

**Social Media Policy**  
**Roman Catholic Diocese of Dallas**

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## Introduction

These guidelines are offered as a synthesis of best practices. They include material compiled from church entities, for-profit corporations and non-profit organizations. Suggestions and comments are welcome at [info@cathdal.org](mailto:info@cathdal.org).

In this document, “church personnel” is defined as anyone – priest, deacon, religious, bishop, lay employee or volunteer – who provides ministry or service or is employed by an entity associated with the Catholic Church.

## Guiding Principles

*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, 2010 World Communication Day message*

Social media is one of the fastest growing forms of communication in the United States, especially among youth and young adults. Our Church cannot ignore it, but at the same time we must engage social media in a manner that is safe, responsible and civil.

As Pope Benedict XVI noted in his message for the 44<sup>th</sup> World Day of Communication, this new form of media "can offer priests and all pastoral workers a wealth of information and content that was difficult to access before, and facilitate forms of collaboration and greater communion in ways that were unthinkable in the past."

The Church can use social media to encourage respect, dialogue and honest relationships – in other words, “true friendship” (43<sup>rd</sup> World Communication Day Message). To do so requires us to approach social media as a powerful means of evangelization and to consider the Church’s role in providing a Christian perspective to digital literacy.

You may want to read both the 43<sup>rd</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup> World Day of Communication messages. These are available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20090124\\_43rd-world-communications-day\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20090124_43rd-world-communications-day_en.html) and [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20100124\\_44th-world-communications-day\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100124_44th-world-communications-day_en.html).

## The Church and Social Media: An Overview

The online encyclopedia Wikipedia defines social media as “ ... media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Social media use web-based technologies to transform and broadcast media monologues into social media dialogues”<sup>1</sup>.

A longer and perhaps more philosophical definition is offered by Jon Lebkowsky, a longtime social media specialist, on his site, [weblogsky.com](http://weblogsky.com):

Social Media is a fundamental transformation in the way(s) people find and use information and content, from hard news to light entertainment. It’s an evolution from broadcast delivery of content – content created by a few and distributed to many – to network delivery, where content can be created by anyone and published to everyone, in a context that is “many to many.” Said another way, publication and delivery by professionals to mass audiences has changed – now publication and delivery can be by anyone, professional or not, to niche audiences through networks of many channels. This is because the means of production are broadly accessible and inexpensive.

As a result of all this, attention and mindshare are fragmented, there’s emphasis on relationship, new forms of media are conversational, and transaction costs for communication approach zero.

Social media offers both opportunities and challenges to Catholic organizations. These can be grouped into three primary categories:

- Visibility
- Community
- Accountability

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media)

## **Visibility**

Online social media communities are vast and growing at a rapid pace<sup>2</sup>. Given the size and scope of these communities, they offer excellent forums for the Church's visibility and evangelization.

The key question that faces each Church organization that decides to engage social media is: "How will we engage?" Careful consideration should be made to determine the particular strengths of each form of social media (blogs, social networks, text messaging, etc.) and the needs of a ministry, parish or organization. The strengths should match the needs. For instance, a blog post may not be the most effective way of reminding students of an event. However, a mass text message to all students and their parents telling them that the retreat begins at 9 a.m. may be very effective.

Social media also requires constant input and monitoring to maintain visibility and awareness of the Church's presence through that particular social media. To keep members, a social networking site needs to have new content on a regular basis. In the case of social media, the axiom "build it and they will come" is not applicable. It would be important to set internal expectations regarding how often posts will be made, so that your "followers" can become accustomed to your schedule.

## **Community**

Social media can be a powerful tool for strengthening community, although social media interaction should not be viewed as a substitute for face-to-face gatherings. Social media can support communities in a myriad of ways: connecting people with similar interests, sharing information about in-person events, providing ways for people to dialogue, etc.

