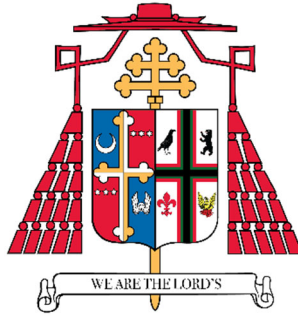


# Policies for the Pastoral Use of Social Media and Electronic Communications



The Roman Catholic  
*Archdiocese of*  
Washington



**HIS EMINENCE WILTON CARDINAL GREGORY  
BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND THE APOSTOLIC SEE  
ARCHBISHOP OF WASHINGTON**

**D E C R E E**

To the Clergy, Religious, Staff and Volunteers of The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington,

It is my pleasure to approve and promulgate the Second Edition of the *Policies for the Pastoral Use of Social Media and Electronic Communications*, together with its attachments.

I am pleased to share these policies, seeking to embrace social media in a way that is effective and prudent, so we may better share the joy of the Gospel with the world. Over the last several decades, our Holy Fathers have shared their insights on the role of social media in the Church. These policies are guided by their wisdom.

These Policies, which were originally promulgated on October 20, 2020, take effect immediately and supersede any other related policies or guidelines. Together with updates which may be made from time to time, these Policies remain in effect until they are rescinded.

It is my hope that these policies will assist our priests, religious, staff and volunteers of The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington so that together we can share the joy of the Gospel.

Given this 21<sup>st</sup> day of January in the year 2022 in The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington.

✠ Wilton Cardinal Gregory  
Archbishop of Washington

Terence J. Farrell  
Chancellor

# **Policies for the Pastoral Use of Social Media and Electronic Communications**

## **Table of Contents**

Section I.	Pastoral Statement .....	1
Section II.	Scope .....	3
Section III.	Definitions .....	4
Section IV.	General Policies.....	5
Section V.	Policies for Communications with Minors & Vulnerable Adults .....	7

### **Attachments:**

1. Acknowledgment and Consent Form.....Attachment 1
2. Policies for Creating & Administering Church Websites  
& Social Media Accounts (and Acknowledgment Form) .....Attachment 2

### ***Acknowledgments:***

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington would like to express its sincere gratitude to the many dioceses and organizations whose policies, guidelines, and documents helped in forming these *Policies for the Pastoral Use of Social Media and Electronic Communications*. The Archdiocese offers a special note of thanks to the following:

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Catholic Mutual Group, National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, the Diocese of Arlington, the Archdiocese of Atlanta, the Diocese of Cleveland, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the Archdiocese of Louisville, the Diocese of Manchester, the Archdiocese of New York, the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, and the Diocese of Rockford.

## **I. PASTORAL STATEMENT**

The Catholic Church has long recognized the opportunity to evangelize and pursue her mission using the social media of the day. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington is pleased to share these *Policies for the Pastoral Use of Social Media and Electronic Communications*, seeking to embrace social media in a way that is effective and prudent, so we may better share the joy of the Gospel with the world. Over the last several decades, our Holy Fathers have shared their insight on the role of social media in the Church. These policies have been guided by their wisdom:

### **Pope Francis:**

- *We need to recognize how social networks, on the one hand, help us to better connect, rediscover, and assist one another, but on the other, lend themselves to the manipulation of personal data, aimed at obtaining political or economic advantages, without due respect for the person and his or her rights.*
- *This is the network we want, a network created not to entrap, but to liberate, to protect a communion of people who are free. The Church herself is a network woven together by Eucharistic communion, where unity is based not on “likes”, but on the truth, on the “Amen”, by which each one clings to the Body of Christ, and welcomes others.*

**–Communications Message, 2019**

*... I believe that, so as not to lose our bearings, we need to make our own the truth contained in good stories. Stories that build up, not tear down; stories that help us rediscover our roots and the strength needed to move forward together. Amid the cacophony of voices and messages that surround us, we need a human story that can speak of ourselves and of the beauty all around us. A narrative that can regard our world and its happenings with a tender gaze. A narrative that can tell us that we are part of a living and interconnected tapestry. A narrative that can reveal the interweaving of the threads which connect us to one another.*

**–World Communications Day, 2020**

### **Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI:**

*The task of witnessing to the Gospel in the digital era calls for everyone to be particularly attentive to the aspects of that message which can challenge some of the ways of thinking typical of the web. First of all, we must be aware that the truth which we long to share does not derive its worth from its “popularity” or from the amount of attention it receives. We must make it known in its integrity, instead of seeking to make it acceptable or diluting it. It must become daily nourishment and not a fleeting attraction. The truth of the Gospel is not something to be consumed or used superficially; rather it is a gift that calls for a free response. Even when it is proclaimed in the virtual space of the web, the Gospel demands to be incarnated in the real world and linked to the real faces of our brothers and sisters, those with*

*whom we share our daily lives. Direct human relations always remain fundamental for the transmission of the faith!”*

**–World Day of Communications, 2011**

*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 increased communion that were previously unthinkable. If wisely used . . . the new media can become—for priests and for all pastoral care workers—a valid and effective instrument for authentic and profound evangelization and communion.*

**–World Communications Day, 2010**

**Pope Saint John Paul II:**

*May those who use the means of social communication for the purposes of evangelization—contributing also to building up in this way a cultural fabric in which man, aware of his relationship with God, becomes more man—be therefore aware of their lofty mission. May they have the necessary professional competence and may they feel the responsibility of transmitting the Gospel message in its purity and totality, without confusing the divine doctrine with men's opinions.”*

**–World Communications Day, 1984**

## II. SCOPE

### What and Whom do the Policies Cover?

- These *Policies for the Pastoral Use of Social Media & Electronic Communications* govern the use of Social Media and Electronic Communications by all clergy, religious, employees, volunteers, and seminarians of The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington (as defined in Section III under “Church Representatives”), including those in the Archdiocese’s parishes, schools, and ministries.
- Any person who creates or administers a website or Social Media account in his or her role as Church Representative is also governed by the attached *Policies for Creating & Administering Church Websites & Social Media Accounts* (Attachment 2).

### How do the Policies Work with Other Requirements?

- These policies are intended to complement—not supersede—existing Archdiocesan policies. Further, they do not supersede applicable laws. Church Representatives must comply with all federal, state, and local laws, avoiding any and all behavior that would incur criminal or civil liability.

Church Representatives are reminded that they must abide by all policies and requirements applicable to their role(s), which may include—but are not limited to—the following<sup>1</sup>:

- *Child Protection & Safe Environment Policy*;
- *Employee Policies and Procedures Manual*;
- *Information Technology Security Policy*;
- *Confidentiality and Nondisclosure Agreement*;
- *Pastoral Code of Conduct*;
- *Policies for Catholic Schools*;
- *School Employee Technology and Internet Usage Agreement*; and
- *Youth Ministry Manual*.

### What are Expectations for Compliance?

- The Archdiocese expects compliance by all Church Representatives. Violations may result in disciplinary action, including termination of employment or removal from service.

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<sup>1</sup> Parishes and employees may find these documents in the following drive and folder locations:

- Windows: [P:\Policies](#) or [\\adw-files\Apps\Policies](#)
- Mac: [smb://adw-files.aow.local/Apps/Policies](#)

### **III. DEFINITIONS**

For purposes of these policies and any attachments, the following definitions apply:

#### **Church Representative:**

A “Church Representative” shall include any person 18 years of age or older<sup>2</sup> who falls within one or more of the following categories:

- Clergy (all priests, deacons, and bishops);
- Religious (all persons in consecrated life);
- Employees of The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington or its parishes, schools, or ministries;
- Volunteers of The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington or its parishes, schools, or ministries; and/or
- Seminarians.

#### **Electronic Communications:**

“Electronic Communications” shall include e-mail<sup>3</sup>, texting, instant messaging (IM), online videos, video chatting, group messaging, blogging/microblogging, online posts, file transfers, and interactive communications through online gaming.

#### **Minor:**

“Minor” shall include any person under the age of 18 years’ old.

#### **Social Media:**

“Social Media” shall mean any form of web-based, network, or mobile-based technology, application (“app”), or tool for sharing content or participating in interactive communications or social networking.

#### **Vulnerable Adult:**

“Vulnerable Adult” shall mean any person at least 18 years old who, because of impairment of physical or mental function or emotional status, cannot adequately provide for his/her own daily needs or is otherwise unable or unlikely to resist, or to report, any sexual abuse, physical abuse, or neglect, without assistance.

