



# ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

*The Church in Central and Southern Indiana*

Office of Catholic Education

## Social Media Guidelines

*Helpful Tips and Rules of the Road for Those Who Live and Minister in the  
Church in Central and Southern Indiana*



# Office of Catholic Education

## Task Force on Social Networking Media

*Committee Members 2011-2012*

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**Kris Casey** – *Committee Chair, Associate Coordinator of Programs, Youth Ministry*

**Joe Peters** – *Associate Executive Director, Office of Catholic Education*

**Ken Ogorek** – *Director of Catechesis, Office of Catholic Education*

**Rev. Rick Nagel** – *Spiritual Advisor, Director of Young Adult and College Campus Ministry*

**Troy Sipes** – *Engineer, DAST Consulting*

**Kristeen Hudson** – *Interactive Marketing Developer, ExactTarget*

**Jackie VandenBergh** – *Administrative Coordinator, Youth Ministry*

**Christy Lux** – *Youth Minister*

**Aaron Haag** – *Parish Administrator of Religious Education*

**Joe Pedersen** – *ECHO Apprentice, Young Adult and College Campus Ministry*

**Justin Hoch** – *Member, Archdiocesan Youth Council*

*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam.*  
**For the greater glory of God.**  
St. Ignatius of Loyola

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Office of Catholic Education  
1400 N. Meridian Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
[www.archindy.org/oce](http://www.archindy.org/oce)

# Social Media Guidelines

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# I. Introduction

*Thanks to the new communications media, the Lord can walk the streets of our cities and, stopping before the threshold of our homes and our hearts, say once more: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20)<sup>1</sup>.*

Pope Benedict XVI

With these simple words, the Holy Father captures the importance and opportunity provided by social media in today’s culture. In response to the Holy Father’s invitation to ‘put out into the waters’ of social media, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops recently issued its own call for responsible and effective Church participation in this new media.<sup>2</sup>

This publication of the Office of Catholic Education, Archdiocese of Indianapolis is the result of both invitations, but is also in response to numerous requests and inquiries for guidance from within the archdiocese. What follows is a compilation of general guidelines for the use of social media in education, faith formation and youth ministry in the archdiocese. This is not official archdiocesan policy, but rather serves as a helpful guide for ministry in the emerging social media world.

This publication will discuss the following areas:

- **Definitions** – *Creating a common vocabulary before engaging in the discussion.*
- **Background and Reach of Social Media** – *Where did all of this come from and why should we pay attention to it?*
- **Advantages and Limitations of Social Media** – *Realistically assessing the technology to determine way to supplement the ministry.*
- **Office of Catholic Education Social Media Guidelines** – *Helpful rules of the road to put you at ease in unfamiliar territory.*
- **Tips for Effective Social Networking** – *Pointers to help maximize your impact on social networks.*
- **Virtuous Use and a Teachable Moment** – *Pope Benedict XVI in his own words on social media and technology in the modern age.*
- **Conclusion** – *Extending the invitation to participate in the new evangelization of the world in the third millennium.*
- **Appendix A – Sample Language for Photographs**
- **Appendix B – Sample Language for Code of Conduct**
- **Appendix C – Helpful Resources for Using Social Media**

## II. Definitions

The following definitions are provided for clarity and to provide a common language in the discussion of social media throughout this document.

- **Adult:** Any person who has reached the age of majority (currently 18 years old in Indiana).
- **Archdiocese:** The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Indianapolis, including all parishes, schools, agencies, and institutions with accountability to the Archbishop of Indianapolis.
- **Follower:** Any person or group that has somehow chosen to be linked to a particular social media page or profile so as to receive updates and content from that page. Each social media site has a different name for these “followers.” Examples would be ‘friends’ on *Facebook*, ‘followers’ on *Twitter*, and ‘connections’ on *LinkedIn*.
- **Ministry Personnel:** Any volunteer, employee, religious, or cleric who conducts ministry within the archdiocese.
- **Minor:** Any person who has *not* yet reached the age of majority (currently 18 years old in Indiana).
- **Moderator:** An adult who has been tasked with keeping up to date, monitoring, responding to questions on, and with full administrative access to, a social media page.
- **Official Ministry Page/Profile:** A page or profile on any social media site which is used as the official representation of the parish, school, or ministry for that social network. Such pages are **not** representing an individual person.
- **Social Media:** There are many definitions for “social media”; however, these media all share a similar concept. “Social media” is any website or media content that includes and relies on interactivity and content that is created by the users of the site which gives rise to two-way communication and conversation. This differs from traditional media and internet sites which rely on one-way communication and are largely informational. Examples of social media include *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and *Twitter*.
- **Social Network:** The collection of individuals with whom a person or organization has a relationship through social media. Current examples of social networks are “friends” on *Facebook* and “followers” on *Twitter*; both describe the sites’ collective users.
- **Social Networking:** The act of using social media to engage with a social network.

### III. Background and Reach of Social Media

Social media is a fairly recent development in the world of communications, but it has grown and expanded very rapidly and has been integrated into the daily life of many people. Consequently, as the Holy Father points out, it is fertile ground for ministry because it extends beyond the reach of traditional means of communication and human interaction. It is for this reason that the Church encourages responsible and effective use of social media.

*Example by the numbers:*<sup>3</sup>

*Facebook* is one of the most popular social media platforms at this writing. It was founded in 2004 out of a college dorm room at Harvard. By the end of 2010, only six years later:

- *Facebook* had close to 600 million users (nearly 10% of the world's population);
- 50 percent of users logged onto *Facebook* *every day*;
- the average user created 90 "pieces of content" (comments, pictures etc.) every month.

Taking the above information as an example, social media can be a powerful tool to reach a great number of people in an easy and efficient way.

### IV. Advantages and Limitations of Social Media

From the perspective of the Church, a major goal of engagement with social media is to create a vibrant social networking experience, keeping in mind the very real human relationship involved, that leads people to more engagement with their faith and moves them to action in the real world. With this in mind, there are both advantages and limitations to social media. The following is a short list that is by no means all-inclusive:

*Advantages of Social Media*

1. **A virtually limitless number of people can be reached:** The number of people that can be reached and ministered to through a social media presence is far greater than would otherwise be possible through traditional means of communication. The potential audience is limited only by the number of members on the social media site.
2. **Easy dissemination of information:** A social media presence makes it very easy to publicize information to an already engaged group since followers would likely already be interested in the content and subject matter of that page.
3. **No geographical or time constraints on content:** The information, content, and conversations that take place on the page can be accessed and engaged with from anywhere at any time. Conversations and discussions can take place with people from across the parish, archdiocese, state, country or the world on their own schedules.
4. **Pages are always available:** Successful social media pages will generate conversations and create their own "virtual communities" that will provide a forum for questions and answers even if the moderator of the page is not available.

## *Limitations of Social Media*

1. **Responsibility to monitor:** Having a social media presence also implies the responsibility of monitoring it for inappropriate discussions, comments or images. Although this is an important responsibility; it is not an unbearable one. Most users of social media in the Christian ministry context are generally respectful in their internet communication, and each social media site offers different privacy settings by which a moderator can control who is able to engage in discussions on the page.
2. **“Perception is reality:”** As with any other written communication, perception can be considered reality in social media communication. The written word lacks the context of face-to-face communication with its gestures, inflection, and facial expressions. This means that it is all the more important to be clear and concise in the communication of ideas through social media. Always pause and think before posting something to a social media page to make sure what is written is actually what is intended. “The internet is forever!” What is written electronically can turn up or be found by others years later even if it has been deleted.
3. **It takes time:** Maintaining a social media page takes time, however, not as much time as might be expected. It takes no more time to monitor past comments and conversations, update the page with a new piece of content, and respond to questions than it does to answer a few e-mails. The return on the time invested is much greater than similar time invested in an e-mail message since the information is public and can be seen by more than the person to whom the response is directed. This process should also be seen as an extension of personal ministry efforts even though it is not face-to-face.

## **V. Office of Catholic Education Social Media Guidelines**

The following are recommended guidelines for the use of social media by Catholic education, faith formation and youth ministry personnel in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis:

1. Ministry personnel should create separate social media pages or profiles for personal and professional use. Appropriate professional boundaries must be maintained. Therefore, personal information, pages, or profiles should not be accessible to the general public, especially when minors are involved. It should be noted, however, that nothing posted on the internet is ever truly ‘private.’
2. Ministry personnel using social media should be aware that they represent the Catholic Church to the larger public community both in their professional capacity and personal capacity if they have identified themselves as such. Due to this connection, ministry personnel should not engage in activity that would reflect poorly upon the Church and/or could cause scandal. The spiritual health of the minister is a concern here as well. Unacceptable activity could include, but is not limited to, mention of inappropriate use of alcohol, advocacy of inappropriate music and/or movies, inappropriate language, inappropriate dress, inappropriate images, or the expression and/or advocacy of opinions that are

contrary to the doctrinal and moral teachings and mission of the Catholic Church as articulated by the Magisterium and/or the official positions of the archdiocese.<sup>4</sup>

3. Moderators and ministry personnel should be familiar with the terms of use, age restrictions, privacy settings and controls of a social media site at the time they establish a presence in that network.<sup>5</sup>
4. Approval should be obtained from a pastor or supervisor prior to the creation of a social media profile or official page for a ministry.
5. At least two adult moderators who are also ministry personnel should have full administrative access to the profile or page. This ensures adequate monitoring as well as timely updates and responses to questions or comments.
6. Ministry personnel and moderators should generally not initiate first contact with a potential follower. “Friend” requests or other such requests for inclusion should be made by the potential follower and then approved by the moderator.
7. When possible, all discussion between moderators and followers of their social media pages should be conducted in a ‘public’ forum instead of private messages. Discussions that require more private means should be handled carefully and the moderator should save a dated copy of the conversation in a confidential file.
8. Ministry personnel should treat any crisis or emergency situation (e.g., signs of suicidal thoughts or other intent to harm oneself or others, chemical abuse, criminal behavior, etc.) as they would with any other mode of communication. There is a duty to report such communications and users should be advised of this responsibility for both adults and minors.
9. In compliance with OCE Policy 2010-04 on Photographs and Personal Information, written consent must be obtained before posting a personally identifiable pictures, videos, or other information on a social media site or any other “public” site. If the subject of the media is an adult, the identifiable adult must give written permission. If the subject is a minor, the parent or legal guardian of the identifiable minor must give written permission. Sample language for obtaining permission can be found in Appendix A.
10. It is suggested that a code of conduct be included on the social media page so that all parties know what appropriate conduct is expected for that particular page. Sample language can be found in Appendix B.
11. The official logo and name of the parish/school or agency should be used on official ministry pages to attest to authenticity. If it is discovered that other non-official pages are using official parish or school logos or names, the appropriate supervisor is to be made aware so that suitable action may be taken.



12. When ministry personnel use social media in their ministry to minors, parents **must** be informed that this is being used as a regular part of ministry. This is not only in compliance with archdiocesan policies, but it also helps get parents involved in ministry.
13. In ministries that involve minors, moderators of social media pages should be familiar with Part V. *Standards of Behavior Regarding Ministry to Minors* from the archdiocesan “To Be Safe and Secure” policy. Adult employees and volunteer moderators for social media pages must have background checks and Virtus training including regular updates as required by the policy for all personnel who have regular contact with minors.
14. Use of social media by ministry personnel shall be subject to relevant archdiocesan policies and revisions that shall be adopted from time to time.
15. Ministry personnel using social media must abide by all copyright and intellectual property rights laws.

## VI. Tips for Effective Social Networking

The world of social media can seem foreign and complex to people not familiar with it. It should be viewed, however, as an extension of personal ministry efforts and interaction. In order to assist in successful social networking, the following suggestions from corporations and other sources have been provided:

- **It’s a conversation:** Talk to followers as you would talk to real people in professional situations.<sup>6</sup> Do not be afraid to engage with followers.
- **Stay timely:** Part of the appeal in social media is that the conversation occurs almost in real time. Be sure to check back frequently, if only for a minute or two at a time, and respond to questions or comments.<sup>7</sup>
- **Pause and think:** Always pause and think before posting something. Make sure it says what you mean and that it adds value to the experience.
- **Keep your cool:** One of the aims of social media is to create dialogue, and people won’t always agree on an issue. When differences of opinion come up, reply in an appropriate, sensitive and pastoral way. Always remember that you are replying to a human person.<sup>8</sup>
- **Remember Christian charity:** As a representative of the Catholic Church, people will see you as being part of the Church’s public face. Remember to treat others with the dignity that they are due as sons and daughters of God.
- **Someone has left a negative comment:** Don’t panic! Calmly assess the comment and determine its merit. If it is inappropriate and violates your posted code of conduct, remove it – no explanation necessary. If it is simply a divergence of opinion and you think

it deserves a response, respectfully (not patronizingly!) thank the person for his or her comment and address it if you can. If it is a comment that seems off topic or unreasonable, sometimes ignoring the comment is the best course of action because there are people that simply want to pick a fight. You might also be surprised at other people coming to your defense (but remember to ‘moderate’ the discussion).<sup>9</sup>

