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Jefferson City

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# DIGITAL, ONLINE, AND SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION WITH YOUTH

*Policies and principles*

*for those serving in faith formation programs to youth*

**“IN THE AREA OF COMMUNICATION TOO, WE NEED A CHURCH CAPABLE OF BRINGING  
WARMTH AND STIRRING HEARTS.”**

**– POPE FRANCIS, MESSAGE FOR THE 48TH WORLD COMMUNICATION DAY, 2014**

DEVELOPED BY THE OFFICE OF YOUTH MINISTRY AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION  
AND THE OFFICE OF CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION DIOCESE OF JEFFERSON CITY  
LAST UPDATED, AUGUST 2018

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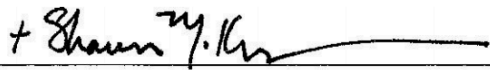
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## Policy Statement

### DIGITAL, ONLINE AND SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION WITH YOUTH POLICY

All digital, online, and social media communications with youth shall uphold the principle of transparency. All individuals communicating with youth will do so in a prudent and professional manner to ensure compliance with the principles and procedures outlined in the Digital, Online and Social Media Communications with Youth manual.

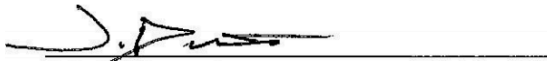
Enacted: August 9, 2018



Most Reverend W. Shawn McKnight, S.T.D.  
Bishop of Jefferson City



Sr. Kathleen Wegman, SSND  
Chancellor



John DeLaporte  
Director of Youth Ministry and Religious Education

## Introduction

### DIGITAL, ONLINE, AND SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION:

#### ESSENTIAL TOOLS FOR YOUTH MINISTRY AND CATECHESIS

As our world moves into an increasingly digital and online environment, so have our ministries. This is particularly true for those ministering to youth as more young Catholics utilize a wide variety of online, digital and social media platforms as their preferred methods of communication. Indeed, these mediums are essential tools for effective ministry with young people. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us:

*“The new communications media, if adequately understood and exploited, can offer priests and all pastoral care workers a wealth of data which was difficult to access before, and facilitate forms of collaboration and communion that were previously unthinkable. If wisely used...the new media can become a valid and effective instrument for authentic and profound evangelization and communion.*

*- The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word, 2010*

As ministers to young people, it is incumbent upon us to leverage these new mediums in our efforts to communicate, evangelize, and share the Gospel with the next generation. However, new mediums involve challenges for both youth and those who minister to them. Thus, transparency, prudence and professionalism must guide our digital communication and online interactions with young people. In this way, we can improve ministry effectiveness while ensuring the privacy and safety of everyone involved. To this end it is the policy of the Diocese of Jefferson City that:

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All digital, online, and social media communications with youth shall uphold the principle of transparency. All individuals communicating with youth will do so in a prudent and professional manner and will ensure compliance with the principles and procedures outlined in this document.

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Due to the ever-evolving nature of this subject, this document will require periodic revision and updating. That said, the general policies and principles outlined herein shall be applied prudently and judiciously in the event an update has not occurred. In this document:

- ▶ **Church Personnel** refers to anyone serving in diocesan, parish or school related ministries who has contact with youth. This includes but is not limited to pastoral leaders, youth ministry and catechetical leaders, parish staff, teachers, coaches, volunteers, chaperones, etc.
- ▶ **Youth** refers to young people below the age of 18 as well as those who are 18 and still in high school.

