DIOCESE OF
FORT WAYNE-SOUTH BEND

Policy – Electronic Communication and Technology

INTRODUCTION

"The image of the body and the members reminds us that the use of the social web is complementary to an encounter in the flesh that comes alive through the body, heart, eyes, gaze, breath of the other. If the Net is used as an extension or expectation of such an encounter, then the network concept is not betrayed and remains a resource for communion. If a family uses the Net to be more connected, to then meet at table and look into each other's eyes, then it is a resource. If a Church community coordinates its activity through the network, and then celebrates the Eucharist together, then it is a resource. If the Net becomes an opportunity to share stories and experiences of beauty or suffering that are physically distant from us, in order to pray together and together seek out the good to rediscover what unites us, then it is a resource.

We can, in this way, move from diagnosis to treatment: opening the way for dialogue, for encounter, for "smiles" and expressions of tenderness... 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."

Pope Francis, 24 January 2019, 53rd World Communications Day Message

Note: Throughout this policy, certain words will be noted by an asterisk. These words are defined in the appendix of this policy. Diocesan school personnel should also refer to Policy P3645 as found in the Catholic Schools Office Educational Policies. Resources and forms for use with this policy are contained in an additional supplement.

PURPOSE

This policy assists those who minister in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend by outlining the acceptable use of electronic communication* and technology. The policy protects both the diocese and its members by defining use that is safe, responsible, civil, and, most importantly, reflects our discipleship of Jesus Christ. The diocese believes these resources are an important educational and evangelizing tool to further the mission of the Church. Therefore, use of these resources must always be consistent with the mission of the Catholic Church. The benefits to using electronic communication and technology include its speed of transmission, ability to reach large numbers of persons, low cost, ease of use, and opportunity for feedback and collaboration. Its thoughtful and careful use promotes healthy communication in building relationships and promoting the mission of the church. However, electronic communication is a

tool in relationship-building and is never a substitute for personal encounter. Moreover, electronic communication can inflict great harm to individuals, especially minors*, and the church itself if misused.

POLICY STATEMENT

The Diocese of Fort Wayne – South Bend may supply computers, software, internet access, and/or other electronic communication devices to its clerics*, those preparing for ordination, employees*, volunteers*, ("church personnel") and students so they may complete the responsibilities assigned by their positions. All users must take care to apply these tools for their intended purposes. The diocese may monitor electronic communication or any other related use of its computers, devices and networks at any time, with or without notice to users.

The diocese encourages administrators, pastors and principals to support the use of electronic communication and technology and to give church personnel the necessary training to communicate safely and responsibly while using electronic communication.

Any communication that includes defamatory or harmful comments regarding the diocese, its personnel*, parishes, schools, institutions or those it serves may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. All church personnel and students of the diocese are required to adhere to the information provided in this policy when using electronic communication.

PROTECTION OF MINORS*

The diocese requires that church personnel and students comply with all aspects of the *Safe Environment Policy* (www.diocesefwsb.org/Policies-and-Procedures). The diocese will review alleged violations of the *Children's Online Privacy Protection Act* and the *Safe Environment Policy* of the diocese as needed. See also Policy 4170 in the Catholic Schools Office Educational Policies concerning disclosure of student education records.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

There are many forms of electronic communication with some enabling private exchanges between two or more persons while others share information in the public domain. Some forms of communication are intended only for adults* while others may include adults and minors. Those utilizing electronic communication should consider the type that best serves their ministry and those for whom the messages are intended. For example, a closed group on a social media platform allows adults and minors the freedom to communicate freely within the group. The communication has a public aspect, but it is contained within the group affording some protection. Whereas open groups on social media platforms allow for the greatest transparency and work well for outreach with adults and promoting events.

Those who serve in the diocese may also use electronic communication in their personal lives. If so, they must use care in those communications also. This is due to the public nature of electronic communication and the association of content to the creator.

Examples of electronic communication platforms

- Learning management systems (LMS): used in educational settings for class and course work. Ex. Canvas, Blackboard, Google Classroom
- Information management systems: information system used for decision-making and reporting, including the coordination, control, analysis, and visualization of information or financial transactions in an organization. Ex. Powerschool, CMG Connect, Parishsoft, Shopwithscrip, and FACTS
- Social media* platforms: used to communicate with others, find people with like interests, share information. Ex. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn
- Texting/email, and marketing platforms: send short messages (texts or email) via mobile devices or using an online application. Ex. Remind, Flocknote, Constant Contact, MailChimp, and GroupMe

Websites/online accounts/blogs

The diocese may approve the creation of ministry websites*/online accounts or blogs* on platforms but only as an extension of a ministry, program, or event. Initiation of such sites must have the prior approval of the proper supervisor*/administrator before beginning such work. Supervisors who give approval to an individual to create a ministry website/online account/blog for dispersal of information are responsible for it. The diocese does not permit use of a personal site* or account to be used by lay employees, volunteers, or those preparing for ordination as the official means of extending a diocesan, parish or school ministry, program, or event. Clerics may use personal sites to share homilies and other spiritual resources.

