

Guidelines for Use of Social Media and Other Forms of Digital Communication

The basic premise of these guidelines is to extend our safe church practices into the digital world, especially where pastoral relationships and children and youth are concerned. There are a few basic rules that go without saying:

- No sexual content.
- No profanity.
- No venting about personal issues or specific people.
- No anonymous online presence.

In addition to these absolutes are the following suggestions that should be considered by anyone within the church using social media.

- Prudent judgement should be used in the time of day a child or youth is contacted through social media. Under normal circumstances, refrain from contact or exchanging text, chats, or emails before 8:00am or after 10:00pm, unless it is an emergency.
- Emails, texts, and social media may not be an appropriate means of communication for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged, or require extensive conversation.
- Adults should not get into isolated one-on-one relationships with children and youth through Facebook, emailing, texting, etc.
- Parents/guardians should be included on emails sent to children and youth.
- Youth leaders should carefully consider whether to text a child or call him/her on a cell phone unless there is an emergency or need to communicate briefly about logistics.
- Anonymous messaging apps, such as Snapchat, should not be used by clergy or those working with children and youth.
- Clergy and other adults who work with children and youth are strongly encouraged to set stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile.
- Clergy should use discretion when submitting “friend” requests to or accepting “friend” requests from parishioners.
- Adults should not submit “friend” requests to children or youth, but may accept friend requests, with discretion.
- Clergy and church staff should consider how online relationships will be maintained after either of the parties has left the church.
- Parishioners requesting to “friend” a priest or a youth requesting to “friend” an adult can be invited to join a closed Facebook group rather than be accepted as a friend on a personal profile account.
 - Any member of the group can only tag him- or herself in photos.
 - Any staff, volunteers, or youth who are no longer part of the church group should be removed immediately. For a youth Facebook group, e.g. EYC, parents should be invited to be members as well.
 - There should always be at least two adults as administrators.
 - Behavioral covenants should be created to govern what content is appropriate.
 - Inappropriate material that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy.