

# GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATION WITH MINORS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS



*Empowering pastoral ministers in these changing times is essential.  
This document is to provide you guidance in the use of technology at the  
Diocese of Salina and in its parishes and schools.*

*“Using the media correctly and competently can lead to a genuine inculturation of the Gospel.”  
[Ecclesia in America, no. 72]*

# INTRODUCTION

Social and business networking tools – such as Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest, TikTok etc. provide broad, efficient and economical avenues for collaboration and communication. Social media opens alternative channels to establish strong relationships and to engage in global conversations related to the work of the churches and schools in the Diocese of Salina. As employees, volunteers, teachers, faculty, staff, coaches and clergy explore ways to integrate social media tools into communications, the Diocese of Salina must ensure that its representatives act in ways that are consistent with the mission of the Church. As with other forms of social interaction, these guidelines affirm a diocesan commitment to communicate by means of social network with:

- clarity about Church teaching and beliefs,
- honesty, integrity and charity,
- regard for the best interests of the Church,
- conformity with diocesan safe environment guidelines.

**ALL WHO SERVE WITHIN THE MINISTRIES OF THE DIOCESE OF SALINA** must comply with these Guidelines for Communication with Minors via Social Media and Other Electronic Communication issued by the Diocese and it is expected that these guidelines will evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge.

## Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

Parish Ministers/School Personnel/Diocesan Staff - faculty, staff, coaches, volunteers, employees and clergy.

Social Media - any web site that is driven by content of its members and allows for member interaction. Common examples of Social Media include, but are not limited to Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, ZOOM, GoToMeeting, Google Hangouts, Google Classroom.

If you are using ZOOM, please go to this [GUIDE](#) for additional information.

Other video conferencing websites can be found here:

<https://www.digitaltrends.com/computing/best-zoom-alternatives-video-conferencing/>

Other Electronic Communication – electronic communication technologies that are not defined as Social Media. Common examples include: cell/smart phone, land-line telephone, e-mail, texting, etc.

## Basic Policies

- In all interactions with minors via the internet, diocese/parish/school personnel should model healthy relationships between adults and young people. Therefore, **ALL COMMUNICATIONS WITH MINORS MUST REFLECT APPROPRIATE CONTENT AND BE EDUCATION AND/OR MINISTRY RELATED.**
- Video conferencing that takes place between an adult and a minor must also include another adult such as a parent.
- There must be at least two adults with administrative rights for each social media account used for diocese/school/parish ministry communication. Personal social media accounts must not be used for school and/or parish ministry communication.
- It is not the role of the diocese/school/parish minister personnel to patrol the internet for the young people to whom they educate and/or minister. Those who work with minors on behalf of the diocese/ parish/school should never usurp the role of the parent. Intentionally monitoring and probing where minors have shared their intimate

thoughts not only violates their privacy but also may call into question the boundaries of the administrator who is investigating.

THE DEPICTION OF MINORS IN PHOTOS OR VIDEOS ON DIOCESE/SCHOOL AND/OR PARISH MINISTRY SOCIAL MEDIA SITES, WEB PAGES, EMAILS, ETC. SHOULD BE LIMITED TO DOCUMENTATION OR PROMOTION OF GROUP ACTIVITIES AND MUST NOT BE USED FOR

- THE IDENTIFICATION OF INDIVIDUAL GROUP MEMBERS. PARENTAL PERMISSION (SEE MEDIA RELEASE PARENTAL CONSENT FORM) MUST BE OBTAINED BEFORE POSTING PHOTOS OF MINORS. TAGGING OR OTHER IDENTIFICATION OF MINORS SHOWN IN PHOTOS OR VIDEOS IS NOT PERMITTED
- Be transparent in all electronic interactions. Exercise sound judgment when communicating and establishing relationships with youth, and do not place yourself into a position which could be viewed as compromising or which could have the appearance of impropriety. Remember to follow safe environment guidelines and be vigilant to protect God's children.
- Be cautious using copyrighted material. Check sources before sharing.
- Do not divulge confidential information about others. Using the name, address, or other personal identifying information of minors (anyone under age 18) is prohibited without the expressed written consent of the Parent/Guardian (see media release parental consent form).
- Any "special projects" must be brought to the attention of the Safe Environment Office.

#### **Diocese/school/parish Electronic Communications Accounts**

- The supervisor or information technology specialist must be in possession of or have access to reset all passwords used to access diocese/school/parish ministry related electronic communications. This information should also be available to those charged with monitoring these interactions.
- Diocese/school/parish ministry personnel who establish an electronic communications account for diocese/school/parish ministry purposes will cooperate with supervisors in providing all necessary information for access to the account.