## General Principals

### TRANSPARENCY

It is vital that all communications with youth be as transparent as possible. Communication shall be open and accessible to multiple parties always taking care to avoid personal, private, one-on-one communications between church personnel and individual young people. To this end:

1. Parents and guardians shall be made fully aware of all the mediums used to communicate with youth for ministerial purposes. Notification of these mediums shall be communicated to parents in a formal way (i.e. parent letter, parent meeting, etc).
2. Written consent to communicate with youth shall be gathered from parents and guardians (see Appendix A).
  - 2.1. Church personnel shall not collect email addresses, phone numbers, or any other mediums of communication from youth without written permission from parents or guardians.
  - 2.2. Church personnel may not share personal contact information with youth unless approved by parents, guardians and appropriate parish administrators.
  - 2.3. With the exception of trusted communications with youth involving a sensitive pastoral situation as detailed in this document, parents shall have full access to all mediums used in communicating with their children. They shall have access to the same information that their children are receiving, though this information need not be shared through the same mediums (i.e. email sent to parents about an upcoming event versus a Facebook post to youth about the upcoming event).
3. Individual, private, one-on-one communication is prohibited. 3.1. In the event that church personnel need to communicate directly with a young person, that young person's parent or other adult ministry leader shall be included in that message (i.e. a text message to youth which includes the parent or other adult).
4. More than one adult shall always be included when communicating with youth in any digital, online, or social media forum.
5. Passwords and names of sites shall be registered in a central location at the parish.

### PRUDENT AND PROFESSIONAL PARAMETERS OF USE

Both the Christian value of prudence as well as standards of professional conduct ought to guide the boundaries and parameters of use. Appropriate boundaries that must be respected in any face-to-face or verbal communications also apply to electronic communications with minors or adults. The following parameters shall always be undertaken when communicating with youth through digital, online, or social media:

1. All communications between youth and church personnel shall be appropriate, professional, and in conformity with teachings of the Catholic Church as well as the Diocesan Code of Pastoral Conduct.
2. The primary purpose of all communications with youth shall be to provide information related to a ministry, event or for evangelization efforts.
3. Acceptable hours for direct communication with youth are between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. Church personnel are encouraged to use “scheduled sending” features should they choose to compose communications outside of acceptable hours (i.e. compose an email or Facebook post at 9:30 p.m. and schedule it to go out to the group at 7:00 AM the next morning).
  - 3.1. Communication outside of acceptable hours may be warranted to communicate important information during a ministry related event whose hours extend beyond those hours (i.e. an overnight retreat, mission trip, youth conference, etc). Parents or other chaperoning adults should be included in any communication outside of acceptable hours.

## **OWNERSHIP OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION**

1. All information and messages that are created, sent, received or stored using parish communication assets are the sole property of the parish, and no user has any ownership interest or expectation of privacy in such communications.
2. The parish retains the right, in its sole discretion, to review all information or communications sent, received, stored, or posted using parish communication assets.
3. The parish also retains the right to track internet sites, chat rooms, social media activity, as well as file downloads, for compliance with parish policies and for other business reasons.
4. Church personnel using a private, personal device to communicate with youth for ministry related purposes must agree to make the contents of their device available upon request of the pastor should there be suspicion of inappropriate communication. The continued position of church personnel using a private, personal device is contingent upon cooperation with this request.

## **REPORTING INAPPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION**

If at any time church personnel receive personal communication in any form from a young person deemed inappropriate, or from other individuals participating in or overseeing a program, the following steps shall be taken:

1. Maintain an electronic copy of the communication and print a hard copy.
2. Document the details of the communication in writing (especially if it was a verbal interaction).
3. Notify the pastor, appropriate supervisor, and the Office of Child and Youth Protection immediately.

## TRUSTED COMMUNICATION WITH YOUTH INVOLVING SENSITIVE PASTORAL SITUATIONS

As ministers to young people we recognize that situations may arise which require us to withhold notifying a parent/guardian about our direct communication with their child. For example, a youth may disclose a situation of abuse in the home that must be kept temporarily confidential to protect the safety of the child. Or, a young person may disclose a personal struggle or “safety at risk” information which they don’t want their parents to immediately know about. If a young person shares these types of sensitive pastoral situations either directly or through digital forms of communication, the following must be followed without exception:

