



Social Media Policy

Preamble

Social media is a relatively recent development in the world of communications. Still, it has grown and expanded very rapidly and has been integrated into the daily life of many people. Consequently, as the Holy Father points out, it is fertile ground for ministry because it extends beyond the reach of traditional means of communication and human interaction. It is for this reason that the Church encourages the responsible and effective use of social media.

Purpose

St. Thomas Syro Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago recognizes that social media is being used in a variety of methods as a critical evangelizing, and educational tool to promote school and ministerial programs. However, those using the internet should bear in mind that specific comments and information may have a harmful effect on the school, parish, the diocese, its reputation, and its employees. In light of this possibility, employees and volunteers are required to adhere to the following policy regarding the use of social media sites, networks, and blogs.

This Social Media Policy applies to all online or mobile-based tools for sharing content and discussing information, whether controlled by the diocese, local parish/mission or hosted on other platforms (such as Facebook), on which employees/ volunteers of the school /parish engage in activities relating to the church or diocese. The term "social media" refers to activities that integrate technology, telecommunications, and social interaction through the use of words, images, video, or audio tools. Examples include, but are not limited to, social websites, blogs, message boards, wikis, podcasts, image- and video-sharing sites, live webcasting, and real-time communities. Because this is a continually evolving area, this policy applies to all new social media platforms whether or not they are specifically mentioned in this policy.

General Policy:

Virtuous Use and a Teachable Moment

With advances in technology and communications media, the desire to be connected to it increases continuously. The Church encourages this involvement but also calls for media to be used with prudence and virtue. The following list can be a springboard for engaging young adults, youth, and other constituents in conversations about how to use modern technologies in responsible ways.

1. Called to evangelize: Just as "...the great Apostles ...brought the Good News of Jesus to the Greek and Roman world ...It falls, in particular, to young people ...to take on the responsibility for the evangelization of this 'digital continent.'" 10 The Good News is needed just as much in the

virtual world as it is in the real one.

2. Christian witness through actions: "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 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."

(His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI. "Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age," Message of His Holiness for the 45th World Communications Day, July 18, 2011.)

3. Pastoral presence: Media platforms bring one into contact with people of different religions and cultures, so it is essential to be sensitive to the needs of those who do not yet believe in Christ, the disheartened, and those with a deep unarticulated desire for the Truth. Respectful dialogue is paramount. *(His Holiness, Benedict XVI. "The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word," May 16, 2010.)*

4. Prudent use: Be it social media, blogging, texting, video games, or doing work on the computer and internet, if virtual connectedness becomes an obsessive need, it can isolate people from the real world and disrupt the patterns of rest, silence, and reflection that are important for healthy human and spiritual development. Moderate and prudent use is healthy. *(His Holiness, Benedict XVI. "New Technologies, New Relationships," May 16, 2010.)*

5. Talking does not replace the spiritual life: Talking about religion and telling others about the Good News of Christ are not substitutes for spiritual life. Successful evangelization and ministry "...comes from Christ himself, encountered and listened to in prayer ...lived in witness; and known, loved, and celebrated in the sacraments." *(His Holiness, Benedict XVI. "The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word." May 16, 2010.)*

6. A tool to encourage real action and involvement in the community: An essential goal of the social media revolution should be to drive people to Christian action and involvement. Communications should encourage people to engage in their own spiritual life and invite them to participate in the life of the parish, school, or another ministry. All of the faithful have the responsibility to invite others to know the Truth in Christ in the community.