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<sup>2</sup> Persons 18 years old and still enrolled in high school while participating in Church activities under the supervision of another Church Representative are, while still enrolled in high school (or on summer break), exempt from these policies. They are still expected to comply with all laws and use the highest level of discretion. They will be bound by these and other applicable Archdiocesan policies upon the *earlier* of (a) 60 days after graduation from (or non-enrollment in) high school; or (b) turning 19 years old.

<sup>3</sup> See the *Information Technology Security Policy* for additional policies governing employee e-mail.

## IV. GENERAL POLICIES

The following policies apply to Church Representatives when using Social Media or Electronic Communications in connection with their Church ministry, service, or employment.

- 1) Church Teachings. Be consistent with Church teachings and beliefs. Respect the Church and Archdiocese.
- 2) Prudence & Respect for Others. Be prudent, transparent, and use good judgment. Be respectful and treat others with dignity. Do not defame others. Avoid scandalous material, inappropriate language, harassment, threats, and anything that might be misconstrued.
- 3) Official Church Position. Never claim to represent the official position of the Church without authorization.
- 4) Posts Involving Minors. Obtain written permission from parents/guardians before posting photos, videos, or personally identifiable information of minors. For photos or videos of large groups or from large, public events (where privacy would not be expected), permission may not be necessary, but discretion must always be used before posting photos or videos of others. If in doubt, contact the Archdiocese Communications Department.
- 5) Protecting Confidential Information of Others. Do not share anyone's confidential, health, or personally identifiable information without permission. Be aware of and abide by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) if handling others' health information.
- 6) Other Confidentiality Obligations. Be mindful of any confidentiality obligations relating to your ministry, service, or employment with the Church.<sup>4</sup> Do not disclose confidential information.
- 7) Applicable Laws. Abide by all laws. Be especially mindful of copyright and trademark laws. Do not use others' photos, videos, content, or audio, or use links with their protected content without their approval. (This includes photos and images found via Google.<sup>5</sup>)
- 8) Disappearing Content without a Record. Avoid using features of Social Media or Electronic Communications that automatically delete content or cause content to disappear without a record (e.g., Snapchat stories).

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<sup>4</sup> Many Church Representatives have confidentiality obligations associated with their positions. For example, see the Archdiocese *Employee Policies and Procedures Manual*, Policy No. 150.

<sup>5</sup> The Archdiocese offers parishes resources for free images and photographs on its site: [digital.adw.org](http://digital.adw.org).



- 9) *Transmitting Sensitive Information.* Do not transmit sensitive personal or financial information through unprotected e-mail, web pages that convert form data into e-mail, or web forms using regular hypertext transmission (“http://” pages). Avoid transmitting sensitive information over SSL (“https://”) unless the communication through the server can be verified through third-party services.
- 10) *Creating and Administering Websites and Accounts.* Anyone who creates or administers a website or Social Media account must, in addition to following these policies, sign and abide by the requirements of the attached *Policies for Creating & Administering Church Websites & Social Media Accounts* (Attachment 2).

**Best Practices:**

- *Remember that no Social Media or Electronic Communication is truly private.*
- *Keep personal Social Media account sites separate from account sites for Church ministry, service, or employment. Obtain pastor or supervisor written permission prior to using personal Social Media accounts for Church ministry, service, or employment.*
- *When using Social Media or the Internet for personal purposes, be aware of how your online presence may be viewed in light of your role with the Church. Employees must be mindful of related employment policies.*

## **V. POLICIES FOR COMMUNICATIONS WITH MINORS AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

Communicating online with Minors or Vulnerable Adults requires special consideration. These policies aim to achieve an appropriate balance between pastoral effectiveness and safety. Maintaining this balance—guided by the values of prudence, reasonableness, and transparency—should continue to be the goal as the Church adopts new technologies to communicate with and evangelize Minors and Vulnerable Adults.