1. Church personnel are not trained therapists or certified counselors and must learn to recognize the difference between a circumstance that requires patient listening and proper pastoral care, and a circumstance that requires professional help. They should serve as a bridge to resources and encourage youth to seek the help they need. Digital platforms should never become personal therapy sessions.
2. Church personnel who work directly with youth in the context of faith formation programs are **mandated reporters** and must report any suspected or direct revelation of physical or sexual abuse of a youth, or if a youth is a safety risk to themselves or others, to the Department of Child Protective Services and to the personnel’s direct supervisor.
3. If a young person discloses sensitive, “safety at risk” information (i.e. drug or alcohol abuse, struggles with promiscuity, cutting, depression, bullying/harassment, etc.) and has requested confidentiality:
  - 3.1. Reassure the youth that they are a trusted source to share with, but cannot promise confidentiality. While they will try their best to protect the youth’s privacy and trust, they need to share this information with another adult to get the youth aid and assistance.
  - 3.2. Maintain transparency by bringing this information to the attention of another supervising adult (such as a Pastor, DRE, or other supervisor) so that someone else is aware that you are engaging in trusted communication with a young person on a sensitive pastoral situation.
  - 3.3. Include the Pastor, DRE, or other supervisor on any further electronic communication with the youth.
  - 3.4. Keep written documentation of the details of your communications noting the dates, times, and nature of the communication.
  - 3.5. Encourage and accompany the youth to seek assistance from and share their situation with their parent/guardian and help connect them to appropriate resources and/or professional counseling.

## **SPECIFIC APPLICATIONS**

1. Cell Phone and Text Messaging
  - 1.1. Contacting youth directly on their personal cell phone must be avoided unless prior written permission has been granted to do so by the parent or guardian. Preference shall always be given to contacting youth through the parent cell phone or through a family line.
  - 1.2. One-on-one text messaging with youth is forbidden.
    - 1.2.1. When a one-on-one text message is needed the parent, guardian, or other appropriate adult shall be included in that message.
    - 1.2.2. Preference shall always be given to group texting. Group texts shall include more than one adult in the group.
2. Personal Social Networking Sites
  - 2.1. Church personnel shall not use personal social networking accounts to communicate with youth. Social media communication shall always be done from a group account associated with the parish.
  - 2.2. If church personnel choose to have a personal social networking account, it shall be private and not accessible to youth. Youth shall not be “friends” with church personnel via their personal social media account.
3. Parish/Youth Ministry Social Networking Sites
  - 3.1. Any social networking site used in parish youth ministry shall be administered by the parish. This means the account is approved in advance by the pastor, registered in the name of the parish, and labeled to reflect the official character of the site. Parish administrators and their designees have the ability to control content and access the communications history of the social media account.
  - 3.2. More than one adult shall have access to and oversight of the account.
  - 3.3. All content and activity shall be in compliance with the teachings of the Catholic Church and the standards for pastoral practice as outlined in the Diocesan Code of Pastoral Conduct.
  - 3.4. All accounts shall be set to maximize privacy. Youth ministry Facebook groups shall be “closed” groups. The group administrator shall retain permissions to add new users to the group. Settings should be reviewed often to ensure that they remain private and closed.
  - 3.5. Church personnel shall never send a “friend request” to any youth participant, but may accept “friend requests” from a youth participant. Likewise, church personnel shall not solicit youth to “follow” them on social media sites such as Twitter or Instagram, but may accept requests to “follow” when approached by youth.
  - 3.6. Tagging photos posted on social media is prohibited. Always refrain from captioning youth in any photos or videos.
  - 3.7. Ministry leaders and parish administrators must monitor social networking activity and quickly respond to any inappropriate content that occurs.
4. Email



