



## ***Social Media Policy for the Archdiocese of Atlanta***

### **Background and Introduction:**

"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, *Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter*, Message for World Communications Day, 2014

Church leaders, including Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have articulated the clear need to use new technologies to express the Word of God to all people in all generations. The Archdiocese of Atlanta recognizes the powerful tool electronic media can be to evangelize and educate all people. In order to ensure electronic communication on the internet is appropriate, effective and reflective of our Catholic values, and consistent with the rules and values of our workplace, the Archdiocese of Atlanta has established the following policies. These policies are in addition to and complement existing policies regarding the use of electronic communications which collectively serve to share the Good News in a way that creates a safe environment for all vulnerable populations.

### **Definition of Social Media**

Any web-based and mobile technologies, including apps, which are designed to turn communication into interactive dialogue. This includes, but is not limited to, the use of blogs/wikis, mobile phone, computer and tablet "apps," message boards/forums, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo, LinkedIn, Instagram, Tumblr, Snapchat, GroupMe, etc.

### **Establishing a Social Media Presence**

It is important to remember online content is visible to anyone in the world, so one must always be aware of the nature of the information posted. Content should consistently represent the views and teachings of the Catholic Church.

- Approval from the department head/pastor/principal is needed before seeking permission to establish a new site, page, group or account.

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- Once permission is granted, the new social media platform (e.g. Facebook page, Twitter account, etc.) should contain the official Archdiocese of Atlanta logo or standard approved images used for the Archdiocese of Atlanta and/or its entities (parishes, schools and agencies).
- A minimum of two adult employees (parish, school, mission staff) should have full administrative access to every social media account. These individuals should receive alerts of any page activity sent to their assigned email account (this allows for a quicker response time to urgent requests and helps to ensure that all postings are appropriate). At no time should minors be granted administrative privileges.
- Official sites should contain no personal views, photos or personal information of the administrator and/or staff. Administrators should establish separate accounts and pages for personal and professional use. (Please review section on personal use of social networking sites below for more information).
- Personal pages and information should be neither advertised nor accessible to young people.
- Written permission must be obtained prior to posting photographs or other identifying information of minors/young people on websites and social media sites. We recommend only using the individual's first name in the caption.
- Post the following "rules of conduct" established by USCCB for visitors to the Facebook page: *"All posts and comments should be marked by Christian charity and respect for 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."*
  - This online "rules of conduct" statement should be in sync with archdiocesan codes of conduct for other areas, such as the standards for protection of children, young adults and human resources.
- We recommend having only one presence in each of the social media platforms that you choose to use. You want to present one church online – spotlighting your various ministries.

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- Please avoid having a separate page for the parish, another for youth ministry and yet another for a special event at your parish, etc. A social media account must have regular content over the course of a full year in order to be useful. Creating many accounts fragments the audience you are trying to attract and dilutes your message.
- Therefore, under *one* account per social media platform, all ministries should do their posts, tweets, etc. to manage content well and for brand consistency. Ministry leaders should approve each posting beforehand. With the exception of Facebook, create a master user name and password that is given to the Pastor and two other designees.

## **General “Rules of the Road” for the Administrator (once site, page or group has been established)**

- All archdiocesan offices, agencies, parishes and individuals are encouraged to use the hashtag **#archatl** on every message/media posted (including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc.). This allows the Office of Communications to more easily find information to share, as well as anyone discussing Catholicism across our archdiocese.
- The Office of Communications requires notification of all accounts created by parishes, missions, schools, offices and departments, in order to add them to a directory and better spread information across the archdiocese. Please notify [communications@archatl.com](mailto:communications@archatl.com) prior to setting up any social media accounts.
- Archdiocesan offices and departments are NOT to have their own YouTube, Vimeo or other video sharing account. All video projects must be coordinated through and approved by the Office of Communications. For videos produced by your office or an outside agency, please supply a copy to [communications@archatl.com](mailto:communications@archatl.com).
- Stick to your ministry and do not claim to represent the official position of the Church unless authorized to do so. Be honest, professional and clear as to who you are and the ministry you represent.
- Avoid engaging in any postings/communications that could be misconstrued or misinterpreted.

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- Respect the Catholic Church as a whole, the Archdiocese of Atlanta, your parish/ministry, coworkers and audience. Do not post information about any of these entities that should be kept confidential. All who serve in the archdiocese will witness by their behavior, actions and words, a life consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church in all social media engagement.
- All comments should be respectful, on topic and void of personal information. You have the right and ability to block/delete those that are potentially libelous, disrespectful or contrary to church teaching.
- Prior to posting make sure you are following all copyright and fair use laws. Always attribute photos, quotes, and information to the original source/author.
- Monitor your posts to determine success of messages and effectiveness of your site. This can be done by monitoring comments, shares, retweets, likes, favorites, etc. Be able to answer questions like “who is your audience” and “which posts are more engaging.” As the account holder and administrator, feel free to delete any negative or questionable comments/posts/reactions. You have full discretion as to what appears on your social media account. If you have any questions, contact the Office of Communications at [communication@archatl.com](mailto:communication@archatl.com).
- For security purposes, if it is discovered that your social media account has been hacked, do not panic. Contact the respective social media platform which will provide the next necessary steps. In all cases, it is a good idea to change all admin credentials and passwords immediately. If your website or Facebook page has been hacked, we encourage you to have the site temporarily disabled until the issue can be resolved in order to prevent confusion for visitors.
- For more suggestions on establishing social media guidelines, consult the USCCB’s website:  
<http://www.usccb.org/about/communications/social-media-guidelines.cfm>
- For specific guidelines related to social networking with minors, please review our separate policy (attached).