Adult Church Representatives using Social Media or Electronic Communications with Minors or Vulnerable Adults for the purpose of their ministry, service, or employment with the Church should comply with the above General Policies and also the below Policies for Communications with Minors and Vulnerable Adults.<sup>6</sup>

- 1) Administrative Access. Two adult employees<sup>7</sup> (including the pastor/department head/canonical administrator) **compliant with the Archdiocese's child protection policies** must have full administrative access to all Social Media accounts to be used with Minors or Vulnerable Adults. These two administrators must sign and abide by the *Policies for Creating & Administering Church Websites & Social Media Accounts* (Attachment 2). No Minor may be given administrative control over account settings.
- 2) Timeframes. Set clear and appropriate timeframes for Social Media and Electronic Communications involving Minors and Vulnerable Adults. Absent an emergency or necessity (*e.g.*, due to the timing of an event), such communications should occur only between 6:00 am and 10:00 pm.
- 3) Parental Notification. Parents/guardians must be informed in writing of the Social Media to be used with Minors. When feasible, they should have the ability to opt out and receive communications via another method.
- 4) Accessibility. Social Media and Electronic Communications with Minors must include or be accessible by (a) the parents/guardians of all minor recipients; or (b) at least two adult employees compliant with the Archdiocese's child protection policy.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Church Representatives also must be in compliance with all applicable Archdiocesan Child Protection & Safe Environment Policies.

<sup>7</sup> For parishes or ministries that have only one employee, the second compliant adult may be a volunteer compliant with the Archdiocese's child protection policies and who has agreed to and signed the attached *Policies for Creating & Administering Church Websites & Social Media Accounts* (Attachment 2).

<sup>8</sup> This policy is not intended to prohibit using such methods of communication with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) devices when necessary to effectively communicate to those with disabilities.

- 5) *Inappropriate Communications.* Avoid any communication that might be construed as having inappropriate sexual, romantic, or overly familiar or intimate overtones. Do not reply to any such communication from a Minor or Vulnerable Adult. Promptly notify your pastor/supervisor and keep a copy of the communication to provide to him/her.
- 6) *Content Review.* When using Internet resources with Minors present, Church Representatives must ensure *all* viewable content is appropriate. This includes taking steps to avoid inappropriate ads, images, or videos from appearing. Review all content in advance.<sup>9</sup>

### **Best Practices:**

- *Social Media and Electronic Communications involving Minors or Vulnerable Adults should be used only for appropriate outreach, ministry, and education.*
- *Pay special attention to monitoring content when Minors (especially teens) are participating in Social Media or Electronic Communications. Unanswered pleas for help can pose dangers for teens and can be damaging to the parish, school, or organization.*
- *Maintain professionalism & appropriate boundaries; write as though others will read what you wrote and see what you posted.*
- *Save copies of conversations when possible, especially those concerning personal sharing of minors.*
- *Recognize the difference between initiating friend requests with Minors and accepting them—Minors should usually be the ones initiating friend requests, not the adult Church Representative.*
- *Use common sense and good judgment. There may be times when a life-threatening or safety emergency requires immediate action that cannot reasonably allow strict compliance with all technical aspects of applicable policies. Life and safety concerns should be appropriately addressed and all reasonable attempts should be made to conform to requirements. Pastors/supervisors should be promptly informed of any emergency situations.*
- *Online gaming often involves social networking. Those who minister to or work in pastoral settings with minors should take care in their involvement in online gaming and protect their online game identities so appropriate boundaries are maintained.*

***We thank you for your service to the Church and helping The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington share the Gospel message prudently, faithfully, and joyfully.***

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<sup>9</sup> School personnel should also consult any applicable guidance from the Catholic Schools Office.

Policies for the Pastoral Use of  
Social Media and Electronic Communications  
Attachment 1

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND CONSENT FORM**

*To be signed by all clergy, religious, employees, volunteers, and seminarians of The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington*

By signing below, I acknowledge and agree to the following:

- 1) I have received, read, and understand The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington's *Policies for the Pastoral Use of Social Media and Electronic Communications* (the "Policies");
- 2) I agree to abide by the Policies, as may be updated from time to time;
- 3) I understand that any violation of the Policies may result in disciplinary action, including termination or removal from service.

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

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Policies for the Pastoral Use of  
Social Media and Electronic Communications  
Attachment 2

**POLICIES FOR CREATING & ADMINISTERING CHURCH  
WEBSITES & SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS**

Any Church Representative creating or administering a website or Social Media account on behalf of the Archdiocese or any of its parishes, schools, or ministries, shall abide by the following policies *in addition to* all other policies in the *Policies for the Pastoral Use of Social Media and Electronic Communications*.

