



Diocese of Western New York Guidelines for Social Media and Virtual Communications

Social media changes all the time and very quickly. No policy can be completely up to date – but this policy seeks to give broad general guidelines on using e-mail, internet communications, apps and social media.

The same expectations for respect, compassion, and treating every human being with dignity that apply to face to face communication apply to the use of texting, Twitter and other social media. The clergy's vows to pattern our lives in accordance with the teachings of Christ so that we may be a wholesome example to all people also apply as much in the digital world as in the physical world.

Failure to comply with the community standards in the virtual world is as serious as a violation of community standards as in the physical world.

The basic guidelines for all digital relationships are as follows:

- Assume that everything done through digital media is done in public – once something is sent through digital media it can be easily and widely shared.
- What is not appropriate in the physical world is not appropriate in the digital world.
- Because tone and expression do not come across in digital communication be careful with using sarcasm in digital communication.

Guidelines for Video Chats, Blogs, and Video Blogs

- Participants in a video chat or blog should consider what will be shown in the video such as their surroundings, their clothing/state of dress, etc.
- All transcripts of online text chats, video chats, blogs or video blogs should be saved when possible.

Guidelines for Publishing/Posting Content

- Signed Media Release forms should be secured from adults and guardians of minor children who participate in activities that may be photographed or videoed for distribution.
- When posting photos to social media, individuals may “tag” themselves, but should not tag others.
- Photos will be removed at the request of any subject pictured therein.

Guidelines for the Use of Email & Texting

- Email can be an appropriate and effective means of communicating basic factual information such as event announcements, meeting agendas and minutes, and sharing documents.
- Care should be taken in using e-mail for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged, or require extensive communication.
- Humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted in an email.
- All email users should take a moment to consider the ramifications of their message before clicking on the “send” or “reply to all” button.

Guidelines for Interactions with Children and Youth on Social Media

The underlying philosophies of the Diocesan Safe Church policy apply to social media usage that is:

- Adults and youth are not equals – the adult holds a position of power due to both their age and position and is therefore responsible for the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of the young person in any interaction
- Interaction between adults and youth should take place in public and in view of others. Adults should not be alone with one youth.
- Adults should not seek to build special relationships with individual youth either through gift giving, one on one interaction or communication
- The Adult is ultimately responsible for maintaining appropriate boundaries in relation to youth.

In the digital world that means:

- Adults who minister to children and youth are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile. Individual personal profiles are to be used to interact with real friends (as opposed to virtual “friends”), family, and peers.
- Adults should not submit “friend” requests or requests to “follow” them to minors or youth. Youth may not be able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between youth and adults. Youth may ask to be “friends”, and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests.
- If an adult chooses to accept friend requests from minors or youth who are associated with their community of faith, other adult leaders must have full access to all aspects of that adult’s profile and correspondence.
- If an adult chooses to accept friend requests from minors or youth who are associated with their community of faith they are required to monitor the privacy settings on their social media accounts and to ensure that the privacy settings remain stringent as the social media sites change and adapt.
- Adults who wish to connect via a social networking website with youth to whom they minister are strongly encouraged to set up a page that youth may like. Youth requesting to “friend” an adult can then be invited to like the page rather than be accepted as a friend on an adult’s personal profile account.

Guidelines for Working with Groups of Children and Youth on Social Media

- Public pages or closed groups, should be used for youth ministry purposes. “Hidden” or secret groups should not.
- Groups should have at least two unrelated adult administrators, as well as at least two youth administrators.
- Invitations to youth to join the group should be made by youth administrators, unless a youth has previously asked an adult administrator to invite him/her to join the group.
- The same standards of conduct that apply at physical events shall apply to posts made on social media.

