

Diocese of Gary Social Media Policy

"Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ. In the area of communications too, we need a Church capable of bringing warmth and of stirring hearts"—Pope Francis

Introduction

These guidelines closely adhere to those set in 2014 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in establishing and managing social media accounts. 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

Social media is fundamentally changing how people communicate. It is our responsibility as Catholics to bring the Church's teachings into what Pope Benedict XVI called the "digital continent."

As Pope Francis wrote in the 48th World Communications Day message, "The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God."

The Church can use social media to encourage respect, dialogue, and honest relationships. 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 on digital literacy.

The Church and Social Media: An Overview

Social media offer opportunities and challenges to Catholic organizations. These can be grouped into three main categories:

- Visibility
- Community
- Accountability

Visibility

Online social media communities are vast and growing rapidly. There are now more active Facebook accounts than there are Catholics, worldwide. 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 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. A blog post may not be the most effective way to remind 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.

Because of the volume of content and the dynamics of search engines and computer networking, social media require constant input and monitoring to make the Church's presence effective. To keep members, a social networking site needs to have new content regularly. In the case of social media, the axiom "build it and they will come" is not applicable. It may seem paradoxical, when considering the fluidity of social media, but good planning and strategizing is as essential, if not more so, when approaching social media, versus traditional media.

Community

Social media can be powerful tools 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 myriad ways: connecting people with similar interests, sharing information about in-person events, providing ways for people to engage in dialogue, etc.

Social media should be integrated into the overall communication strategy of an organization. Users move seamlessly across multiple platforms, receiving information and entering into dialogue using print, oral, video, and digital communications, in a variety of settings. Effective communication strategies recognize the expectations and preferences of the community and develop messages suited to those expectations and preferences.

With the rapid acceptance of digital social networks, the "digital continent" has become crowded. The Church can be successful in being heard above the fray by being engaging. Engagement is the activity that happens around a message posted on a social network, such as comments, likes and shares. The more engagement, the more a message will be seen.

Accountability

Social media provide tools for building community. Membership in communities also requires accountability and responsibility. Users of social media expect site administrators to allow dialogue, provide information and 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.

While not every demand or inquiry can be met, it is important that creators and site administrators of social media understand both how social media are different than mass media and the expectations of their consumers. Creators and consumers of mass media generally accept their one-way conversations. Social media's emphasis is on the word "social," with a general blurring of the distinction between creators of content and consumers of content. Many communication experts describe the adaption of social media as a paradigm shift in how humans communicate a development as important as that of the printing press and the innovation of electronic communication.

Definitions

Definitions provide clarity and a common language. They are even more important in guidelines for social media, since the usage of terms is rapidly evolving.

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. WordPress is one of the more popular tools used to create blogs.

Social network:

A social network is a website entirely driven by content of its members. Individuals are allowed flexibility in privacy settings in posting text, photos, video, links, and other information, as well as in the level of interaction with other members. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are among the popular social networking sites.

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 associates.

Guidelines

Social media administrators will follow the Code of Conduct and Mission Statement for the Diocese of Gary.

Mission Statement: As members of the Body of Christ, the people of the Roman Catholic community of the Diocese of Gary, diverse but united through Baptism and empowered by the Holy Spirit, nourished by Word and Sacrament, are called to continue the mission of Jesus by being a sign and instrument of God’s kingdom of truth, peace, justice, and love.

Code of Conduct (Taken from Sec. 106 of employee handbook): The successful operation and reputation of the Diocese of Gary and all its entities is built upon the Christian principles of fair dealing and ethical conduct of our employees. Our reputation for integrity requires careful observance of the spirit and letter of all applicable laws and regulations, as well as a scrupulous regard for the highest standards of conduct and personal integrity. The continued success of the diocesan mission is dependent upon the trust of those we serve and the professionalism of those we work with. As employees and volunteers, we are called to be stewards and maintain high ethical standards. To preserve that principle, employees owe a duty to the diocese to act in a way that will merit the continued trust and confidence in all those we encounter. In general, the use of good judgment, based on high ethical principles will guide all employees and volunteers to conduct all diocesan business in accordance with the letter, spirit and intent of all relevant laws and to refrain from any illegal, dishonest, or unethical conduct. Acceptable conduct includes assuming a friendly, cordial and cooperative Christian attitude with our colleagues.

The following statement should be posted under the “long description” section on Facebook pages and in similar biographical sections where applicable on other social media sites: All posts and comments should

be marked by Christian charity and respect for the truth. They should be on topic and presume the good will of other posters. Discussion should take place primarily from a faith perspective. No ads please.

Social media will follow standards set by the diocese regarding photographs, likeness and voices of children:

At registration for Diocese of Gary schools, parents sign a consent form granting parental permission for the use of name, likeness and/or photographic image of a child/youth where such permission is required. It is the responsibility of the person photographing or submitting the photograph of the child to ensure parental permission. (Example: if a school sends a photo of students and asks the diocese to post on social media, the school sending the photo must ensure all of the students are allowed to be photographed.) If a parent objects to a photo that is being used on social media, it will be removed from the site until the matter is resolved.

