



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE *of* PORTLAND

PARISH SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

“Emails, text messages, social networks and chats can also be fully human forms of communication. It is not technology which determines whether or not communication is authentic but, rather, the human heart and our capacity to use wisely the means at our disposal. Social networks can facilitate relationships and promote the good of society, but they can also lead to further polarization and division between individuals and groups. The digital world is a public square, a meeting-place where we can either encourage or demean one another, engage in a meaningful discussion or unfair attacks. I pray that this Jubilee Year, lived in mercy, “may open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; and that it may eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination” (Misericordiae Vultus, 23). The internet can help us to be better citizens. Access to digital networks entails a responsibility for our neighbor whom we do not see but who is nonetheless real and has a dignity which must be respected. The internet can be used wisely to build a society which is healthy and open to sharing.” – Pope Francis, Communication and Mercy – A Fruitful Encounter, 2016.

In an effort to offer guidance for the use of social media for those involved in parish ministries, specifically with minors, the Office of Lifelong Faith Formation (OLFF) created the following best practices:

1. Complete transparency with users is strongly recommended. Acquire parents’ or legal guardians’ written permission for you and adult members of your teams to text, email, Instagram, or “friend” their children (under age 18) in local parish ministries for any given year of ministry, and to be renewed with every new year of ministry. It is strongly recommended that Snapchat be avoided at all cost, as these chats cannot be accessed once timed out.
 - a. For any adults who work or volunteer in any capacity with minors, (i.e. core team members, catechists, etc.) it must be made clear that any texts, emails, Instagram, or Facebook messages **MUST** be made only in regard to upcoming events/meetings/sessions, etc., and all that is posted, texted, tweeted, etc., must reflect Catholic teaching and values. Personal conversation should take place in person and not through social media. It is strongly recommended that Snapchat be avoided at all cost, as these chats cannot be accessed once timed out.

2. Creating a group on Facebook is recommended for the youth and parents of your parish.

- a. The creator/admin for the group needs to be a paid parish employee. A volunteer youth ministry leader/coordinator may be added as a secondary admin along with the paid parish.

Though an individual creates the group, it should be understood that this group page “belongs” to the parish; in other words, it is a parish tool and therefore falls under the mandates of the Code of Ethics for the Diocese of Portland.

- b. The group should only be used to provide appropriate information for youth ministry.
- c. Groups should have the highest privacy settings (i.e., you control who can join, all information is closed, etc.) This allows you to control who is viewing the information (vs. being publicly open to all Facebook users – see privacy settings). Parents/legal guardians should always be invited to join the group, as well as their teens, so that there is complete transparency.
- d. Groups also allow you to control what information is shared thus protecting you from accountability issues.
- e. If you do create a group, it is the creator/admin’s responsibility to monitor the wall and all discussion posts to make sure it remains a safe and fruitful environment. Determine and communicate criteria for removing posts or membership within the group.
- f. Permission from parents or legal guardians must be granted in writing before posting photos of any minor on social media. Photos should only be posted in groups with the privacy settings marked as “closed to public viewing.” “Tagging” should only be done by the individual who is pictured and only if those pictures are uploaded with the highest privacy settings.

3. While reaching out to teens via social media is a part of relational ministry; there is a distinction between “befriending” and social media “friending” and chatting. While social networking sites, like Facebook and Instagram, can be excellent tools for evangelization, they should never become the primary mediators of your ministry.

General Uses & Guidelines

1. All information displayed on any site/page/group/etc., must reflect the Catholic teaching and values. This includes and is not limited to: language, photos, songs, videos, bulletins, posts, blogs, podcasts and applications.
2. The highest privacy settings should always be selected.
3. The youth ministry leader or volunteer must not 'seek' friends; rather, teens should request you first.
4. In all cases, keep communications transparent. Parents and legal guardians must be fully aware of all platforms being used to keep in contact with their children for ministerial purposes.
5. Secure permission to identify someone by name before posting a message or picture. This is critical when posting about minors. "Tagging" should only be done by the individual who is pictured and only if those pictures are uploaded with the highest privacy settings. Permission from parents or legal guardians must be granted in writing before posting photos of any minor on social media. Photos of minors should only be posted in groups with the privacy settings marked as "closed to public viewing."
6. If you have any questions, always err on the side of caution and call the OLFF.