Email

The diocese requires that a ministry/work email account be established and used in all ministry and professional work on behalf of the diocese by clerics, those preparing for ordination, and employees. The account should be in a domain that is owned or controlled by the diocese so that archiving of all messages is possible for retrieval if needed. The pastor/principal/supervisor should ensure every employee who needs an email account to complete job duties has one. The diocese does not permit use of a personal email account to conduct ministry or work on behalf of the diocese by clerics, those preparing for ordination, or employees. While volunteers may use their personal email accounts in their volunteer role, the parish/school may consider providing an account in the parish/school domain to certain volunteers so that it controls access to and retention of messages.

Cell phones/other devices

Since the diocese does not provide cell phones to most of its church personnel, they may use their personal devices for electronic communication. When doing so, adults in their roles within the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend must use the approved electronic communication methods outlined in this policy. In cases where organizations do, however, provide a device that is owned or paid for by a diocesan entity, the diocese shall retain all rights to monitor, track, or analyze usage of the device.

Confidential and proprietary information

Church personnel are prohibited from disclosing information that is understood to be held in confidence by the diocese, FERPA (the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974) or HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996). Church personnel are prohibited from disclosing any information that is proprietary to the diocese, except by explicit permission of the appropriate authority.

Trademarks and logos

Use of the diocesan crest, logo, and name requires explicit permission from the diocesan Communications Office. The diocese does not allow use of its name, trademarks or logos, names of any parish, school or entity of the diocese on personal websites or in any way that could reasonably suggest diocesan or affiliate sponsorship or agreement with any views expressed on personal accounts.

The crests of the bishops belong to them and are not to be used in any unofficial capacity.

Right to review

The diocese reserves the right to review the electronic communications of any church personnel that is generated by diocesan accounts or using diocesan equipment.

RULES/PROCEDURES

In using electronic devices to communicate in their roles with of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, including but not limited to email messages, text messages, tweets, websites, blogs, and social networking sites, church personnel and students will:

1. Always use respectful language.
2. Maintain appropriate relational boundaries in all forms of communication.
3. Never access, post or send immoral, obscene, illegal, threatening, abusive, defamatory, or profane material or pornography (adult or minor) of any kind to any person.
4. Never send anonymous messages. Messages sent by an address from an office holder, such as info@diocesefwsb.org or bishopsoffice@diocesefwsb.org are permitted.
5. Create usernames on a diocesan-owned entity or third-party account that allow transparency as to the identity of the user.
6. Treat all communication as if it were public. Communication via these forms of technology does not always remain private. Always use language and communicate as if you were face to face with the person. The message may be altered and sent beyond the original author's intention.

When communicating with minors using forms of electronic communication:

7. The purpose is to provide information related to a ministry, educational activity, or event and not for socialization or other personal interaction. Prolonged conversations or

interactions of a personal nature with minors through such communication methods are not permitted. Family members are exempt.

8. Parents must be notified of the methods of communication which are used with their minor children and their consent obtained. Parents must be granted access to such communications including the minor's account login credentials and/or membership in a closed social media group. Written verification of understanding from parents/guardians is required. See the resources and forms document for a sample form.

9. Social Media/Network or other electronic communication may not be used to communicate directly to minors who have not reached the 9th grade, but instead should be directed to their parents. Educational or curriculum-based electronic communications are acceptable for those below 9th grade if it is approved by the pastor/principal/supervisor and parents/guardians via signature(s) and occur on a learning management platform used by the school. These programs must always be transparent in nature and freely accessible by parents/guardians. If the school allows individual communication between adults and minors on the platform, e.g. teachers and students, then parents must be informed that this feature will be used and given access to the messages. It is also acceptable to create public organizational pages which may be viewed by any individual. Minors may only be given information to follow these public pages if they are permitted by the rules of the site to open an account.

10. For electronic messages that are sent to *groups of minors* who have reached the 9th grade, the following is required:

Email:
    a. Parents/guardians informed of use with their minor children and written consent given.
    b. Message sent to all members of group.
    c. Parents copied on message if they request this.
    d. Supervisor copied on all messages.

