

**DIOCESE OF TUCSON
GUIDELINES FOR PASTORAL USE OF TECHNOLOGY**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Clearly, electronic communications (social networking sites, instant messaging, email, text messaging, cellular phone and the like) will continue to grow in sophistication and usefulness. They are already a preferred means of communication among youth and young adults. Church leaders, including Pope Benedict XVI, articulate the clear need to use new technologies to express the Word of God to all people in all generations. This is articulated as well in the *National Directory for Catechesis* which states that, “using the media correctly and competently can lead to a genuine inculturation of the Gospel” (NDC 21).

These technologies can be wonderful, and ministers cannot afford to act as if they do not exist. Nevertheless, they also can be misused; facilitating communication between ministers and those they serve in ways that do not allow for appropriate boundaries, visibility or accountability. In using such communication tools, it is most important to remember that the boundary issues are the same as in person-to-person communication, notwithstanding the superficial informality of the medium. The development of comprehensive policies that strike a balance between safety and pastoral effectiveness must be guided by three essential values: ***prudence, reasonableness, and transparency.***

GENERAL RULE OF VISIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Underlying every guideline for healthy boundaries are the twin goals of visibility and accountability. In all cases we must differentiate between confidentiality and secrecy with respect to communications with children and youth, as we do with every person we serve. Parents must be fully aware of all media being used to keep in contact with their children for ministerial purposes, and the parents must have access to all these forms of communication.

Parish/School and Ministry Websites: A great static presence for general information about parish/ministry goals, objectives, staff, and events. Must maintain the professional identity of the parish/school/ministry and adhere to the photo and video guidelines found in the full text of these guidelines.

Parish/School and Ministry Social Networking Sites: A great way to network with the parishioners/parents/constituents. Must maintain professional parish/school/ministry identity, be monitored for inappropriate content, while also adhering to photo and video guidelines found in the full text of these guidelines.

Email, Text, and Instant Messaging: A great way to direct parish/school/ministerial messages to individuals, or groups of individuals. Content must be related to parish/school/ministry, maintaining professional boundaries at all times. Information shared can be printed, archived, and shared with responsible parties as necessary.

Blogging: Should maintain the professional identity of the parish/school/ministry and not be combined with a personal blog. Should be used solely for promoting parish/ministry events, evangelization, and providing information on behalf of the parish/ministry. Blog must be monitored for inappropriate content.

Online Chat and Video: Should be used for educational purposes only, maintaining the professional identity of the parish/school/ministry. No exclusive adult-minor communication permitted.

*The electronic version of this Executive Summary and the complete Guidelines may be found at
www.diocesetucson.org/cot.php*

DIOCESE OF TUCSON
GUIDELINES FOR PASTORAL USE OF TECHNOLOGY

This document provides guidance to pastoral ministers on the use of various technologies, and as an aid to pastoral ministers and diocesan, parish, and/or school personnel in determining appropriate boundaries in their use of technology within their professional relationships with others.

Clearly, electronic communications (social networking sites, instant messaging, email, text messaging, cellular phone and the like) will continue to grow in sophistication and usefulness. They are already a preferred means of communication among youth and young adults. Church leaders, including Pope Benedict XVI, articulate the clear need to use new technologies to express the Word of God to all people in all generations. This is articulated as well in the *National Directory for Catechesis* which states that, “using the media correctly and competently can lead to a genuine inculturation of the Gospel” (NDC 21). It further calls for:

- Training of pastoral ministers in communications technology
- State-of-the-art production centers
- Communication networks (NDC 21).

These technologies can be wonderful, and ministers cannot afford to act as if they do not exist. Nevertheless, they also can be misused; facilitating communication between ministers and those they serve in ways that do not allow for appropriate boundaries, visibility or accountability. Therefore, it is imperative to develop and adhere to specific guidelines when communicating via any form of electronic media. In using such communication tools, it is most important to remember that the boundary issues are the same as in person-to-person communication, notwithstanding the superficial informality of the medium. 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. Policies and certain technologies may be deemed *reasonable* if the use is practical, sound, and considered a normative practice or standard. Lastly, being *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. The following guidelines will help you maintain appropriate boundaries.

GENERAL RULE OF VISIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Underlying every guideline for healthy boundaries are the twin goals of visibility and accountability. In all cases we must differentiate between confidentiality and secrecy with respect to communications with children and youth, as we do with every person we serve. Parents must be fully aware of all media being used to keep in contact with their children for ministerial purposes, and the parents must have access to all these forms of communication.

“THE NEW COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA, IF ADEQUATELY UNDERSTOOD AND EXPLOITED, CAN OFFER PRIESTS AND ALL PASTORAL CARE WORKERS A WEALTH OF DATA WHICH WAS DIFFICULT TO ACCESS BEFORE, AND FACILITATE FORMS OF COLLABORATION AND INCREASED COMMUNION THAT WERE PREVIOUSLY UNTHINKABLE. IF WISELY USED, WITH THE HELP OF EXPERTS IN TECHNOLOGY AND THE COMMUNICATIONS CULTURE, THE NEW MEDIA CAN BECOME—FOR PRIESTS AND FOR ALL PASTORAL CARE WORKERS—A VALID AND EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENT FOR AUTHENTIC AND PROFOUND EVANGELIZATION AND COMMUNION.”