- 4.1. Every effort should be made by the parish to provide church personnel with a parish email account for use in their respective ministry. Church personnel shall not use a personal e-mail account for their ministry work and shall keep separate accounts for personal use and ministry use.
  - 4.1.1. If a parish account is not available, then church personnel shall open a separate account for ministry and provide the pastor or appropriate supervisor access to the account.
- 4.2. Church personnel shall cc parents or guardians on all email communication with youth. In the event this is not possible or recommended, the appropriate supervisor shall be copied. In the case of elementary-aged youth, only email parents.
5. Instant Messaging
  - 5.1. Church personnel shall not instant message youth. Instant messaging takes place in one-on-one, private online venues and must be avoided.
6. Video Calling, Chat Rooms, Hangouts, and online video game forums
  - 6.1. At no time shall one-on-one communication take place between youth and church personnel in chat rooms, private online hangouts, online video gaming forums, or through video call services such as Skype or G-Chat.
  - 6.2. If church personnel want to establish an online group hangout or conduct a live group video call for purposes of ministry, parents shall be notified and permission shall be granted for those to participate (if not already done so). These mediums shall always be done in a group with more than one adult helping to administer the communication.
7. Blogging and Vlogging (video blogs)
  - 7.1. Professional, ministry-based blogs (written or video based) may be utilized for catechesis, event promotions, sharing resources or evangelization. Blogs shall not be used to conduct personal business and shall never divulge personal information of youth being ministered to.
  - 7.2. Professional, ministry-based blogs (written or video based) shall be in conformity with the teachings of the Catholic Church as well as the standards for pastoral practice as outlined in the Diocesan Code of Pastoral Conduct.
  - 7.3. Professional, ministry-based blogs (written or video based) shall be administered by the parish and monitored by at least two adults.
  - 7.4. If a blog has a “comment” function enabled, administrators shall monitor comments closely and react quickly should any comment turn inappropriate.
  - 7.5. If one maintains a personal blog outside of ministry, great care should be taken to ensure that information from one’s personal blog not be made available to young people.
8. Youth Ministry Webpage or Website
  - 8.1. Youth ministry webpages or websites shall be related to or an extension of the parish website. In the event that a parish website is not available, the youth ministry website shall be registered in the name of the parish.

- 8.2. A minimum of 2 adults functioning with an official organizational capacity shall have full access to the website account.
- 8.3. Public websites shall not contain personal photographs, personal information, or contact information about youth.
- 8.4. Written permission from a parent or guardian shall be obtained prior to posting any photographs, videos, or other identifying information about youth on a webpage or site.
  - 8.4.1. It is advisable to refrain from captioning youth in online videos or photographs. If necessary, use only their first name.

PLEASE DIRECT QUESTIONS OR REQUESTS FOR MORE INFORMATION TO:

**Director of Youth Ministry  
and Religious Education**

John DeLaporte  
[jdelaporte@diojeffcity.org](mailto:jdelaporte@diojeffcity.org)  
573.635.9127, ext. 233

**Director of Child  
and Youth Protection**

Connie Schepers  
[cschepers@diojeffcity.org](mailto:cschepers@diojeffcity.org)  
573.635.9127, ext. 224

FOR INFORMATION FROM THE STATE OF MISSOURI, REGARDING REPORTING CHILD  
ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Please visit the State of Missouri's website: <http://dss.mo.gov/cd/can.htm> or call

- ▶ **The Missouri Child Abuse & Neglect Hotline:** 1.800.392.3738
- ▶ **The Missouri Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline:** 1.800.392.0210

## CONSENT FORM FOR DIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH MINORS

This form allows you, the parent or guardian, to be aware of the various forms of communication used in your parish's youth formation programs. It allows you to identify who may communicate directly with your child and by what means. Parents or guardians will always be included on all written or digital communications with their child, and will always be granted full access to any digital or social media forum used for parish ministry to young people.

### TO BE COMPLETED BY PARISH MINISTRY PROGRAM

Parish Name and City: \_\_\_\_\_

Specific Ministry/Event: \_\_\_\_\_

Ministry Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

For ministry/event:

Phone number (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Digital and social media platforms used in this ministry or event (list all that apply): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

### TO BE COMPLETED BY PARENT OR GUARDIAN

Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Child Name: \_\_\_\_\_

- You **may not** contact my child directly.
- Contact with my child is permissible via the following methods (check all that apply):

- Phone calls to this telephone number: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

- Text messages to this cell phone number: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

- Emails to this email address: \_\_\_\_\_

- The following social networking sites sponsored by this ministry (list below):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**SUBMIT TO THE OFFICE OF YOUTH MINISTRY**

## VIDEO AND PHOTOGRAPHY CONSENT

This form allows you, the parent or guardian, to identify how images of your child may or may not be used for purposes of print, online or social media communication or promotion. In any print, digital and online postings, your child will never be identified by written caption without specific written consent of the parent. Your child will never be “tagged” in any posting through social media.