Privacy: All social media will be set to a level of security that allows for strict oversight and control, while still allowing the flow of information and audience engagement. On Facebook, this can be done on the “settings” page. Set “profanity filter” to “strong” and click “page moderation” to add key words (such as offensive and derogatory terms) that automatically block posts including those words. Under “visitor posts,” click “disable posts by other people on the page,” which will allow only page administrators to post on the Facebook page. Under “tagging ability” and “others tagging this page,” do not click the box allowing others to tag photos and videos. Comments made on posts can be hidden or deleted by clicking a little “x” that appears next to the comment when you hover over it with your mouse.

On Twitter, changes can be made by clicking your profile photo icon in the upper right corner of the page, which takes you to profile and settings. Click “security and privacy” to adjust levels of security for your Twitter account. For “photo tagging,” click “Only allow people I follow to tag me in photos” so strangers don’t tag you without permission. The level of privacy will vary for different needs. In general, the more unrestricted the social media account, the broader the audience. Although loose restrictions will help expand the reach, it may make it easier for people to make inflammatory remarks or to “troll” your account. To delete a tweet for some reason, click the three dots below your tweet and click “delete tweet.” To block another person from following you or sending you messages, click on the person’s profile page, click the gear icon (it looks like a sunburst), select “block” and click to confirm it.

Inappropriate Material: It is prohibited to post immoral and otherwise inappropriate material via social media. Inappropriate material includes but is not limited to: obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory, defamatory or sexually explicit comments, links or images/video.

Dealing with difficult “fans”: Trust your instinct on blocking repeat offenders of the Code of Conduct. There is a difference between discussing issues in a civil manner and posting inflammatory rhetoric. Argumentative participants can easily change the tone of every post. A good way to determine if they should be blocked is to go to their profiles and browse through the pages that they have “fanned.” Do not allow those unwilling to dialogue to hold your site and its other members hostage. In particular situations, the moderator might determine it is best to ask a member to take a conversation “offline.” These offline conversations can be conducted in person, over the telephone, or through private e-mail. The site moderators should be able to refer to the appropriate resources, such as the pastor, program director, diocesan communication office, etc.

Rules of the Road

- Site administrators should be adults.
- There should be at least two site administrators (preferably more) for each site, to allow rapid response and continuous monitoring of the site.
- Do not use personal sites for diocesan or parish programs. Create separate sites for these.
- Passwords and names of sites should be registered in a central location, and more than one adult should have access to this information.

When posting:

- Abide by diocesan/parish guidelines.
- Know that even personal communication by church personnel reflects the Church. Practice what you preach.
- Write in first person. Do not claim to represent the official position of the organization or the teachings of the Church, unless authorized to do so.
- Identify yourself. Do not use pseudonyms or the name of the parish, program, etc., as your identity, unless authorized to do so.
- Abide by copyright, fair use, and IRS financial disclosure regulations. (Example: do not post a photo if you weren't the one who took it or if you have not received permission to post it.)
- Do not divulge confidential information about others. Nothing posted on the Internet is private.
- Practice Christian charity.

Social Networking with Minors

Be sure to have permission from a minor's parent or guardian before contacting the minor via social media or before posting pictures, video 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 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).

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.)

Be familiar with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (www.coppa.org), which is federal legislation that oversees how websites interact with children under age 13. And adhere to the practices of Safe Environment/Protecting God's Children (https://www.virtusonline.org/virtus/preview_pgc.cfm and <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/safe-environment.cfm>).

Personal Sites

Personal sites of church personnel should also reflect Catholic values. Businesses are cautioning their employees that, while employees have a right to privacy and confidentiality regarding what their employers know about them, an employee's use of social networking—because of its very nature—means he or she relinquishes some privacy and could be construed as representing the company's ethics and values. Likewise, church personnel should be encouraged to understand that they are witnessing to the faith through all of their social networking, whether "public" or "private."

Many employers and church organizations ask their personnel to consider including a disclaimer on their personal sites, especially if employees/church personnel are highly visible in the community and/or post material related to church work/ministry on their personal sites. One example: "The views expressed on this site are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer."

How to Report and Monitor

Personnel are asked to report unofficial sites that carry the diocesan or parish logo to the diocesan communication office or pastor. It is important that the owner (the diocese or the parish) is able to protect its brand and identity.

Contact the communications office at (219) 769-9292 or email dbosak@dcgary.org or vnegrete@dcgary.org to report misinformation on a site that needs to be corrected or to report defamatory or libelous comments on a page for direction on how to respond.

Violations

Violations to the social media policy will result in disciplinary action in accordance with the policy in the Diocese of Gary Personnel Handbook.

(Policy established May 2016)