General Procedural Guidelines

Be selective—due to the availability of a variety of digital tools, be careful in the type of medium for your message – a blog or social network might not be the right place for messages intended only for a small group. Ministry personnel should create separate social media pages or profiles for personal and professional use. Appropriate professional boundaries must be maintained. Therefore, personal information, pages, or profiles, should not be accessible to the general public, especially when minors are involved. It should be noted, however, that nothing posted on the internet is ever truly 'private.' Ministry personnel using social media should be aware that they represent the Catholic Church to the larger public community both in their professional capacity and personal capacity if they have identified themselves as such. Due to this connection, ministry personnel should not engage in activity that would reflect poorly upon the Church and could cause scandal. The spiritual health of the minister is a concern here as well. The unacceptable activity could include

but is not limited to, mention of inappropriate use of alcohol, advocacy of inappropriate music and movies, inappropriate language, inappropriate dress, inappropriate images, or the expression and advocacy of opinions that are contrary to the doctrinal and moral teachings and mission of the Catholic Church as articulated by the Magisterium and the official positions of the diocese.

- 1. Be responsible** – social media are individual interactions, not official diocesan/parish/mission communications. All employees and volunteers at the parish/mission are personally accountable for their posts. Official statements of policy may only be made by the Superintendent/ Pastor/ Principal or designee. A blog or community post is visible to the entire world. Remember that what you write will be public, and potentially for a long time. In the event you identify yourself as, (or is manifestly understood to be) an employee of the local parish or diocese on a personal blog (or another website with a similar purpose), to help reduce the potential for confusion, the employee is required to put the following notice in a reasonably prominent place on the site:

"The views expressed on this site are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer, or the Diocese of St. Thomas Syro Malabar, Chicago."

- 2. Identify yourself** – authenticity and transparency are driving forces behind social media. Use real identities to the greatest extent possible rather than anonymous posts and comments. Moderators and ministry personnel should be familiar with the terms of use, age restrictions, privacy settings and controls of a social media site at the time they establish a presence in that network.
- 3. Honor the privacy of others** – do not publish the personal information of others without their permission or, in the case of minors, written permission of their parents. All guidelines for the Protection of Children, as outlined in all agreements and policies are to be followed.
- 4. Be respectful** – if you disagree with others, do so with civility. Respect your audience, express your views with appropriate language, and be respectful of the church and its teachings.
- 5. Comply to** - all guidelines of the Employee/Staff Acceptable Use Agreement and all aspects of the Safe Environment Policy of St. Thomas Syro Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago.

6. Establishing a Site

Websites or social networking profile pages are the centerpiece of any social media activity. The following are recommended guidelines for the establishment of the site.

- A, Site administrators should be adults.
- B. There should be at least two site administrators (preferably more) for each site, to allow rapid response and continuous monitoring of the website.
- C. Do not use personal sites for diocesan or parish programs. Create separate sites for these.

- D. Passwords and names of sites should be registered in a central location, and more than one adult should have access to this information.
- **E. Be sure those establishing a site know these key "Rules of the Road":**
 - F. Abide by diocesan/parish guidelines.
 - G. Know that even personal communication by church personnel reflects the Church. Practice what you preach.
 - H. Write in the first person. Do not claim to represent the official position of the organization or the teachings of the Church, unless authorized to do so.
 - I. Identify yourself. Do not use pseudonyms or the name of the parish, program, etc., as your identity, unless authorized to do so.
 - J. Do not divulge confidential information about others. Nothing posted on the internet is private.
 - K. Don't cite others, post photos or videos of them, link to their material, etc., without their approval.
 - L. Practice Christian charity.

Specific Policies:

Use of Official Name and Logo

Any use of the parish/mission name or logo for branding or titling pages, blogs, or other similar elements of social media must be approved in writing before using. Requests for prior consent to use such names or logos will be made to the Pastor or designee. Any uses in existence at the time of adoption of this policy are not grandfathered and would be authorized according to this policy. Permission to use the name or logo of the parish or mission may be revoked at any time.

Duties of Moderators. Moderators of official parish/mission social media are responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy statement. If there are official parish/mission social media, there will be an employee /volunteer of the parish/mission designated as the moderator. All content, comment, and blog response areas must be moderated. Those responsible for such areas must review and approve comments before posting, and should not post any comments that do not meet our standards for civility, misrepresent the position of the Church or diocese/ parish/mission, or that include profanity, defamatory language or speech that is otherwise inappropriate or off-topic. Anonymous comments will not be permitted. All moderation functions reserve the right to ban repeat offenders. Moderators who permit users to post materials such as documents or photographs will make clear to users that the site will not archive those materials. The site will delete them after a published period (typically 12 months, except in cases where a project needs to be preserved for a more extended period). Moderators must provide login in access to social media to pastors.