Some examples of **appropriate content** for diocese/school/parish ministry related electronic communications media include information on upcoming activities; permission forms; assignments; tests; calendar of events; descriptions of projects, including procedures and expectations; cancellations; arrange meetings to discuss school related issues and or follow-up on an issue that has previously been discussed, religious studies, and other spiritual links and prayer resources.

Some examples of **inappropriate content** for diocese/school/parish ministry related electronic communications media include counseling, socializing or other personal interaction with minors.

*Personal Social Media accounts* must **NOT** be used for diocese/school and/or parish ministry communication.

#### **Web Pages**

- Web pages should reflect clear goals consistent with diocese/school teaching/parish ministry for which they are designed.
- Privacy and the protection of minors must be an essential goal in the establishment of a web page. Telephone numbers, personal email addresses and/or other identifying information of minors must not be published on the Web.
- Care should be taken to protect personal contact information of diocese/school/parish personnel, avoiding the web publication of home addresses, telephone numbers, cell numbers, and home email addresses.

#### **Communicating with minors using Social Media or other Electronic Communication**

- Parents or guardians must be notified of the methods of communication which are used in each particular school and/or parish ministry and must be granted access to participate in such communications.
- Social media may not be used to communicate with minors on **personal** social media sites.

Any use of social media to connect with a club, team, etc., shall use a separate diocese/school/parish or school event related profile. Use of social media between faculty/staff/coaches/volunteers/employees and students shall be for communication of diocese/school/parish related events **ONLY**.

- Social media groups should be “closed” or “private” groups, with administrator approval required for joining.

Communication through social media groups should also be sent to group members by other electronic communication means as well (i.e., Facebook messages should also be sent by email).

Acceptable hours for communication with minors using “other electronic communication” shall be between 7:30 am and 9:00 pm. Communication outside of the acceptable hours may be used only in emergency situations or to communicate time-sensitive information related to the school and/or parish ministry event. Communications via “other electronic communication” should be to a group rather than to individual minors.

On-line “chatting” with minors is not permitted.

Two adults should be present during virtual meetings.

Virtual meetings with minors should not be recorded without signed consent from parents

## E-mail and Other Text-Based Communication

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- The boundary issues that relate to **verbal** communication between school personnel/parish ministry and minors also apply to the use of **email, texting and instant messaging**. All such communication should be consistent with professional practices for other correspondence, this includes grammar, format and salutation. It must reflect appropriate content and be educational and/or parish ministry related. All information should be kept brief and factual.
- The use of a personal email account for diocese/school and/or parish ministry related communications with minors is **prohibited**. It is preferable to set up a separate email account (e.g., Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo mail, etc., are free services), or use an account provided by the appropriate diocesan entity for this purpose. It is advisable to save copies (either hardcopies or electronic copies in a “saved” folder) of all communications with minors.
- It is advisable to post “group” email messages using the “blind carbon copy” option; this prevents the possibility that personal information can be forwarded to non-intended recipients.
- If possible, teachers, priests, deacons, seminarians, adult volunteers, catechists, and/or parents should be copied on all electronic communications with minors. It is prudent to make “hard copies” of all communications with minors if at all possible.
- Electronic communication can be misinterpreted; therefore, it is preferable to communicate in person whenever possible.
- Communications that might be construed as having sexual overtones are to be scrupulously avoided. It is never appropriate to reply to any such e-mail from a minor. Hardcopies should be made and one’s supervisor notified **immediately**.
- Text messaging (IM or DM) between an adult volunteer, coach, teacher, staff, clergy and students on personal communication devices should be avoided at all cost.
- Email messaging from diocese/school/parish computers (email address) shall be used for general information such as class activities, curriculum, assignments, tests, deadlines, special events, cancellations, to arrange meetings, dates and times of games, all relating to diocese, parish or school related issues, and or to follow up on an issue that has already been previously discussed.

## Blogging

The word blog is short for the term “web log”. As a representative of the Church, blogging should be conducted in a professional manner for ministry purposes only. As with any professional communication, ministry blogs should **not** be used for any personal communication or agenda, to conduct or promote outside business activities, to defame or cause defamation of the character of any individual, organization or institution, to divulge any personal information about an individual or jeopardize their safety in any other way.

Some examples of **appropriate content** for diocese/school/parish related blogs include information on past or upcoming activities; permission forms; calendar of events; descriptions of projects, including procedures; expectations; biblical studies; other spiritual links, and prayer resources.

