SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR ADULTS AND MINORS

Diocese of Boise

I. GENERAL RULE OF VISIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1.01 A basic principle in protecting minors from sexual abuse is eliminating opportunities for such abuse to occur. This requires a commitment to the twin goals of visibility and accountability in all interactions with minors, and the establishment of appropriate boundaries, both physical and situational.

1.02 It is inappropriate for church personnel to be alone with a minor and/or in a location not visible to others. Similarly, healthy boundaries limit the times, topics, frequency and content of all communications between church personnel and minors. These boundaries extend to the use of technology and media.

II. COMMUNICATIONS BY CHURCH PERSONNEL WITH MINORS

The ethical behavior that we expect of church leaders and personnel in their interactions with minors must extend to all forms of communication, including the virtual/technological world. Those who minister and work in pastoral settings and schools should be especially vigilant regarding healthy boundaries with everyone, and especially with minors. The following principles contribute to the establishment and maintenance of healthy boundaries.

2.01 Parents are the primary educators in faith and morals, and they are the first heralds of the Faith in regards to their children. Church personnel, including but not limited to catechists, youth ministers, school personnel, volunteers and others serve as partners to assist the parents, and avoid even the perception of competition over the parents' authority.

2.02 All communications between church personnel and minors must be open and transparent. Care must be taken to avoid falling into the role of "surrogate parent" in all circumstances. A parent should never have cause to be concerned about church personnel interfering with the primacy of the parent. Therefore, the content of any pastoral consultations with minors must willingly and openly be available for sharing with the parent(s).

2.03 To protect both the adult and the minor, communications with young people must not be excessive and/or occur with improper frequency, at inappropriate hours or in private, no matter the medium used.

2.04 Those who minister and work in pastoral settings with young people will consistently represent the teachings of the Catholic Church when using electronic media. The purpose of all communications with minors must be as a tool of evangelization.

2.05 It is advisable for church personnel to avoid the use of personal communications devices (cellular phones, etc.) and instead use diocesan or parochially issued devices when interacting with a

minor. If a personal device must be used, it is prudent to make hard copies of all communications with minors if at all possible.

2.06 Church personnel must never distribute or intentionally access abusive, harassing, libelous, obscene, offensive, profane, pornographic, threatening, sexually explicit, or illegal material.

2.07 Church personnel, especially those who work with young people should be diligent in avoiding all situations that could be a source of scandal for themselves or others.

2.08 Church personnel must always distinguish between "being friendly" and "being friends" with minors. Minors are not the peers of adults and should never be allowed to become overly friendly or familiar with church personnel.

2.09 It is normally inappropriate for adults to include minors within an adult social circle.

2.10 Church personnel should not be accessible to minors on a constant "on-call" basis. This includes contact using any of the various communications media. Established times permitting such contact should also be limited to appropriate hours of the day or evening. Contact must clearly relate to one's specific role as church personnel and/or church matters.

2.11 It is inappropriate when there seems to be a special relationship between an adult and a young person who seems to be a favorite. Even the appearance of a special relationship between church personnel and a minor is to be avoided.

III. THE INTERNET AND OTHER ELECTRONIC MEDIA

3.01 In all interactions with minors via the Internet, church personnel should model and inform healthy relationships between adults and young people. Establishing and adhering to healthy boundaries provides a model that helps young people more quickly recognize when an adult on the Internet engages in behavior that is divergent and report it to their parent and/or other trusted adults. Therefore, all communications with minors must reflect appropriate content and be church-related.

3.02 It is not the role of church personnel to patrol the Internet for the young people to whom they minister. While a young person should have no expectation that statements made on-line are private, it is the parent's role to monitor their minor's behavior, not church personnel. Those who work with minors on behalf of the church should never usurp the role of the parent. Adults must not seek out a minor's personal sites. 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 minister who is investigating.

3.03 Church personnel are expected to follow this Policy at all times, including all provisions regarding reporting and specified procedures, regardless of the medium by which information is obtained. Questions regarding this should be directed to the Diocesan Office of Child, Youth and Adult Protection.