Text:
    a. Parents/guardians informed of use with their minor children and written consent given.
    b. Message sent to all members of group.
    c. Parents copied on message if they request this.
    d. Supervisor copied on all messages.

Post on social media platform:
    a. Parents/guardians informed of use with their minor children and written consent given.
    b. Posts or messages are visible to all group members.
    c. Parents are invited or admitted as members if the group is closed.
    d. Supervisor given access to the social media site or designated as a co-administrator with full access and posting privileges to the social media account.

11. For messages that are sent to *individual* minors (9th grade and above), the following is required:

Email:
   a. Parents/guardians informed of use with their minor children and written consent given.
   b. Parents copied on message.

Text:
   a. Parents/guardians informed of use with their minor children and written consent given.
   b. Parents copied on message.

Telephone call:
   a. Parents/guardians informed of use with their minor children and written consent given.
   b. Calls are made infrequently and only for a purpose associated with ministry, program, or event.
   c. Calls are not made for socializing.

Post on social media platform: Not recommended between adult and individual minor.

12. When using social media sites for communication with minors, a closed or private group or page may keep the group safer as it prevents interference from outsiders.
13. When using a ministry social media account, adults must not "follow" or "like" a minor but may accept the request from minors who are involved in the ministry. Church personnel may not post publicly or privately on a minor's personal social media page.
14. When minors form their own electronic communication groups, adults should not join these groups. If the teens involved with a ministry, club, team or organization have a running group message, the ministry and/or its leaders would not be responsible.
15. If minors contact an adult engaged in ministry without copying their parents/guardians on the message, (other than a "follow" request), the adult may reply with a group message (i.e., when the personal contact was for information relevant to the group). When the contact is such that a group response is not appropriate, the adult should respond with: *"I have received your message but am unable to reply as you have not copied your parent/guardian on the message. Please resend to me with at least one parent/guardian copied so that I may reply to you. If this is an emergency and you need to communicate with me immediately, reply and include that in your message. Thank you."* It is also permissible for the adult minister to respond to the message if the parent is copied. Church personnel should maintain copies of all such messages.
16. Adults are permitted to initiate communication with minors between 8:00 AM and 9:00 PM. They may respond to communication sent to them by a minor outside of this time period only if it is an emergency, urgent such that it cannot wait until the next morning or occurs in the context of a retreat or pilgrimage and is necessary.
17. Online "chatting" with minors is not permitted.

18. Adults must remember that they are adult professionals who are rendering service to a minor. Appropriate boundaries must exist between adults and minors so that effective ministry may occur. Adults are not friends or buddies with the minors they serve. All electronic interaction with youth should be conducted as if the adult minister would be willing to say or give the same response in person, in the presence of that minor's parent.

Additional information for social networking sites (as part of a parish, school or diocesan site)

1. Before creating a social media account on a platform, the pastor/principal/administrator must approve its use in writing. See the resources and forms supplement for a form for this use.
2. There must be at least two administrators with rights for each social media account used for ministry communication.
3. The adult creating the account should use electronic communication platforms that are based in the United States to assure compliance with US laws for safety, security, and privacy.
4. Consider the audience and purpose of the account to determine if it should be a public or private site.
5. The site administrator must approve each request to follow/like the site after verification of current participation in the program or ministry.
6. Do not post or distribute personal identifiable information of a minor without verifiable consent of the parent or guardian. Personal identifiable information includes the minor's home address, email address, telephone number or other information that would allow someone to contact the minor. Personal identifiable information pursuant to this policy also includes any photo and/or video of a minor that is published or posted along with the minor's name or the name of any family member of the minor, or the minor's age or grade level. Verifiable consent may be given by a release/permission form, an email from a parent or guardian, a parent/guardian request, or spoken permission by a parent or guardian in the presence of another adult.
7. Absolutely no tagging pictures with the minors' names or other identifiers which could show up in search engines can be used without a parent's/guardian's written permission. (Use of diocesan permission form required).
8. Post rules of conduct on the site. If public posting or replies to posts are allowed, site administrators must actively monitor the content for appropriateness and civility; deleting such content and/or blocking or sanctioning members that do not abide by those principles.
9. Snapchat is not youth ministry friendly. Attempting to connect with youth with a personal account or attempting to set up a ministry account is not compliant with proper professional standards.

