

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Introduction

The parishes, schools, and administration of the Diocese of Manchester provide and use a variety of forms of communication and information technologies. The goals in the use of electronic communications media are to spread the Gospel message; to provide information to the faithful so that they may gain a deeper understanding of their faith; to improve communication among diocesan personnel; and to allow access to the wealth of information available on the internet to parish, school, and diocesan personnel. The use of electronic communications media should be viewed as a tool to enhance productivity and further the purposes and goals of the Roman Catholic Church. It is therefore imperative that Church personnel conduct themselves in a responsible, ethical, and professional manner while using electronic communications media. All communication is subject to the boundaries established by our faith tradition, the *Serving Christ, Serving Others* Code of Ministerial Conduct, as well as canon and civil law.

Applicability

This policy applies to all Church personnel. "Church personnel" means all clergy, members of religious institutes, lay employees, and lay volunteers who minister or otherwise provide services to the Diocese of Manchester, its parishes, schools, or institutions.

The policy applies to all "electronic communications media" including, but not limited to, telephone, facsimile, voice mail, computers, tablets, internet and internet access, and electronic mail. The term also includes data storage equipment, digital information devices, personal computers, "smart phones" and similar devices, either owned or reserved for use by the Diocese and its parishes and schools, located on or off diocesan, parish, or school premises.

The term "Church" refers to the Diocese of Manchester and its parishes, schools, institutions, and agencies.

Ownership/No Expectation of Privacy

Electronic communications media purchased or provided by the Church is Church property and subject to inspection. All information created in the course of Church business or ministry and/or produced or carried on Church electronic communications media is likewise Church property and subject to inspection. Church personnel should have no expectation of privacy in the use of electronic communications media when using Church equipment or when conducting Church-related business or ministry. Electronic communications media and any information communicated, received, or stored using such media is the exclusive property of the Church, and although the Church does not regularly monitor electronic communications, they may be monitored, reviewed, retrieved, and stored at any time by Church representatives.

Church personnel must provide their supervisors and/or the network administrator with their passwords for all Church-owned electronic communication media. Church personnel may not share passwords for electronic communications media or secured websites owned or operated by the Church with anyone other than their supervisors and/or the network administrator.

Acceptable Use of Electronic Communications Media

No list of rules for the appropriate use of electronic communications media can be all-inclusive, and this policy does not attempt to articulate all required or proscribed behavior by Church personnel. All communications originating at the Church or using Church-owned equipment must be consistent with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, the letter and spirit of the *Serving Christ, Serving Others* Code of Ministerial Conduct, civil and canon law, and the Diocese of Manchester Public Policy Directives.

- *General e-mail and internet use:* During office hours, church personnel are expected to use electronic communications media only for work purposes, except for limited use during break times. Limited personal use of communications is permitted on the express understanding that the Church reserves the right (for its business purposes or as may be required by law) to review Church personnel use and to inspect all material created by or stored on the electronic communications media. Use of the electronic communications media constitutes permission for the Church to monitor communications and to access files that are made on or with these communications tools.
- *Mass Mailings:* Church personnel must obtain prior permission from their supervisor (the pastor, principal, or for diocesan personnel, the Cabinet Secretary), to send mass electronic mailings.
- *Social Networks, Blogs, Wikis, Chat Rooms, Message Boards, Online Comment Sections:* Church personnel are expected to comply with the *Serving Christ, Serving Others* Code of Ministerial Conduct with respect to all electronic communications and use of social networks, blogs, wikis, chat rooms, message boards, twitter, and online comment sections, whether or not employees are using personal or diocesan equipment or are on personal or work time. Church personnel who seek to establish a blog or a social network site (e.g., a Facebook page) for ministry must obtain prior permission from their supervisor (the pastor, principal, or for diocesan employees, the Cabinet Secretary and the Director of Communications) and must comply with the Diocese of Manchester *Guidelines for the Use of Social Networking Sites in Parish Programs* set forth below. Church personnel should not provide information to a “wiki” (a web page, such as Wikipedia or Masstimes.org, that allows visitors to edit content) or online comment sections of newspaper articles, blogs, YouTube video pages, and other forums without prior permission from their supervisor.