Parish Name and City: \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsoring Ministry: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Child(ren) Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

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- You **may not** use any images, video, or audio of my child in any online, social media, or print format for any reason.
- I consent that photographs/video recordings/audio recordings of my child may be used in the following circumstances (check all that apply):
  - Posted within a private, closed Facebook group moderated by the sponsoring parish ministry/event.
  - Posted on a public Facebook page moderated by the parish.
  - Posted on a public webpage or website moderated by the parish or sponsoring ministry/event.
  - Posted in the print or online version of the parish bulletin.
  - Posted on other digital or print promotional materials or publications affiliated with parish or sponsoring ministry.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

**SUBMIT TO THE OFFICE OF YOUTH MINISTRY**



## Available Apps and Services

### HELPFUL TIPS, TECHNOLOGY AND APPS

The following apps and services are possible programs that the Office of Youth Ministry and the Office of Child and Youth Protection have found to be helpful communication tools for ministry that comply with the policy and procedures of this document. The use of these applications and others like them should always be used in accordance with the policy and procedures outlined in this document. As other applications and services are reviewed they will be added to this list. Questions about a particular app or service should be directed to the Office of Youth Ministry or the Office of Child and Youth Protection.

#### FLOCK NOTE



Flocknote is a communications application designed specifically for Catholic church ministry. The app helps communicate with groups of people through text and email messaging. Type one message and it is sent to the group through each person's preferred method of communication. It can be used by individual groups or the entire parish. By organizing your church into different groups and ministries on Flocknote, the message gets to exactly who needs it, and to no one who doesn't. Plus members can reply directly to any email or text message, vote in polls,

RSVP to events and more.

Flocknote has emerged as one of the most preferred and reputable communications apps for church ministry. Its features ensure compliance with safe environment standards, and make it easy to comply with the principles and procedures outlined in this document. Groups 40 and under are free. Groups over 40 members pay a monthly fee beginning at \$5 per month.

Learn more: [www.flocknote.com](http://www.flocknote.com)

#### REMIND



Remind is a communications application designed for school and classroom use, yet is easily adaptable to a parish youth ministry or catechetical setting. Through Remind youth as well as parents are invited to join an online forum where they can receive announcements, reminders, documents, and other communications via text or email or both. Like Flock Note, one note is sent to the group and they can receive it and reply through their own preferred method of communication. Because it is designed for classroom use its features easily conform to the principles and policies outlined in this document.

Individual accounts are free. Plans are available for entire parishes for a modest monthly fee.

Learn more: [www.remind.com](http://www.remind.com)

### GROUP ME



Group Me is a text messaging application that enables one to text a large group of people at the same time from the phone or computer. Participants are invited to join a group and all can receive a group text from everyone in the group. This app is ideal for events or trips where one might have to communicate a quick message to a large group in an efficient manner. By adding adult chaperones or parents to the group chat the principle of transparency is upheld.

Learn more: [www.groupme.com](http://www.groupme.com)

### GOOGLE VOICE



Google Voice is a free telecommunications service provided by Google wherein users can obtain a single phone number through their Google account that can be synced to all of one's electronic devices. No longer do you have to give out an office, cell and home number – with Google Voice, whenever the Google Voice number is dialed it will ring each phone and device synced to the service. Moreover, phone calls and text messages can be sent and tracked through a computer making it easy for multiple users to have access account activity. Google Voice is helpful for church personnel because it enables you to communicate with youth and families in a transparent way. All phone calls, texts, and messages are accessible through one's google voice account, and you can protect your privacy by not giving your private number to youth.

Learn More: [www.google.com/voice](http://www.google.com/voice)