### **Social Networking**

The Diocese affirms the usefulness of this medium under the following parameters:

- Diocese/school/parish personnel having “personal” social networking pages must not advertise that site to minors, nor “friend” any minors, or current students of majority age, on my private accounts for Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or any other types of social media, including but not limited to, emailing, texting, skyping, calling on private phone and/or exchanging videos or pictures by any private social media source. If contacted by a minor or current student of majority age, I will notify them in person, or by diocese/school/parish e-mail, or diocese/school/parish Facebook, or official diocese/school/parish youth page that I am unable to “friend” them as a matter of policy.
- Should the creation of a professional networking page be approved for clarification and dispersal of information regarding a particular parish ministry or school-related activity, it must be registered in the name of the appropriate diocesan entity, not that of an individual.
- As a general rule, neither personal, school nor parish ministry social media accounts should be used to contact minors individually. If minors contact particular adults engaged in education and/or parish ministry, the school account/parish account should be used to reply by sending a group message (i.e., when the personal contact was for information relevant to all in the group). When the contact is such that a group response is not appropriate, the adult is to avoid using a personal Social Media account to respond. In those unusual cases where social media is used to respond, adults should maintain copies of all such messages.
- All diocese/school/parish ministry related sites are to be monitored consistently by appropriate diocese/school/parish personnel (supervisors, IT specialists, etc.).

### **URGENT OR EMERGENCY CIRCUMSTANCE**

In an urgent or emergency circumstance, faculty/staff/coaches/volunteers/employees/clergy can use a personal communication device or account to contact a student. It must include the parent’s email or phone number, date, time, and nature. The nature of the contact must be reported in writing to the pastor designate and/or principal as soon as possible.

*For your protection and the students **always** include the parent’s email or phone number when communicating with minors.  
The use of social networking sites is **not** recommended for groups that include students younger than high school age.*

**For more information regarding Social Media guidelines the following links should be reviewed.**

<http://www.usccb.org/about/communications/social-media-guidelines.cfm>

<https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/privacy-and-security/children%27s-privacy>

**If you have questions regarding any of this information, please contact:**

Kim Hoelting, Director of Human Resources - Diocese of Salina 785-827-8746 #28

Wendy Backes, Office of Safety and Security- Diocese of Salina 785-827-8746 #24

## Media Release Parental Consent Form

Dear Parent:

In completing and signing this Media Release Form, you hereby express an understanding and consent to your child/student to be photographed, video or audio recorded, and that these images or recordings may be included in official Diocesan, Parish, or School Webpage or Social Media posts, materials and campaigns, as well as other secular media initiatives (i.e., Secular Print or Electronic News Media, Newsletters, Webpages, Fund-Raising and Development Efforts, Grant Applications, and Video, Powerpoint or other Presentations).

Photographs, video and audio recordings, social media posts, and print and electronic media may be available for a limited amount of time, \_\_\_\_\_  
and restricted to specific groups of people, \_\_\_\_\_  
and for a specific purpose, \_\_\_\_\_  
but I also understand that due to the nature of these media, there may not be protections from unauthorized dissemination.

- ✚ I understand that any photographs, video or audio recordings will only be used by the Diocese, Parish or School in a legal manner and that in no way will my child be depicted in an unethical manner.
- ✚ I verify that I have read and understand this Release and am aware of the policy regarding the Guidelines for Communication for the Diocese of Salina.
- ✚ I agree to comply with this policy and also understand the Diocese of Salina and parishes and schools may amend or change the policy at its discretion without notice.
- ✚ I understand that I may report any concerns or violations to the Office of Communications, the Safe Environment Office, Law Enforcement, or the Kansas Protection Report Center Hotline 1-800-922-5330.
- ✚ This Release may be revoked by parent/guardian at any time by written notice.

Child/Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ DOB: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parish/School/Group and Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone No: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Safe Environment Office  
Diocese of Salina

*Guidelines for  
Creating a  
Safe Environment  
Online*

# MINISTERING ONLINE TO MINORS



## CONSIDER YOUR ATTIRE

Wear what you would have worn to the meet up had you attended in person



## CONSIDER YOUR LOCATION

Engage in online forums from public areas of your house-dining room, office space, living room, etc. The backdrop should be free from adult signs or displays

## CONSIDER YOUR PLATFORM



Limit your contact with minors to **public** platforms such as Google Hangouts, Flocknotes, Zoom and Go To Meeting. Private connections such as Face Time are discouraged

## HOW MEET UPS ARE SCHEDULED



Schedule on-line face-to-face contact with minors in advance through a group forum and with the knowledge and permission of parents or guardians

## HOW THEY CONTACT YOU

Avoid sharing personal contact information, instead provide minors with parish or group related email addresses or accounts



## WHO HAS ACCESS TO YOUR MEET UPS

Arrange to host group meet ups always with another adult and provide parents with links/access to the meet ups, emails and other messages