Prudent Judgment

- A. **Personal Use – Possible Negative Impact.** Even when engaging in social media for personal use, the comments of employees or volunteers of the parish/mission may be viewed

as a reflection on diocese/parish/mission. Users will use their best judgment when engaging in social media activities and should be on guard against actions and discussions that could harm children, the interests of the diocese/parish/mission, or be subject to questions as inappropriate by parents or parish administration.

B. Contact with Students

Employees and volunteers of the school cannot engage with current and prospective students on social media sites unless the site is parish sanctioned. Also, knowingly interacting with students on a third-party social media page (such as a fan page for a local sports team) is prohibited. Caution and prudence should be used if there are communications with students who are 18 and have graduated. The parish will strictly limit friendly/engagement with parents to only parish-sanctioned sites. Approval should be obtained from a pastor or supervisor before the creation of a social media profile or official page for a ministry. **At least two adult moderators** who are also ministry personnel should have full administrative access to the profile or page. This ensures adequate monitoring as well as timely updates and responses to questions or comments.

Copyright Laws. Anyone who submits content must comply fully with copyright law. Any posting of materials to official parish/mission social media must adhere to all copyright laws. Images and other materials from the parish or mission websites will not be copied and uploaded to other forums without the prior written consent of the Pastor or designee.

Privacy. All users of social media within parish and mission communities will take care to safeguard the privacy interests of other community members. In particular, personally identifiable information (that is, information that can identify a specific person, including name, photo, phone number, address, or email address) will not be disclosed without the prior written consent of the person identified. In cases where a user has consented to the publication of such information, appropriate privacy settings and levels will be utilized.

Social Networking with Minors. Public social media maintained by the parish/mission are not intended for the use of children under the age of 13. Any site operated by parish/mission that is oriented toward youth between the ages of 13 and 18 must require registration for all users and must be password-protected so that only registered users may access the site. Users of such a website may not post images of minors without the prior written consent of a parent or legal guardian of any minor depicted.

Be sure to have permission from a minor's parent or guardian before contacting the minor via social media or before posting pictures, videos, and other information that may identify that minor.

Parents must 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 allowed 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 email list).

Church personnel should be encouraged to save copies of conversations whenever possible, especially those that concern the personal sharing of a teen or young adult. (This may be especially important with text messaging.)

Make everyone aware of the [Children's Online Privacy Protection Act](#), which is federal legislation that oversees how websites interact with children under age 13.

- 1. Enforcement.** Any use of social media that does not comply with this policy should be brought to the attention of the appropriate party: the Pastor or designee immediately. Failure to follow the social media policy may result in the loss of privileges or disciplinary action, up to and including termination, for an employee or removal from position, if a volunteer.

- 2. Social Networking Website Passwords:** Students and their parents or guardians are advised that the St. Thomas Syro Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago may not request or require a student to provide a password or other related account information to gain access to the student's account or profile on a social networking website. The diocese/parish **may** conduct an investigation, and if the church has **reasonable** cause to believe the content of a student's social media account has violated a disciplinary rule or policy of the parish.

- 3.** Approval should be obtained from a pastor or supervisor prior to the creation of a social media profile or official page for a ministry. At least two adult moderators who are also ministry personnel should have full administrative access to the profile or page. This ensures adequate monitoring as well as timely updates and responses to questions or comments.

Suggests VIRTUS guidelines for reference.

This policy may be updated and modified at any time at the sole discretion of St. Thomas Syro Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago Office, Office for the Protection of Children and Youth, in light of changing circumstances and events.

Presented by

Paul T. Cherian Commission Chair. For review by members pending approval.