- Social networking groups for youth should be open to parents of current members.
- Adult leaders and former youth members who, due to departure, removal from position, or are no longer eligible because they have graduated from high school should be immediately removed from all groups/List Serves, etc. of youth ministries that are maintained by congregations. Pages which are open to everyone should be the primary vehicle for the distribution of information

Guidelines for Video Chats, Blogs, and Video Blogs with Children and Youth

- Adults should refrain from initiating video chats with youth, outside of regular group meetings that may take place over this media.
- All clergy and adults involved in ministry with youth should consider the content and nature of any post that will be read by or visible to youth. Your voice is often considered the voice of the church.

Guidelines for Publishing/Posting Content with Children and Youth

- Photos should not include names or contact information for minor children or youth.
- Care will be taken in posting videos to YouTube or similar video sharing sites. Video of youth events is covered by the same rules as photos and other recordings.

Guidelines for Clergy

- It is the responsibility of the clergy to keep up to date with the changes in privacy settings and terms of use of any social media they choose to use.
- Clergy and Parishioners are not equals. Clergy are assumed to hold a position of power in relation to parishioners and are therefore responsible for maintaining boundaries. This is as true in the digital world as it is in the physical world.
- Digital relationships are to be treated as having the same weight and value as relationships in the physical world.
 - Clergy are not to send “friend” requests or requests to “follow” parishioners on social media. They may accept friend or requests to follow from parishioners but should be mindful of privacy settings.
 - Clergy may wish to set up a “public figure page” on Facebook and other social media sites rather than accepting friend requests to their personal profiles.
 - When leaving a congregation clergy are to either unfriend members of that congregation or create a separate list for them so that they may not see the clergy person’s posts for the period of 12 months.
 - Parish web-sites and social media presences should be reviewed regularly by several people to ensure that all content is appropriate and up to date.

Guidelines for the Clergy List Serve

The Bishop will use the Diocesan e-news system to create an e-newsletter (similar to Postings) that will be sent to all clergy on a quarterly basis. All clergy canonically resident or licensed to officiate in Western New York will be invited to subscribe to this e-newsletter. The purpose of the newsletter is to share general information with the clergy.

The List Serve, WNYClergy, is meant to be a tool for communication among the Bishop and active clergy of Western New York and is under the direct supervision of the Office of the Bishop.

The people invited to be privy to the conversation and have posting privileges on the List Serve are:

- The Bishop(s) of Western New York
- Priests serving congregations in Western New York as rectors, vicars, priests-in-charge, interims, assistants and associates.
- Deacons assigned to congregations or deaneries
- Clergy either canonically resident or licensed to officiate who meet one of the following criteria:
 - In the last 12 months have functioned in a worship leadership role in the diocese at least 15 Sundays.
 - In the last 12 months have attended a minimum of three Diocesan clergy events (including Convention)
 - Have been given special permission by the Bishop.

A list of things not to do on the List Serve:

- Don't forward things from the List Serve to people not subscribed to the List Serve, unless expressly given permission by the person posting.
- Don't discuss issues presented on the List Serve with people not subscribed to the List Serve, unless expressly given permission by the person posting.
- Don't use abusive language.
- Don't forget that Christians of good conscience disagree with each other.
- Don't assume that everyone shares your point of view and experience.
- Don't get offended when others disagree with your point of view.
- Don't forget to give permission to share, if you mean your post to be open and non-confidential.

Appropriate posts to the List Serve include, but are not limited to:

- Questions, theological and pastoral
- Invitations
- Announcements
- Reminders
- Reports
- Communiques from the Bishop
- Ongoing conversations among the college of clergy.

List Serve moderators will be appointed by the Bishop and serve at the pleasure of the Bishop in order to fulfill the technical requirements of List Serve Maintenance. The Moderator's duties will be to regularly check for bouncing addresses, duplicates, and clergy who no longer qualify for List Serve membership as well as to reach out and include new clergy who do qualify for List Serve membership.

Violations of these guidelines may be brought to the Bishop by any member of the List Serve and those found to be in violation will be subject to the reprimand of the Bishop.