- **We have no followers:** It takes time to build up a base of followers in social media. Start locally by publicizing the page to your youth group, school club, or others in your ministry. Be patient. Over time, people will start to become aware of your page.

## VII. Virtuous Use and a Teachable Moment

With advances in technology and communications media, the desire to be connected to it increases constantly. The Church encourages this involvement, but also calls for media to be used with prudence and virtue. The following list can be a springboard for engaging young adults, youth, and other constituents in conversations about how to use modern technologies in responsible ways.

1. **Called to evangelize:** Just as “...the great Apostles ...brought the Good News of Jesus to the Greek and Roman world ...It falls, in particular, to young people ...to take on the responsibility for the evangelization of this ‘digital continent.’”<sup>10</sup> The Good News is needed just as much in the virtual world as it is in the real one.
2. **Christian witness through actions:** “To proclaim the Gospel through the new media means not only to insert expressly religious content into different media platforms, but also to witness consistently, in one’s own digital profile and in the way one communicates choices, preferences and judgments that are fully consistent with the Gospel, even when it is not spoken of specifically.”<sup>11</sup>
3. **Pastoral presence:** Media platforms bring one into contact with people of different religions and cultures, so it is important to be sensitive to the needs of those who do not yet believe in Christ, the disheartened, and those with a deep unarticulated desire for the Truth. Respectful dialogue is paramount.<sup>12</sup>
4. **Prudent use:** Be it social media, blogging, texting, video games, or doing work on the computer and internet, if virtual connectedness becomes an obsessive need, it can isolate people from the real world and disrupt the patterns of rest, silence, and reflection that are important for healthy human and spiritual development. Moderate and prudent use is healthy.<sup>13</sup>
5. **Talking does not replace the spiritual life:** Talking about religion and telling others about the Good News of Christ are not substitutes for a spiritual life. Successful evangelization and ministry “...comes from Christ himself, encountered and listened to in prayer ...lived in witness; and known, loved, and celebrated in the sacraments.”<sup>14</sup>
6. **A tool to encourage real action and involvement in community:** An important goal of the social media revolution should be to drive people to Christian action and involvement. Communications should encourage people to engage in their own spiritual life and invite them to participate in the life of the parish, school, or other ministry. All of the faithful have the responsibility to invite others to know the Truth in Christ in community.

7. **Direct human contact is vital:** “It is important always to remember that virtual contact cannot and must not take the place of direct human contact with people at every level of our lives.”<sup>15</sup> God the Father did not send a Facebook message to humanity to communicate the good news of salvation, but rather sent His only Son in human form to directly engage humankind. In this way, the Father showed the importance of meeting face-to-face for the human experience.

Many other ideas and topics can be grounds for fruitful discussion with youth, young adults and adults regarding social media and all modern technologies. These seven points, however, build off of each other and touch on the major issues and concerns that the Church has regarding prudent and virtuous use of these technologies.

## VIII. Conclusion

As the Holy Father and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have said, social media is a powerful tool that the Church should not be afraid to engage. “We must engage [it] in a manner that is safe, responsible, and civil.”<sup>16</sup> The above guidelines and suggestions are meant to answer concerns and provide a safe road-map for appropriate and effective ministerial use of social media. This is not a mandate to engage in social media; rather, this is an extension of the invitation from the Holy Father and the U.S. Bishops. As technology develops, Holy Mother Church strives in new ways to fulfill the Great Commission that Christ laid out when he said, “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”<sup>17</sup>

## Appendix A – Sample Language for Photographs

The language in this section has been taken from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis’ “Policy on Photographs and Personal Information” (OCE Policy 2010-04).