- *Linking to Other Websites:* Church websites, including the websites of the Diocese of Manchester and its parishes, schools, and institutions, may provide links only to non-commercial sites that are not in conflict with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. All links to other websites must be approved in advance by the pastor, principal, or Director of Communications. Examples of websites to which Church websites may link, include: (1) official Church sites, the Vatican, USCCB, dioceses, and archdioceses; (2) the sites of other parishes, schools, and ministries of or associated with the Diocese of Manchester; and (3) organizations under the oversight of a bishop or religious congregation or that are listed in the Official Catholic Directory.
- *Downloads:* Church personnel must obtain the prior permission of their supervisors or the network administrator before downloading any programs or installing any software on Church equipment. In order to prevent computer viruses from threatening the network, Church personnel should not open attachments or download content of unknown origin.
- *Electronic Mail:*
 - The use of personal e-mail accounts for communication with minors for ministry or Church-related business is discouraged. Whenever possible, official diocesan, parish, or school email accounts should be used.
 - Any use of electronic communication media through Church accounts for illegal purposes or in support of illegal activities is prohibited.
 - Any use of Church electronic communication media for commercial purposes is prohibited.
 - Any use of Church electronic communication media for partisan political lobbying is prohibited.
 - Church e-mail accounts should be used only by the authorized user(s) of the account for the authorized purpose.
- *Posting Photos, Videos, and Recordings:* Church personnel shall not post online (including on social networking sites) photographs, videos, or recordings without obtaining prior permission for their use. If identifying information about persons depicted in photographs or videos is to be posted, prior written authorization from such persons (or in the case of a minor, the parent or guardian) is required. Such written authorization may, for example, be included in an application or release for a Church-related event or program.
- *Copyright Infringement:* Church personnel must always respect copyrights and trademarks of third parties and their ownership claims in images, text, video and

audio material, software, information, and intentions. Church personnel may not copy, use, or transfer materials of others without appropriate authorization.

Guidelines for the Use of Social Networking Sites

“Social Networking Sites” are online websites that are used by groups with a common interest for communication purposes. Social networking sites should be used as a means of effective communication for ministry and education rather than for befriending people or socializing. Every effort must be made to provide a safe and secure environment and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety when using the internet as a ministry tool. Thus, the following guidelines should be kept in mind when considering the use of social networking sites for programs that involve youth under the age of 18. Note: The use of social networking sites is *not recommended* for groups that include students younger than high school age.

- The permission of the pastor, principal, or administrator must be obtained before using a social networking site for a program or ministry.
- Parents must be informed in writing about the use of the social networking site.
- Accounts should be established for the ministry or program; personal accounts should not be used.
- Minors should not be invited to be a “friend.” The minor must make the request.
- The site/group administrator must be an adult. Preferably, there should be two site administrators. The site administrators are considered to work with minors and thus should have completed all safe environment requirements in accordance with diocesan policy.
- Privacy settings may be used in order to protect group members’ privacy, but communication must be transparent and ministry-oriented. Private messaging is strongly discouraged.
- The administrator should pre-approve or regularly monitor all comments and postings. Any inappropriate content should be deleted, and the person who posted it should be contacted and reminded that improper content is not acceptable.
- Rules of conduct should be posted on the site.
- The main purpose of the site should be for general communication about group events rather than for chatting or socializing.
- All information displayed on the site should reflect the Catholic faith.
- Postings should be written as though others will read them. Communications can easily be shared with others for whom they are not intended.
- Whenever possible, copies of communications sent to youth should be maintained. Parents should be copied on communications when possible.
- Photographs may not be “tagged” on social networking sites, such as Facebook.

Further Information

Additional information about the Electronic Communications Policy may be obtained by contacting the Director of Communications for the Diocese of Manchester.