A well-considered use of social media has the ultimate goal of encouraging "true friendship" (43<sup>rd</sup> World Communication Day Message) and of understanding the human longing for meaningful community.

## **Accountability**

Social media provides a tool for building community. Membership in communities also requires accountability and responsibility. Users of social media expect site administrators to allow dialogue, to provide information and to acknowledge mistakes. The explosion of information available to social media consumers has meant that they often only use information from trusted sites or sites recommended by those whom they trust.

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2 For example, the number of active users on Facebook is greater than the population of the United States. (<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>).

While not every demand or inquiry can be met, it is important that creators and site administrators of social media understand how different social media is from mass media and the expectations of its consumers. Many communication experts are describing the adaptation of social media as a paradigm shift in how humans communicate, as important a development as that of the printing press and the discovery of electronic communication.

## Definitions

Definitions provide clarity and a common language.

- **Web 2.0:** The term "Web 2.0" is commonly associated with Web applications which facilitate interactive information sharing. A Web 2.0 site allows its users to interact with other users, to change Website content, to provide reaction to content, to share the site's content with others, or to filter content being provided by the site creator. This is in contrast to non-interactive websites where users are limited to the passive viewing of information that is provided to them.  
\* Example: Amazon.com's inclusion of users' reviews and offering recommendations based on past use of the site by the consumer makes it a Web 2.0 site.
- **Blog:** A blog (a contraction of the term "web log") is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.  
\* Examples: There are many types of blogs on sites throughout the Internet. They are common for celebrities, writers, journalists, etc. WordPress is one of the more popular tools used to create blogs.
- **Micro-blog:** A form of multimedia blogging that allows users to send brief text updates or micromedia such as photos or audio clips and publish them, either to be viewed by anyone or by a restricted group which can be chosen by the user. These messages can be submitted by a variety of means, including text messaging, instant messaging, E-mail, digital audio or the web. The content of a micro-blog differs from a traditional blog in that it is typically smaller in actual size and aggregate file size. A single entry could consist of a single sentence or fragment or an image or a brief, ten second video.  
\* Example: Twitter – A form of micro-blogging, entries are limited to 140 characters.
- **Social Media/Network:** A Web 2.0 site that is entirely driven by content of its members. Individuals are allowed flexibility in privacy settings, in posting text, photos, video, links

and other information, and in level of interaction with other members.

\* Examples: Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace. Twitter, YouTube and Flickr are often also included in lists of social networking sites, although sometimes YouTube and Flickr are designated as multimedia sharing sites, while Twitter is currently more often designated as a micro-blogging application.

- **Ministry website<sup>3</sup>:** An Internet website/tool created by employees, clerics and volunteers for the sole purpose of conducting diocesan/ affiliate business.
- **Personal website:** A social network page, blog or any Internet website/tool created by employees, clerics, and volunteers primarily to share personal communication with friends and family.
- **Other Electronic Communication:** Electronic communication technologies that are not defined as Social Media/Network (e.g., cell phone, email, texting, etc.)
- **Supervisor:** the hiring and/or supervising agent: for parish staff, the pastor; for parish volunteers, the appropriate administrator (e.g., Director of Religious Education or Director of Youth Ministry); for school personnel, the principal.
- **Employee:** any person who is employed by the Diocese of Dallas or an affiliate. An employee may be a cleric or a lay person who may also be a member of a religious institute.
- **Cleric:** an ordained priest or an ordained deacon who is incardinated in the Diocese of Dallas, as well as a religious priest or deacon, or a priest or deacon incardinated in another diocese, who is engaged in a ministry under the control or auspices of the Diocese of Dallas or an affiliate.
- **Adult:** an individual who is eighteen years of age or older.
- **Child:** a person under 18 years of age or a physically or mentally disabled person under 21 years of age.
- **Volunteer:** an adult who works without financial or material gain on behalf of the Diocese of Dallas or its affiliates who is not an employee or a cleric (for example, an intern, catechist, scout leader, coach, student teacher and others in similar capacities).