*I, (name of subject), do permit and authorize (name of School/Parish) and its employees, agents, and personnel who are acting on behalf of the School/Parish to use my photograph or other likeness and appropriate identifying and accompanying information for purposes related to the educational and ministerial mission of the School/Parish, including publicity, marketing, and promotion of the School/Parish and its various programs and ministries. I understand my photograph or likeness may be copied and distributed by means of various media, including video presentations, television, news bulletins, billboards or signs, brochures, placement on websites, or in newspapers.*

*I understand that, although the School/Parish will endeavor to use my photograph or likeness and identifying and accompanying information in accordance with the standards of good judgment, the School/Parish cannot warrant or guarantee that any further dissemination of my photograph or likeness and information will be subject to School/Parish supervision or control. Accordingly, I release the School/Parish from any and all liability related to dissemination of my photograph or likeness.*

*Signature of subject and date: \_\_\_\_\_*

*If the subject is under the age of 18 years, must also be signed and dated by a parent (guardian): \_\_\_\_\_*

## Appendix B – Sample Language for Code of Conduct

Example from: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Facebook Comment Policy:

*The purpose of this Facebook page is to provide an interactive forum where readers can gather and discuss information about the wide range of issues addressed by the work and mission of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).*

*Followers are encouraged to post questions, comments and concerns, but should remember this is a moderated online discussion hosted by the USCCB.*

*USCCB appreciates healthy, constructive debate and discussion; that means we ask that comments be kept civil in tone and reflect the charity and respect that marks Christian discourse.*

*Comments will not be removed simply because they express opinions in disagreement with the USCCB. However, comments that may be deleted include those that contain:*

- *Vulgar language*
- *Personal attacks/inflammatory remarks against a person or group*
- *Content/comments off topic*
- *Spam*
- *Links to sites that contain offensive material or attack the bishops and their mission*
- *Promotion of services, products, political organizations/agendas*
- *Information that is factually incorrect*
- *(Inappropriate images [added])*

*USCCB reserves the right to remove posters (users) who violate this policy.*

*Comments left by others on this page do not reflect the views of the USCCB.*

## Appendix C – Helpful Resources/References for Using Social Media

The following are a few helpful resources for people trying to learn how to use social media platforms:

The “Social Media Guide” offers helpful tips on a number of different social media platforms: <http://thesocialmediaguide.com/>

The “How to ...for Dummies” company has put together a short video on how to get on Facebook: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sGrJ-oNhA>

Facebook itself has an extensive resources page with tips and explanations for various parts of its site: [https://www.facebook.com/FacebookPages?v=app\\_7146470109](https://www.facebook.com/FacebookPages?v=app_7146470109)

The following are references used in this publication:

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<sup>1</sup> His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI. “The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word.” Message of His Holiness for the 44<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, May 16, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> USCCB. “Social Media Guidelines.” <http://www.usccb.org/comm/social-media-guidelines.shtml>, March 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Facebook Press Room. “Factsheet and Statistics,” <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?factsheet#!/press/info.php?statistics>.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from: National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. “Recommended Technology Guidelines for Pastoral Work with Young People,” 2010, Pg. 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Intel Social Media Guidelines. [http://www.intel.com/sites/sitewide/en\\_US/social-media.htm](http://www.intel.com/sites/sitewide/en_US/social-media.htm), March 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Eastman Kodak Company. “Social Media Tips,” Pg. 11. [http://www.kodak.com/US/images/en/corp/aboutKodak/onlineToday/Kodak\\_SocialMediaTips\\_Aug14.pdf](http://www.kodak.com/US/images/en/corp/aboutKodak/onlineToday/Kodak_SocialMediaTips_Aug14.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from: Kodak’s Social Media Policies, Pg. 14.

<sup>10</sup> His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI. “New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue, and Friendship,” Message of His Holiness for the 43<sup>rd</sup> World Communications Day, May 16, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI. “Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age,” Message of His Holiness for the 45<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, July 18, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> His Holiness, Benedict XVI. “The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word,” May 16, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> His Holiness, Benedict XVI. “New Technologies, New Relationships,” May 16, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> His Holiness, Benedict XVI. “The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word.” May 16, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Benedict XVI. “Truth, Proclamation, and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age,” July 18, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> USCCB. “Social Media Guidelines.” <http://www.usccb.org/comm/social-media-guidelines.shtml>, March 2011.

<sup>17</sup> *New American Bible*. Matthew 28:19-20.