Pope Benedict XVI

The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word
Message for the 2010 World Communications Day

CHURCH AND MINISTRY WEBSITES

- Web content should consistently represent the views/teachings of the Catholic Church and present modesty.
- Public websites should not contain personal and/or contact information about young people.
- Written permission must be attained prior to posting individual photographs, or other identifying information, of minors/young people on websites. When posting group photographs of minors/young people, it is advisable to caption the photographs using only the group's identity.
- A minimum of two adults functioning with an official organizational capacity should have full access to all organizational account/site(s).
- The official organizational logo or standard images should appear on the site to distinguish it as the organization's official site, and not that of a specific person.
- Communication with visitors to the site should be done through official organizational e-mail whenever possible.
- Use only photos that reflect the professional role of parish, school or organizational staff or volunteers that appear on any page/site.

PARISH SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

- Ministry leaders utilizing social networking sites, either for ministerial or personal use, must be vigilant in representing themselves as ministers of the Catholic Church in all interactions that can be viewed publicly. Anything that could cause scandal to the ministry should be avoided. Such may include mention of inappropriate use of alcohol, advocacy of inappropriate music/movies, inappropriate language, inappropriate dress, or the expression of opinions that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- Interactions with those to whom you minister should be through your professional organizational site.
- Parents should be informed that a social networking site is being utilized as a standard part of the ministry, and have the same access the youth have to the site.
- Be aware of the terms of use, age restrictions, privacy options and controls for each site prior to establishing a ministry presence.
- A minimum of two adults functioning with an official parish, school, and/or organizational capacity should have full administrative access to the account/site(s). Both adults should be registered to have e-mail alerts of page activity sent to their official organizational e-mail addresses.
- There is a difference between initiating a "friend request" and accepting one. Friend/connection requests should be initiated by the young people, not the adult representative of the parish, school, and/or organization.
- In photographs of youth activities, youth should not be "tagged," or identified by name in the photograph. On the original social networking site, it is recommended that the "no tagging" option be set.
- Use only photos that reflect the professional role of parish, school or organizational staff or volunteers that appear on any page/site.
- Post rules of conduct on the site, including a message on the profile page redirecting needs for emergency assistance to parish/school staff or other professional assistance – counselors, hospital, emergency personnel.
- The official organizational logo or standard images should appear on the site to distinguish it as the organization's official site, and not that of a specific person.

E-MAIL AND TEXT AND INSTANT MESSAGING

- Use a parish, school, or organizational e-mail account when communicating parish, school, or organizational business. Do not use home or personal accounts.
- Parents should be informed of the use of e-mail or instant messaging for communications purposes with minors, and that its use is a standard part of youth ministry.
- Communications should be professional and rendered only on behalf of the parish, school, or organization to young people. Communicate only about matters relative to the ministry.
- The same boundaries observed in oral/personal communication should be adhered to when communicating via e-mail/text messages.
- There is no such thing as a private e-mail/instant message. E-mail, text messages, and instant messages can be logged, archived, and forwarded to other parties. Both parties should know that any communication may be forwarded to parents, pastors, or local authorities if and/or when needed.
- Avoid any communication which might be construed as having sexual overtones. Do not reply to any such e-mail received from teens; make and keep a copy of any such inappropriate communication and notify an administrator/pastor/supervisor. Refer to the Diocese of Tucson Guidelines for the Response to Sexting and Cyberbullying. Do not “forward” messages or images.
- It is recommended that clear guidelines or parameters be established with regard to times of communication between adults and young people. While young people may be on the phone/texting in the late evening hours, those who minister with young people should pre-determine a timeframe when it is too late to take a professional call.
- Save copies of conversations whenever possible, especially those which concern the personal sharing of a teen or young adult.

BLOGGING

- Professional, ministry-based blogs should only be utilized to promote upcoming events or programs and for the purpose of evangelization and providing resources and information within the ministry setting. Such blogs should not be used to conduct or promote outside business and/or personal activities, and should not divulge any personal information regarding those being ministered to.
- Extreme care should be taken that information regarding personal blogs not be made available to young people. Those who publish personal blogs still need to be vigilant; they will be seen as representing themselves as ministers of the Catholic Church, regardless of disclaimers.
- If youth are to engage in blogging as a part of an officially sanctioned organizational activity, such activity must be monitored by at least 2 adults; no youth should be identified by name or other personal information; and the content of such a blog must be in compliance with Catholic Church teaching and values.

ONLINE VIDEO AND CHAT ROOMS

- It is recommended that streaming video be used only for organizational education, communication, and promotional purposes.
- Any use of live streaming or chat rooms that leads to, supports, or encourages exclusive youth-adult relationships is not permitted.
- At no time is one-on-one video or chat room interaction appropriate between adults and minors.
- When posting videos online, extreme care must be taken to protect the privacy of young people, and such videos should only be utilized to showcase/advertise ministry related events and activities.
- When presenting webinars, or engaging in chats/discussions, it is essential that pastoral ministers remember that they are representing the values of the Catholic Church.