- 1) Pastor Approval. Obtain pastor or supervisor written approval before establishing a new website or Social Media account.
- 2) Administrative Access. Ensure two adult employees<sup>10</sup> (including the pastor/department head/canonical administrator) have full administrative access to all websites and Social Media accounts at all times. Never give a Minor administrative control over account settings.
- 3) Content Monitoring. Administrators must register to get email alerts of activity and monitor content on a regular basis, promptly reporting any problematic material.
- 4) Privacy & Restrictions. Be familiar with the terms of use, age restrictions, and privacy options and controls for each site. Limit who may post on public sites and pages and who may access non-public sites and pages (*e.g.*, a Facebook page set up for a parish ministry would generally be limited to those actively involved in the ministry).
- 5) Ownership. Websites and Social Media accounts shall be owned by the Archdiocese or the Archdiocesan parish, school, or ministry for which the website or Social Media account was created and used. No individual shall have ownership rights in any website or Social Media account of the Archdiocese or its parishes, schools, or ministries, regardless of the name or contact information under which the site or account is registered.

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<sup>10</sup> For parishes or ministries that have only one employee, the second compliant adult may be a volunteer compliant with the Archdiocese's child protection policies and who has agreed to and signed this Attachment 2, *Policies for Creating & Administering Church Websites & Social Media Accounts*.

- 6) *Handling Hacks.* Have a plan of what to do if a website or Social Media account is hacked. Report the situation and follow the instructions of the service. Suspend public view of the site/account until the issue is resolved to avoid additional problems.
- 7) *Web Forms & Sensitive Information.* When creating and managing web forms that capture sensitive information (e.g., registration forms), be sure to use a qualified web-solution provider or person who understands the demands of secure transmissions and can assure that the website can appropriately handle such security. If in doubt, contact the Archdiocese Communications Department.
- 8) *COPPA.* Be aware of, and ensure all administrators are aware of, the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)<sup>11</sup>, federal legislation that oversees how websites interact with children under 13 years’ old.

### **Best Practices:**

- *Use Church websites and Social Media only for appropriate outreach, ministry and education.*
- *Promptly remove inappropriate posts and comments. Use good judgment in determining what content remains on a site. Consider posting rules of conduct such as those used by USCCB: “All posts and comments should be marked by Christian charity and respect for the 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.”*
- *Consider using a “no-tagging” option on accounts. Alternatively, avoid using full names in captions—use first names only (e.g., John S.) or no names. Minors should not be tagged without parent/guardian permission.*
- *When using Internet resources with audio for a group or audience, try to have closed captioning available for those who might require it.*

[Continue to next page for Acknowledgment and Authorization]

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<sup>11</sup> 15 U.S.C. §§ 6501-6506. See <https://www.ftc.gov/enforcement/rules/rulemaking-regulatory-reform-proceedings/childrens-online-privacy-protection-rule> and therein links.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND AUTHORIZATION**

*To be signed by all clergy, religious, employees, volunteers, and seminarians of the Archdiocese of Washington who, in their role as Church Representatives, create or administer a website or Social Media account*

By signing below, I acknowledge and agree to the following:

- 1) I have received, read, and understand the Archdiocese of Washington's *Policies for the Pastoral Use of Social Media and Electronic Communications* and these *Policies for Creating and Administering Church Websites and Social Media Accounts* (collectively, the "Policies");
- 2) I understand and agree to abide by the Policies, as may be updated from time to time;
- 3) I understand that any violation of the Policies may result in disciplinary action, including termination from employment or removal from service.
- 4) Any website or Social Media account created or used for or on behalf of the Archdiocese of Washington or any of its parishes, schools, or ministries, shall be owned by the Archdiocese or the Archdiocesan parish, school, or ministry for which the website or Social Media account was created or used. Neither I, nor any other individual, shall have or assert any ownership rights in any website or Social Media account of the Archdiocese or its parishes, schools, or ministries, regardless of the name or contact information under which the website or Social Media account was created or registered.
- 5) I understand and agree that if I assert personal ownership rights over, or take steps to exclude the Archdiocese from accessing, any website or Social Media account created or used for or on behalf of the Archdiocese, the Archdiocese shall be entitled to injunctive relief and to recover from me all costs and expenses incurred in pursuing relief, including attorneys' fees.
- 6) I understand and agree that the Archdiocese shall have the authority to access all content and administrative controls of any website or Social Media account created or used for or on behalf of the Archdiocese or its parishes, schools, or ministries. I hereby irrevocably consent to giving the Archdiocese full access to and control of any and all websites and Social Media accounts created or used for or on behalf of the Archdiocese or its parishes, schools, or ministries.

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

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_