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3 Definitions for ministry website and personal website are from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's Social Media Policy

## Social Media Policy

**Policy Statement:** The Diocese of Dallas and its affiliates recognize that in today's environment, with the increasing prevalence of the Internet, employees, clerics and volunteers will use the Internet to conduct ministry work and to communicate with associates and friends. The Internet provides various ways for individuals to interact and has changed the way we communicate and share information. The Diocese of Dallas views the Internet as an important educational and evangelizing tool to promote school and ministerial programs. The diocese encourages administrators, pastors and principals to support Internet use and to give employees, clerics and volunteers the necessary training and tools to interact safely and responsibly online. However, those using the Internet should bear in mind that certain comments and information may have a harmful effect on the Diocese of Dallas, its reputation and its employees. In light of this possibility, employees, clerics and volunteers are required to adhere to the following policy regarding the use of personal and ministry websites including social networks and blogs.

## Procedure

### Password-Protected Sites

Both ministry websites and personal websites may involve the use of a username/password or other such means to access all or portions of the site. In the event that a cleric, employee or volunteer, subject to approval by the Diocese of Dallas or its affiliate, gives a child access to a website that is not otherwise openly accessible to the public, that same access must also be provided to the child's parent/guardian, if the parent/guardian so desires.

### Ministry Websites

The Diocese of Dallas and its affiliates support the creation of ministry websites as a means to conduct diocesan/affiliate ministry. The use of ministry websites is encouraged when conducting diocesan/affiliate educational and evangelizing programs. Supervisors who approve individuals to create a ministry website for dispersal of information are responsible for monitoring the ministry website.

### Personal Websites

The Diocese of Dallas and its affiliates recognize that church personnel, clerics and volunteers may create personal websites as a medium of self-expression. Employees, clerics and volunteers must recognize that anything published on a personal website is no different from making such information available in any public forum. Any information that causes or has the potential to cause embarrassment to the Diocese of Dallas or its affiliates should be avoided. Note: If church personnel elect to use personal websites to conduct diocesan/affiliate ministry, the personal websites must be approved, and are subject to monitoring, by their supervisor or designee.

### Ministry Blogs

The Diocese of Dallas and its affiliates support the use of **blogging** as a ministry communication tool. It is an excellent platform for creating and distributing information. Although blogging is a powerful communication tool, ministry blogs may not be used for: 1) conducting or promoting outside business 2) defaming the character of any individual or institution 3) causing embarrassment to the Diocese of Dallas or its affiliates or 4) divulging any personal information about children that would jeopardize their safety or well-being in any way.

### Personal Blogs

In the event an employee or cleric identifies himself/herself as, or is manifestly understood to be, an employee or cleric of the Diocese of Dallas or its affiliates on a personal blog (or other 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 website:

**“The views expressed on this website are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer.”**

### **Confidential and Proprietary Information**

Church personnel are prohibited from disclosing via the Internet information that is understood to be held in confidence by the Diocese of Dallas or its affiliates.

Employees, clerics and volunteers are prohibited from disclosing via the Internet any information that is proprietary to the Diocese of Dallas or its affiliates, except by explicit permission of the appropriate authority.

### **Trademarks and Logos**

Church personnel may use diocesan or affiliate trademarks or logos on personal websites only in ways that clearly promote or call positive attention to diocesan events, websites or organizations associated with the trademark or logo. Church personnel may not use diocesan or affiliate trademarks or logos on their personal websites in any way that could reasonably suggest diocesan or affiliate sponsorship or agreement with any views expressed.

### **Inappropriate Language and Images**

The Diocese of Dallas and its affiliates will not tolerate employees, clerics or volunteers posting obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory, defamatory or otherwise potentially scandalous comments, links and/or images which reflect discredit or cause embarrassment to the Diocese of Dallas or its affiliates, employees, vendors, partners, agencies, schools and others. Any activity via Social Media or other Electronic Communication that contains any of the above and/or reflects negatively on the Diocese of Dallas or its affiliates, employees, vendors, partners, agencies, schools, or others is prohibited.