3.04 Church personnel will also be mindful of their duty as mandated reporters and appropriately involve legal authorities in situations where there is child abuse, neglect or abandonment.

3.05 At least two adults in a parish or school setting must regularly monitor church-sponsored Internet content and interactions. In the case of computer labs or use of portable devices in Catholic schools, screens must be publicly visible.

3.06 The supervisor must be in possession of all passwords used to access church related electronic communications. This information should also be available to those charged with monitoring these interactions.

3.07 Church personnel who establish an electronic communications account for church business purposes will cooperate with supervisors in providing all necessary information for access to the account.

3.08 Appropriate content for Church-related electronic communications media includes (but is not limited to):

(a) Information on upcoming activities; permission forms; calendar of events; descriptions of projects, including procedures; expectations; biblical studies and other spiritual links and prayer resources.

3.09 Web pages

(a) Web pages are to reflect clear goals consistent with Church teaching and the ministry for which they are designed.

(b) 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 church personnel, avoiding the Web publication of home addresses, telephone numbers, cell numbers, and home email addresses.

(c) Parental permission must be obtained in writing before posting photos of minors. Posting pictures must not be captioned to include a minor's name unless it has been specifically authorized by the parent/guardian.

3.10 Email and other text-based communication

(a) Email, texting and instant messaging (IM) are examples of the blessing and curse technology brings. The boundary issues that relate to verbal communication between church personnel and minors also apply to the use of email, texting and instant messaging. All such communication must reflect appropriate content and be church-related.

(b) The use of a personal email account for church-related communications with minors is prohibited. It is preferable to set up a separate e-mail account (e.g., Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo mail, etc., are free services), or use an account provided by the appropriate diocesan agency, for this purpose. It is advisable to save copies (either hard copies or electronic copies in a "saved" folder) of all communications with minors.

(c) 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 unintended recipients.

(d) If possible, adult volunteers, teachers, 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.

(e) 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 email from a minor. Hard copies should be made and one's supervisor notified immediately.

3.11 Social Networking

A social network service utilizes software to build online social networks for communities of people who share interests and activities. These are primarily Web based and provide various ways for users to interact, such as chat, messaging, email, video, voice chat, file sharing, blogging, discussion groups, and so on. The Diocese affirms the usefulness of this medium under the following parameters:

(a) Church personnel having personal social networking pages must not advertise that site to minors, nor "friend" or allow access to minors to their personal pages. (cf. USCCB Social Media Guidelines, "Establishing a Site")

(b) Should the creation of a professional networking page be approved for clarification and dispersal of information regarding a particular church-related ministry or regular activity, it must be registered in the name of the appropriate diocesan entity - not that of an individual.

(c) All church-related sites are to be monitored consistently by appropriate church personnel (supervisors).

3.12 Blogging

(a) Blogging (an abbreviation of the term "Web log") targeting minors by church personnel should be limited to the following purposes:

(i) Promoting a youth ministry program, school, the parish and/or the Diocese, as well as serving as an evangelization tool.

(ii) Establishing productive communication between the youth ministry program or school and home by providing ongoing information about programs, opportunities, expectations, policies and requests for support.

(iii) Providing young people with information that will help them become disciples of Jesus Christ.

(b) Appropriate content for Church-related blogs includes (but is not limited to):

(i) Information on upcoming activities; permission forms; calendar of events; descriptions of projects, including procedures; expectations; biblical studies other spiritual links and prayer resources.

(c) One who ministers and works in pastoral settings with young people must not use their blogs to:

(i) Conduct or promote outside business activities.

(ii) Defame or cause defamation of the character of any individual, organization or institution.

(iii) Divulge any personal information about young people, or jeopardize their safety in any other way.

3.13 On-line games

(a) Church personnel should take care in their involvement with on-line games, to protect their on-line game identities, and not to participate in on-line games with minors late at night. It is preferable to avoid playing online games with minors entirely.

(For additional information the Frequently Asked Questions about Social Media Guidelines document can be found in the resources to the right)

I acknowledge that I have read the "Social Media Guidelines" as established by the Diocese of Boise and am able to print a copy.

I promise to adhere to these guidelines as I work with minors in my local community.

March 26, 2015