.

## Participation

Participation in social media on behalf of the Diocese of Trenton offers a unique opportunity to bring a Catholic perspective to the world and carries with it serious responsibilities. Ministry leaders should see social media more as a means of communication, not personal expression. It is also a powerful means to instill among those to whom they minister, especially youth, that one's

faith can be expressed and shared in every forum and communication, rather than being limited to formal Church activities.

All employees of the Diocese of Trenton are encouraged to use social media. To participate on behalf of the Diocese of Trenton, permission from the appropriate supervisor must be obtained and appropriate notification made to the Department of Communications.

It is expected that all who participate in social media on behalf of the Diocese of Trenton comply with this policy, as well as, but not limited to the Diocese of Trenton Code of Conduct and/or Christian Witness Statement, working in conjunction with any other guidelines or policy documents governing safe environment practices. Because this policy will continually evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge, a regular review is recommended.

## Best Practices for Establishing and Maintaining a Site

Once an appropriate social networking site has been selected, the following practices are recommended when engaging in social media on behalf of the Diocese of Trenton. Underlying all recommended practices are the twin goals of visibility and accountability. In all cases we must differentiate between confidentiality and secrecy with respect to communications with all those we serve, most especially children and youth.

1. All communications must reflect Catholic teachings and values, and promote the mission of the Diocese of Trenton: To proclaim and advance the Kingdom of God. Recognizing that:
   o Within our rich diversity, we are made one by our Baptism in Christ.
   o We are united with Jesus, the Eternal Shepherd, with our Holy Father, the Universal Shepherd, and with our Bishop, the local Shepherd.
   o We form a community of faith, called to worship God, celebrate the sacraments, teach the Good News and grow deeper in our prayer life.
   o As pilgrims, conscious of our sinfulness and need for reconciliation, we seek renewal always in the light of Christ.
   o Responding to our call to discipleship, we reach out in love and service to all, ever striving to advance the cause of peace and justice in the Name of our Lord Jesus.

2. With Christ as our model, it follows that posting obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory, defamatory or otherwise potentially scandalous comments, links and/or images is not allowed.

3. Disclaimers should be used to advise site participants that inappropriate comments will not be posted or will be removed. Careful consideration should be given to decide whether to allow commenting at all, or to allow posts without review on the site. The following disclaimer should be posted to all diocesan properties in which comments are accepted, and may serve as a model for parish, school and extraordinary ministry sites:

- "The Diocese of Trenton encourages comments, questions and healthy debate through this monitored online discussion board, requiring that all posts reflect the practice of Christian charity and respect. The diocese will not remove comments simply because they are not in agreement with the Diocese of Trenton. However, comments may be deleted if they are inflammatory, disrespectful, slanderous, profane, uncivil, or deemed otherwise inappropriate. Discussion should take place primarily from a faith perspective, presuming the good will of other posters. This forum is not to be used to attack individuals or groups. Promotional advertising is not permitted. The Diocese of Trenton, parish or school representative reserves the right to remove any comments not deemed in compliance with this statement. If your comment or message involves an emergency that requires help immediately, it should be addressed by phone."

4. Individuals may not start social media accounts on behalf of their parish or parish ministry without the pastor's express consent.

5. The official organizational logo or standard images should appear on the Church/ministry site to distinguish it as the organization's official site, and not that of a specific person. It is always preferable to set up the site as an organizational page, where users do not connect as "friends" but as "likes."

6. At least two adult administrators (moderators), who have passed criminal background checks and completed safe environment training in compliance with the Diocese's child protection policy, should be assigned to the site for continuous monitoring and response, assuring both site security and relevance. This is a requirement when working with teens (under age 18). Social media sites must be kept fresh and meaningful if they are to be effective.

7. Administrators are to ensure the social media site complies with these guidelines and all relevant diocesan policies and codes of conduct. They will review comments and will remove those that are disrespectful, misrepresent the position of the Church, offend the faith or morals of the Church, include inappropriate language or speech.

8. In an effort to encourage open dialogue, comments that are confrontational or provocative should be addressed calmly and respectfully, recognizing that other people will have opinions different from our own. Arguing with comment posters should be avoided. All responses should be based on the truth and teachings of the Church.

9. Administrators should be aware of the terms of use, age restrictions, and privacy options and controls for each site. This is essential, especially when establishing a ministry presence for youth.

10. Passwords and names of all sites should be registered in a central location — such as with a safe environment coordinator or parish administrator — with more than one adult having access to this information.

11. Both site administrators should be registered to have e-mail alerts of page activity sent to their official organizational e-mail addresses. This allows for a quicker response time to urgent requests and helps to ensure that all postings are appropriate.

12. Administrators/ministers should keep separate sites for personal and professional use. Sites/spaces/pages for dedicated Church/ministry use should be clearly titled as such. All correspondence should take place through official channels. This includes email, social media applications, websites, chat, IM (instant messaging), etc. Personal pages and information should be neither advertised nor accessible to Church site users from the Church site.

13. Personal sites of anyone who presents himself/herself as someone connected to the Church, including volunteers, should reflect Catholic values at all times. Church personnel/volunteers should understand that they are witnessing to the faith through all of their social networking, whether "public" or "private." Anything that could cause scandal to the Church or any ministry should be avoided and no post should reflect a violation of the teachings of the Catholic Church.

14. 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.

    o Whether or not an employee or volunteer is using social media for personal purposes, comments may be viewed as a reflection of the Church. Employees and volunteers should be on guard against making any comment, suggestion or discussion that could harm the Church or the Church community.
    o Employees and volunteers may not attribute personal statements or opinions to the Diocese/Parish/School.
    o If employees or volunteers express personal statements or opinions they must post the following notice: "The views expressed are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of any other person or entity."