### **Right to Review**

The Diocese of Dallas and its affiliates reserve the right to review the personal website of any church personnel, if there are reasonable grounds for believing that this diocesan policy is being violated.

### **Protection of Children**

Church personnel of the Diocese of Dallas and its affiliates will comply with all aspects of the *Safe Environment Policy* of the Diocese of Dallas <http://www.cathdal.org/pages/a-safe-environment>. Employees, clerics and volunteers are forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information, including photos and/or video, of any child under the age of eighteen without verifiable consent of a parent or guardian. Personal identifiable information includes full name, photos, home address, email address, telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a child. Verifiable consent can take the form of a release/permission form, an email from a parent or guardian, or spoken permission by a parent or guardian in the presence of another adult. The Diocese of Dallas and its affiliates will review alleged violations of the *Children's Online Privacy Protection Act*, and the *Safe Environment Policy* of the Diocese of Dallas, on a case-by-case basis.

## **When Communicating with Children Using Social Media or Other Electronic Communication:**

- There must be at least two adults with administrative rights for each Social Media account used for ministry communication. Personal Social Media accounts must not be used for ministry communication.
- The primary purpose of such communication shall be for providing information related to a ministry or event and not for socialization or other personal interaction. Counseling of children through such communication methods is not permitted.
- Parents must be notified of the methods of communication which are used in each particular ministry and must be granted access in such communications.
- Social Media/Network or other electronic communication may not be used to communicate with children who have not reached the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, but instead should be directed to their parents.
- When using a ministry Social Media account, adults must not initiate “friend” requests with children, but may accept “friend” requests from children who are involved in the particular ministry.
- When children form their own Social Media groups, adults should not join these groups.
- As a general rule, neither personal nor ministry Social Media accounts should be used to contact children individually. If children contact particular adults engaged in ministry (other than a “friend” request), the ministry account should be used to reply by sending a group message (i.e., when the personal contact was for information relevant to all in the group). When the contact is such that a group response is not appropriate, the adult is to avoid using a personal, Social Media account to respond. In those unusual cases where Social Media is used to respond, adults should maintain copies of all such messages.
- Acceptable hours for communication with children via other electronic communications shall be between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. Communication outside of the acceptable hours may be used only in emergency situations or to communicate time sensitive information related to the ministry or ministry related event.
- On line “chatting” with children is not permitted.

**Enforcement**

The Diocese of Dallas, its affiliates and their respective administrators intend to enforce the policy set forth here and expect church personnel to comply. Failure to comply with any of the provisions of the Social Media Policy will be grounds for discipline, up to and including termination, for an employee or cleric, or removal from position, if a volunteer.

The Diocese of Dallas and its affiliates reserve the right to make changes to this policy at any time and at its sole discretion, and interpret and administer the policy in light of changing circumstances and events.

The Diocese of Dallas gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati in granting the use of its social networking policies and guidelines as a resource in the development of this policy.

## Diocese of Dallas Social Media Policy

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<b>Last</b>	<b>First</b>	<b>Middle Initial</b>
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**Job Title: Pastoral Center/Parish/School**

### Verification Statement

As with other Diocese policies, violations of this policy may be considered in performance evaluations and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

The Diocese of Dallas/Parish/School reserves the right to suspend, modify or withdraw this policy at any time and shall not be liable, under any circumstances, for any errors, omissions, loss or damages claimed or incurred due to any of your online activities.

I verify that I have read and understand this policy. I agree to abide by this policy and also understand that the Diocese of Dallas/Parish/School may amend or change the policy at its discretion without notice

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Employee/Volunteer Signature

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Date

**PLEASE PRINT Employee/Volunteer  
RETURN SIGNED FORM to Employer/Supervisor**