### **Guidelines for the Use of Social Networking Sites with Minors**

The Archdiocese of Atlanta recognizes the various ways, both positive and negative, that technology and social media can be used. It is important that technology be used in a responsible and ethical way and that Archdiocesan staff, volunteers and parents be transparent in all forms of communication, particularly when ministering to young persons. Social networking sites should be used for ministry and education rather than for befriending people or socializing. 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).

After receiving written parental permission to communicate with young people via social media, Archdiocesan employees 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 email and text messaging.)

Make everyone aware of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, which is federal legislation that oversees how websites interact with children under age 13.

*SOURCES: USCCB Social Media Guidelines  
Archdiocese of Chicago, IL  
Archdiocese of St. Louis, MO*

#### **Guidelines:**

- Written permission must be obtained prior to posting photographs, or other identifying information, of minors/young people on websites. When posting photographs of minors/young people, it is advisable to caption the photographs using only the individual's first name.

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- The site administrator is an adult considered to be working with minor and thus should have completed all safe environment requirements per the Archdiocesan policy.
- Parents should be informed that a social networking site is being utilized as a standard part of youth ministry and any materials posted on the site must also be available through other communication mediums.
- There is a difference between initiating a “friend request” and accepting one. Friend requests should be initiated by young people, not the adult representative of the Archdiocese of Atlanta and/or its entities.
- 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.
- Because of the potential of teen crises or time relevant information, any pages with high volumes of youth involvement should be monitored frequently by official organizational personnel. A plea for help that goes unanswered can be damaging to the parish, school, and/or organization and dangerous for teens and their families.
- 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, except in the case of serious urgency.
- All Archdiocesan employees must maintain separate personal and ministry based social media accounts to ensure that any information posted on one’s personal account is not made available to young people.
- 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.

*ADAPTED FROM: The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry*



### **Personal Use of Social Networking Sites**

The Archdiocese of Atlanta respects the right of employees, volunteers and independent contractors to create and maintain personal social networking websites.

Employees, Volunteers and Independent Contractors who choose to identify his or her affiliation with the Archdiocese of Atlanta and/or its entities (parishes, schools and agencies) on personal social networking websites may be seen by their readers as a representative of the Archdiocese of Atlanta. As a result, Employees, Volunteers and Independent Contractors must adhere to the following guidelines:

- **Under no circumstances should confidential, privileged or private matters relating to the Archdiocese of Atlanta and its affiliates be addressed.** This would also include (but not limited to) the advertisement of archdiocesan, school or parish sponsored events and activities.
- **Always include a Disclaimer.** Please add a notice to your personal website that clearly communicates to your readers that the comments or views you chose to share do not reflect the views of the Archdiocese of Atlanta.
- **Adhere to the Confidentiality Policy.** Employees, Volunteers and Independent Contractors must maintain the confidentiality of the Archdiocese of Atlanta and its entities at all times.
- **Be mindful of time spent on personal websites during your normal scheduled working hours.** All time spent on personal social networking websites should be spent on your personal time. Time spent on personal networking websites should not interfere with an employee's job performance. Do not use the Archdiocese of Atlanta e-mail addresses to register on social networking sites, blogs or other online tools utilized for personal use.
- **Respect all of our workplace policies and procedures at all times, even on social networking sites.**
- **Adhere to the policies of the Archdiocese of Atlanta.** Policies regarding workplace conduct in our churches, offices and schools also apply to online activities. Inappropriate postings that may include discriminatory remarks, harassment or threats of violence will not be tolerated.

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- **Be mindful that the information posted on your personal social networking site, or on other social networking sites could potentially be grounds for discipline or possible termination of employment.**
- **Consult the Human Resources Department of the Archdiocese of Atlanta for more information.**

**Acknowledgements**

Compiled by the Communications Department of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, utilizing the policies and guidelines of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the Diocese of Salt Lake City, the Diocese of Dallas, the Diocese of Orlando, the Archdiocese of St. Louis and the Archdiocese of Chicago.

*Revised June 2018*

**\*\*\*\*Please retain for your records\*\*\*\***



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**Social Media Policy Acknowledgement Form**

I \_\_\_\_\_, hereby acknowledge receipt of the Archdiocese of Atlanta's Social Media Policy. I understand and hereby consent to its contents, application and enforcement:

This \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**(Printed) Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Check one:**

\_\_\_\_ Priest

\_\_\_\_ Deacon

\_\_\_\_ Religious

\_\_\_\_ Seminarian

\_\_\_\_ Employee

\_\_\_\_ Independent Contractor

\_\_\_\_ Volunteer