Computers

In using a computer or other electronic device supplied by the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend or one of its entities, church personnel must:

1. Respect the privacy of other users.
2. Respect and honor copyright and license agreements.
3. Safeguard user identification (user ID) and private passwords.
4. Protect information from unauthorized use or disclosure.
5. Never use the computer for illegal purposes or in any way that violates any international, federal, state or local laws.
6. Never use the computer to harass, threaten, or transmit inappropriate material.
7. When separating from employment or volunteer service with the diocese, never delete any computer files or download diocesan information without appropriate authorization.

Internet access

In accessing and using the internet from diocesan-owned electronic equipment or accounts, all church personnel must adhere to the above-mentioned items. Also, they must:

1. Never attempt to block, bypass or remove filtering software.
2. Use great care when downloading files from the internet to the diocesan, parish or school system. Files must be scanned for viruses. Compressed files should be scanned before and after decompression.

ENFORCEMENT

The Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend will enforce the policy set forth here and expects all church personnel to comply. Failure to comply with any of the provisions of the Electronic Communication and Technology Policy will be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including termination.

The diocese reserves the right to make changes to this policy at any time, at its sole discretion, and interpret and administer the policy considering circumstances and events.

GENERAL DECREE

In accord with *CIC/83* can. 29, I hereby promulgate this Electronic Communication and Technology Policy as particular law for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend and decree that it is to take effect on August 12, 2019.

All previous particular law relating to this is hereby abrogated.

+ Kevin C. Rhoades

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Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades
Bishop of Fort Wayne – South Bend

Rev. Mark A. Gurtner

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Very Reverend Mark A. Gurtner
Chancellor

Given on August 12, 2019.
at the Archbishop Noll Center,
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Appendix – Definitions

- *Adult:* An individual who is eighteen years of age or older.

- *Blog:* A blog is a website usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.

- *Cleric:* An ordained priest or deacon incardinated in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, a priest or deacon who is a member of a religious institute or society of apostolic life if engaged in a ministry in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend at the direction of its bishop, or any priest or deacon incardinated in another diocese but who is engaged in a ministry in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend at the direction of its bishop.

- *Electronic Communication:* All electronic communication technologies that are used to transmit information between persons either individually such as through text message or email message or those used to communicate through social media with small or large numbers of persons.

- *Employee:* Any person who is paid by the diocese for his or her work.

- *Interactive website:* A website that allows its users to communicate. A website in which visitors can post their replies and comments to communicate with the person behind the website to get solutions for their query in a more entertaining and effective manner. Some of the most common types of interactive websites include blogs, forums, wikis, and social networks. Interactive websites allow users to change the way the website displays, play games, interact with friends online, and perform a host of tasks.

- *Micro-blog:* A form of multimedia blogging that allows users to send brief text updates or micro media such as photos or audio clips and publish them, either to be viewed by anyone or by a restricted group which can be chosen by the user. These messages can be submitted by a variety of means, including text messaging, instant messaging, E-mail, digital audio or the web. The content of a micro-blog differs from a traditional blog in that it is typically smaller in actual size and aggregate file size. A single entry could consist of a single sentence or fragment or an image or a brief, ten-second video. *Example: Twitter – A form of micro-blogging, entries are limited to 140 characters.

- *Ministry Website:* An Internet website/tool created by employees, clerics and volunteers for the sole purpose of conducting diocesan/affiliate business.

- *Minor:* A person under 18 years of age. A person who habitually lacks the use of reason is to be considered equivalent to a minor (ref. Essential Norms for Diocesan / Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons).

- *Password-Protected Sites:* Sites that use a username/password or other such means to access all or portions of the site. For example: Powerschool account for grade and student information at a school.

- *Personal website:* A social network page, blog or any Internet website/tool created by employees, clerics, and volunteers primarily to share personal communication with friends and family.

- *Personnel:* Persons associated with the church such as clerics, those preparing for ordination, employees and volunteers who minister on behalf of the diocese.

- *Social Media/Network:* Social media networks are interactive, a place to share information/content, mediated by algorithms, and create virtual community/networking among members. Individuals are allowed flexibility in privacy settings, in posting text, photos, video, links and other information, and in level of interaction with other members. *Examples: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr are often also included in lists of social networking sites (although sometimes YouTube and Flickr are designated as multimedia sharing sites, while Twitter is currently more often designated as a micro-blogging application).

- *Supervisor:* The hiring and/or supervising agent: for parish staff this is the pastor; for parish volunteers, the appropriate administrator (e.g., Director of Religious Education or Director of Youth Ministry); for school personnel, the principal / pastor.

- *Volunteer:* An adult or minor who works without financial or material gain on behalf of the diocese, who is not an employee or a cleric (for example, an intern, catechist, scout leader, coach, student teacher and others in similar capacities).