

Holy Family Youth Ministry Social Media/Communication Policy



Holy Family Youth Ministry Guidelines

Pope Benedict once said, “The new digital technologies are, indeed, bringing about fundamental shifts in patterns of communication and human relationships”. With these fundamental shifts, youth ministry is constantly revolving its guidelines to keep up with the changing times. Within this packet are a list of comprised guidelines that have been extracted from the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. These guidelines are designed to mutually protect our Youth Ministry Leaders and children of Holy Family Parish.

Texting/Communication Guidelines

- 1) Good judgment should always be used with text based communication tools.
- 2) Parents should be informed of the use of e-mail or instant messaging for communications purposes with minors, and that it is a standard part of youth ministry.
- 3) It is recommended that ministers and volunteers should maintain separate e-mail accounts for professional/church and personal communications.
- 4) The same boundaries observed in oral/personal communication should be adhered to when communicating via e-mail/text messages. E-mail, text messages, and instant messages can be logged, archived, and forwarded to other parties. Avoid engaging in any postings/communications that could be misconstrued or misinterpreted.
- 5) It is recommended that clear guidelines or parameters be established with regard to times of communication between adults and young people. While young people may be on the phone/texting in the late evening hours, those who minister with young people should pre-determine a timeframe when it is too late to take a professional call, except in the case of serious urgency.
- 6) Use a parish, school, or organizational e-mail account when communicating parish, school, or organizational business; not home or personal accounts.
- 7) Communications should be professional and are being rendered on behalf of the parish, school, or organization to young people.
- 8) E-mail and instant messaging should only be used with the matters that deal with one’s professional relationship. Communicate only about matters relative to the ministry (i.e., parish, school, or organizational matters or pastoral care matters that are appropriate for discussion.)

- 9) Care should be taken to maintain professionalism and appropriate boundaries in all communication. Do not overstep the boundaries of adult/student relationships.
- 10) Avoid any communication that might be construed as having sexual overtones. Do not reply to any such e-mail received from teens; make and keep a copy of any such inappropriate communication and notify an administrator/ pastor/supervisor if necessary.
- 11) Write as though others will read what is written. Messages may easily be shared or forwarded with students and others.
- 12) There is no such thing as a private e-mail/instant message. All such communications are organizational in nature, may be viewed by the organization at any time, and may be subject to legal action.
- 13) Ask, "If my bishop/pastor/principal asked to see this communication, would I be embarrassed by what I have written?" If the answer is "yes," do not send the message.
- 14) E-mail can be misinterpreted. If you think an e-mail might somehow be misunderstood, do not send it.
- 15) Lastly, if you are communicating with a teen through text messaging, you must add the group leader into the text messaging chain. This will create an effective means of communication for all parties involved.

Social Media Guidelines

- 1) Adult ministers should establish separate sites and pages for personal and professional use. Personal pages and information should be neither advertised nor accessible to young people.
- 2) Ministry leaders utilizing social networking sites, either for ministerial or personal use, must be vigilant in representing themselves as ministers of the Catholic Church in all interactions that can be viewed publicly. Anything that could cause scandal to the ministry should be avoided. Such may include mention of inappropriate use of alcohol, advocacy of inappropriate music/movies, inappropriate language, inappropriate dress, or the expression of opinions that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- 3) Parents should be informed that a social networking site is being utilized as a standard part of the ministry.
- 4) The most popular sites for social networking have been Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Be aware of the terms of use, age restrictions, and privacy options and controls for each site prior to establishing a ministry presence.
- 5) A minimum of two adults functioning with an official parish, school, and/or organizational capacity should have full administrative access to the account/site(s).
- 6) Both adults should be registered to have e-mail alerts of page activity sent to their official organizational e-mail addresses. This allows for a quicker response time to urgent requests and helps to ensure that all postings are appropriate.

- 7) There is a difference between initiating a “friend request” and accepting one. Friend/connection requests should be initiated by the young people, not the adult representative of the parish, school, and/or organization.
- 8) In photographs of youth activities, youth should not be “tagged,” or identified by name in the photograph. - On the original social networking site, it is recommended that the “no tagging” option be set.
- 9) Because of the potential of teen crises or time relevant information, the page should be monitored frequently by official organizational personnel. A plea for help that goes unanswered can be legally damaging to the parish, school, and/or organization and dangerous for teens and their families.
- 10) No personal photographs or information of parish, school or organizational staff or volunteers should appear on any page/site. This includes family pictures, social events, home phone numbers and addresses, personal e-mail accounts, etc.

Social Networking with Minors

Be sure to have permission from a minor’s parent or guardian before contacting the minor via social media or before posting pictures, video, and other information that may identify that minor.

Parents must have access to everything provided to their children. For example, parents should be made aware of how social media are being used, be told how to access the sites, and be given the opportunity to be copied on all material sent to their children via social networking (including text messages). While parents should be provided with the same material as their children, it does not have to be via the same technology (that is, if children receive a reminder via Twitter, parents can receive it in a printed form or by an e-mail list).

Church personnel should be encouraged to save copies of conversations whenever possible, especially those that concern the personal sharing of a teen or young adult. (This may be especially important with text messaging.)

Make everyone aware of the **Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act.** which is federal legislation that oversees how websites interact with children under age 13.