



Diocese of Oregon

The Episcopal Church in Western Oregon

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Digital & Social Media Guidelines

From the Communications Policies & Style Guide

Contents

General Information about Digital Communications.	3
Recommended Practices and Guidelines for Interactions with Children and Youth.	4
Groups on Social Networking Sites	5
Recommended Practices and Guidelines for Interactions with Adults	6
Recommendations for digital communications and content.	7
Recommendations for Video Chats, Blogs or Video Blogs	8
Recommendations for Publishing/Posting Content Online	9
Recommendations for Use of Email or Texting (Includes Twitter) .	10
Resources	11

Digital & Social Media Guidelines

General Information about Digital Communications

- All communication sent digitally (email, social networking sites, notes or posts, etc.) is NOT CONFIDENTIAL and may be shared or reposted to others.
- Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent, just as a window in the door provides transparency in the physical world.
- In the virtual world healthy boundaries and safe church practices must be adhered to as they are in the physical world.
- In the virtual world, “friend” can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate through that medium. In the physical world, friend can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self disclosure, mutuality and expectations for relationship.
- Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world.



Recommended Practices and Guidelines for Interactions with Children and Youth

Adults who minister to children and youth are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile. Individual personal profiles are to be used to interact with real friends, family and peers. Adults should not submit “friend” requests to minors or youth. Youth may not be able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between youth and adults. Youth may ask to be “friends”, and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests.

If an adult chooses to accept friend requests from minors or youth who are associated with their community of faith, other adult leaders must have full access to all aspects of that adult’s profile and correspondence.

Adults who want to connect via a social networking website with youth to whom they minister are strongly encouraged to set up a closed group account that youth may join. These groups must be administered by more than one account. Youth requesting to “friend” an adult can then be invited to join this group rather than be accepted as a friend on an adult’s personal profile account. The purpose of these two separate accounts/profiles is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with youth and real family, friends and colleagues.

Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy and/or the local county authorities. If the material is on a church affiliated site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with local county authorities.

Groups on Social Networking Sites

- Groups should have at least two unrelated adult administrators as well as at least two youth administrators. Closed groups, but not “hidden” groups, should be used for youth groups (J2A, Rite 13, Confirmation, pilgrimage, mission trips, etc.).
- Invitations to youth to join the group should be made by youth administrators, unless a youth previously asked an adult administrator to invite him/her to join the group.
- Behavioral covenants should be created to govern what content is appropriate and inappropriate for an online youth group.
- Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy and/or Department of Human Services (DHS). If the material is on a church affiliated site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with DHS and/or police.
- Inappropriate material that does not raise suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should immediately be removed from the site.
- Any content that details inappropriate behavior (outside of the bounds of the established behavioral covenant) during a church sponsored event or activity should be addressed by adult youth leaders and parents.
- Social networking groups for youth should be open to parents of current members.
- Parents should be informed that the content of youth pages or groups that are not sponsored by the church are NOT within the purview of adult youth leaders.
- Adult leaders of youth groups and former youth members who, due to departure, removal from position, or are no longer eligible because they “aged-out” of a program should be immediately removed from digital communication with youth groups via social networking sites, list serves, etc.

Recommended Practices and Guidelines for Interactions with Adults

- Clergy are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile to shield both adult and youth members from viewing content that may be inappropriate.
- Individual personal profiles of clergy are to be used to interact with real friends, family and peers. Clergy should not submit “friend” requests to parishioners and others to whom they minister. The disparity of power may not give the other person the ability to decline such request.
- Clergy who want to connect via a social networking website with parishioners are strongly encouraged to set up a group account that all parishioners may join. The purpose of having a personal profile and parish group is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with parishioners and real family, friends and colleagues.
- Clergy should consider the impact of declining a “friend” request from parishioners. These encounters may create a tension in “real world” relationships. Clergy can direct “friend” requests from parishioners to the parish’s group page.
- Clergy who work directly with youth are encouraged to establish church sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with youth members.
- When a cleric’s ministry at a parish or other ministry setting ends, the cleric should remove parishioners as “friends” or contacts in all forms of digital communications.

Recommendations for digital communications and content

Behavioral Covenants

Covenants should acknowledge that materials posted on Church Sponsored sites (and/or group pages) are **not confidential**.

Covenants should acknowledge that content deemed inappropriate will be removed from the site or group page.

Covenants for communities of faith should address the following issues:

- Appropriate language
- Eligibility of membership to join a social networking group. Things to consider include whether you have to be a member of a parish or youth group and whether there are age requirements/restrictions for participation for youth groups.
- Loss of eligibility of membership and removal from the social networking group. Consider how and when members will be removed from the group due to moving away, leaving the faith community, becoming too old for youth group, clergy leaving to minister to another parish or exclusion from ministry positions for other reasons.
- Who, how and when may photos be tagged (members identified by name; for example, individuals may tag themselves in photos but should not tag others)
- (violence, sexual acts, etc.) and the consequence for inappropriate behavior.
- Compliance with mandated reporting laws regarding suspected abuse.

Recommendations for Video Chats, Blogs or Video Blogs

Adults should refrain from initiating video chats with youth

- Participants in a video chat or blog should consider what will be shown in the video such as their surroundings, their clothing/ state of dress, etc.
- All transcripts of on-line text chats, video chats, blogs or video blogs should be saved when possible.
- All clergy and adults engaged in ministry with youth should consider the content and nature of any post that will be read by or visible to youth. Your voice is often considered the voice of the church.



Recommendations for Publishing/Posting Content Online

- Congregations must inform participants when they are being videoed because church buildings are not considered public space.
- Any faith community that distributes video of its worship services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media MUST post signs that indicate the service will be broadcast.
- All communities of faith should take care to secure signed Media Release forms from adults and guardians of minor children who will or may participate in activities that may be photographed or videoed for distribution.
- Photos that are published on church sponsored sites should not include name or contact information for minor children or youth.

Recommendations for Use of Email or Texting (Includes Twitter)

- Email can be an appropriate and effective means of communicating basic factual information such as the time of an event, agenda for a meeting, text of a document, etc.
- Email is not an appropriate communication method for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or require extensive conversation.
- If an email message is longer than a couple of sentences, then the matter might more properly be addressed via live conversation.
- Humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted in an email.
- All email users should take a moment to consider the ramifications of their message before clicking on the “send” or “reply to all” button.

Resources

The resources listed below are not specifically aimed toward church or religious organizations but the content is applicable to general use guidelines not only for understanding how best to use it, but what legal and social ramifications there can be.

- CDC Social Media Tools, Guidelines & Best Practices
<http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/>
- From Crisis 1.0 to Crisis 2.0: The Need for Social Media Responsible Use Training
<http://socialmediatoday.com/chrissyme/1606101/crisis-10-crisis-20-need-social-media-responsible-use-training>
- Best Practices in Social Media: A Resource Guide for Associations
<http://www.connect2amc.com/uploads/files/11socialmediahandbook.pdf>
- 10 Best Practices for Social Media: Helpful guidelines for news organizations, American Society of Newspaper Executives
http://asne.org/Files/pdf/10_Best_Practices_for_Social_Media.pdf