15. All communications must be in compliance with copyright, fair use, IRS financial disclosure regulations, and privacy laws. If quoting material from other sources, do not quote more than short excerpts from copyrighted material, always with proper accreditation. While it is accepted online practice to link to other's work, messages and content, care must be taken that such links do not lead site users to material that is inappropriate by Church or diocesan standards. Copyright laws can vary depending on where you live and work. Content on social media can be considered promotional and does not fall under fair use.

16. Caution should be used to ensure that the original source is not in violation of Church teaching.

17. Be aware of diocesan or another company's confidential or other proprietary information and do not disclose such information. Do not cite or reference the names of any private person, or link to their material without their prior agreement and approval. Be sure to adhere to any parish, school and/or diocesan policy concerning the use of photos/videos with permission from those appearing in the photo/video or their parent/guardian. Always check accuracy before publishing any information.

18. Take all appropriate quality control measures to ensure that the content you post is accurate and professional. Proofreading is a must! If an error is made, be the first to correct your own mistakes by editing the post.

19. No photographs unrelated to church or school activities or personal information of parish, school or organizational staff or volunteers, including those who are responsible for the administration of the page/site should appear on any page/site. This includes family pictures, home phone numbers and addresses, personal email accounts, etc. Photos that meet a reasonable expectation of privacy are allowed.


## Policy for Communicating with Youth

1. Anyone using social media to communicate to youth on behalf of the Diocese of Trenton must pass a criminal background check and complete safe environment training.

2. While it is recognized that the utilization of social media has become an effective ministry tool with teenagers in youth ministry programs and upper grade level students, no direct electronic communication (using any form of social media or technology) between children younger than 13 in any Church-sponsored group or activity and adults ministering to them, teaching them or coordinating the program or activity should ever take place.

3. Before any electronic communication, including text messaging, may take place as part of ministry with youth participants older than 13, parents must be informed of the intent of the adult agent of the Diocese of Trenton to use that technology as part of his/her ministry. Where social networks involve a direct appeal or invitation for participants to join, parents must first grant permission in writing for the agent to invite the teen.

4. Adult agents of the Diocese of Trenton must acquire contact information, including a phone number, for the parent or legal guardian of any minor with whom there is electronic communication.

5. Acceptable hours for communicating with youth via social networking sites or text message should only be between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. Communication outside of these hours should only be done under emergency circumstances or if something is time-sensitive to the ministry or an event.

6. It is not permitted for an adult to initiate an online conversation with a minor (under age 18).

7. Parents must also have access to everything provided to their children. For example, parents should be made aware of how social media are being used, be told how to access the sites, and be given the opportunity to be copied on all material sent to their children via social networking (including text messages). While parents should be provided with the same material as their children, it does not have to be via the same technology (that is, if children receive a reminder via Twitter, parents can receive it in a printed form or by an e-mail list).

8. The youth minister must approve each request by youth for membership in the social networking site after verification of current participation or leadership in the youth program.

9. Church personnel are encouraged to save copies of conversations whenever possible, especially those that concern the personal sharing of a teen or young adult. Paying to have pages archived should also be considered.

10. No pictures, images, videos or other releases except those that are newsworthy or of general interest may be identified or linked without permission of the person or persons depicted. No picture, image or video of any minor may be posted without verifiable consent of the minor's custodial parent or guardian. Verifiable consent can take the form of a written release/permission form, an email from a parent or guardian, or spoken permission by a parent or guardian in the presence of another adult.

11. In photographs of youth activities, youth should not be "tagged," or identified by name, or any other identifier, which might cause them to show up in search engines. On the original social networking site, it is recommended that the "no tagging" option be set.

12. Because of the potential of teen crises or time relevant information, the page/site should be monitored daily by site administrators. Anyone who conducts a site relating to youth should sign up to receive emails about page activity and respond to them throughout the day. A plea for help that goes unanswered can be dangerous for teens and their families and damaging to the parish, school, and/or organization.

13. All have a responsibility when communicating with youth to recognize there is a valid way to act when using sites we administer, and to participate in sites where teens are present.

14. All ministry leaders should be familiar with Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, http://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/complying-coppa-frequently-asked-questions, which is federal legislation that oversees how websites interact with
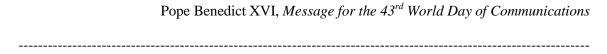
children under age 13. Administrators must also ensure that the use of social media sites complies with all Safe Environment policies and best practices.

## <u>Social Media Success – Summary</u>

In order for social media to be effective and a worthwhile investment of time, a site must be engaging, honest, interesting and of high quality. It must also meet the needs of the audience. It is important that site administrators be knowledgeable of the Catholic faith and Church teachings, while staying current, not only on social media technology but on trends affecting their particular audiences.

A small but powerful piece of social media advice is to pause before posting. Taking a minute to reflect on what you have written, and consider the ramifications of what you are sending out to the world, can save you from making a serious mistake, suffering embarrassment or even chastisement by supervisors, or possibly leading someone away from the Church or the faith.

> *"The new digital technologies are, indeed, bringing about fundamental shifts in patterns of communication and human relationships. The desire for connectedness and the instinct for communication that are so obvious in contemporary culture are best understood as modern manifestations of the basic and enduring propensity of humans to reach beyond themselves and to seek communion with others. In reality, when we open ourselves to others, we are fulfilling our deepest need and becoming more fully human. Loving is, in fact, what we are designed for by our Creator."*
>
> Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the 43rd World Day of Communications*

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These guidelines have been compiled using the USCCB Social Media Guidelines, the NFCYM Guidelines, previously drafted Social Media Policy of the Diocese of Trenton, and with reference to social media policies of several other dioceses.