

Diocese of Olympia

The Episcopal Church in Western Washington

An excerpt from *Archives and Records Management Program: Policies and Procedures Manual*, 2013

INTERNET USE POLICY:

Social Media An Addendum

INTRODUCTION

Social media can be defined as: *Tools that allow the sharing of information and creation of communities through online networks of people.* ¹

Among the most well-known social media applications are Facebook (social networking), Twitter (micro-blogging), YouTube (video sharing), LinkedIn (professional networking) and Flickr (image sharing). However, these are only a few of the better known among a myriad of web sites, blogs, wikis, etc. See: <http://www.oneillcommunications.com/2010/04/all-the-different-types-of-social-media/>

Social media presents us with a wonderful opportunity to engage with the constantly growing online community and to share our beliefs, our congregations, our communities, our programs and our story with a worldwide audience. One of the most exciting aspects of social media is the immediate interaction with our audience that it allows in a direct two-way conversation never before possible. ²

Yet, the many possibilities presented by social media do come with a few risks attached – and identifying, addressing and managing these risks is the purpose of this document.

There are three primary areas of concern:

- 1 The “face” of the Diocese of Olympia being presented to the public.
- 2 The appropriate use of social media applications including appropriate interaction with our various audiences.
- 3 The legal ramifications of content posted on diocesan social media applications – or by diocesan employees on personal social media web site, web pages, blogs, etc.

When information is posted on the Web, it is there for all to see. There is absolutely nothing private about the Internet – and the content you post doesn’t go away!! So, when you post anything on behalf of the Diocese of Olympia – or when you identify yourself in your post as an employee of the diocese – always keep in mind the impression you will be making. Remember you are representing not only yourself but the Diocese of Olympia and The Episcopal Church.

Appropriately used, social media can invite new members into the Church, encourage interactive participation, provide information and help build strong and vibrant communities. ³ However,

INTERNET USE POLICY:

Social Media An Addendum (cont.)

inappropriate use of social media may leave you and the diocese open to embarrassment, to issues of questionable, unethical or immoral behavior and/or to litigation.

Misuse of social media may be intentional and malicious or, as is more often the case, it may be the unintentional result of unthinking or hastily composed messages or the posting of inappropriate visual images. Additionally, when it comes to online relationships, “interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent...In the virtual world healthy boundaries and safe church practices must be adhered to as they are in the physical world.”⁴

There are many legal ramifications of social media use. The diocese could be held liable for what its employees post on diocesan web sites and its social media sites. What may not be as well understood is that the diocese could also be held liable for what its employees post on their personal sites. There are confidentiality and privacy issues, copyright issues, defamation and discrimination concerns, and concerns about unlawful activity of any kind. The bottom line is: “Regardless of whether employees are posting at home or during working hours, employers may face legal liability when employees misuse social media.”⁵

With these concerns in mind, the Diocese of Olympia has formulated the following social media best practices for its paid employees, volunteer staff and the staff and volunteers of its mission congregations. Parishes are encouraged to follow these practices or an appropriate variation thereof.

BEST PRACTICES:

- Project a positive and professional image: Posts on social media sites should project a positive image by being professional in tone and in good taste.
- Be respectful. Always be fair and courteous to fellow employees, volunteers, and others who work on behalf of the diocese.
- Acknowledge who you are. If you are representing the Diocese of Olympia when posting on a social media platform, acknowledge this. If you are not representing the Diocese of Olympia, (on your own blog, web site, etc.) acknowledge this as well and make it clear that the views being expressed are your own with a disclaimer.

Sample Disclaimer: "The views expressed on this (blog, Web site, etc.) are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Diocese of Olympia"

INTERNET USE POLICY:

Social Media An Addendum (cont.)

- Maintain interactive transparency - Interactions with minors (anyone under the age of 18):
 - 1 **Do not submit or respond to ‘friend’ requests to or from minors from personal profiles.** Adult employees or volunteers who want to connect via a social networking website with minors as part of their job responsibilities will set up a public social network page for the program which minors may join and through which staff, volunteers and youth may communicate. Minors requesting to ‘friend’ an adult employee can then be invited to communicate through this public page to which at least two other adult diocesan employees will have full access. Social networking pages for minors will be open to parents of all minors involved.
 - 2 Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the diocese or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the appropriate diocesan and civil authorities. If the material is on a diocesan affiliated site, that material will be documented and then removed from the site after consultation with the appropriate authorities.

NOTE: Additional best practices for congregations are found below.

- Protect confidential and private information: Do not post any confidential, private, or restricted information.
- Respect copyright and fair use: When posting, be mindful of the copyright and intellectual property rights of others and of the diocese. NOTE: For copyright law go to: <http://www.lawsitesblog.com/2009/10/social-media-copyright-quiz.html>
- Terms of Service: Obey the Terms of Service of any social media platform employed.
- Make sure you are always honest and accurate when posting information or news, and if you make a mistake, correct it quickly. Be open about previous posts you have altered. Remember that the Internet archives almost everything; therefore, even deleted postings can be searched.

INTERNET USE POLICY:

Social Media An Addendum (cont.)

- In addition to those practices stated above, use of Social Media on behalf of the Diocese of Olympia shall **NOT** be used for transmission of information that promotes or transacts any of the following:
 1. Discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, gender, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity.
 2. Sexual harassment.
 3. Participation or intervention in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.
 4. Personal positions or agenda not associated with one's position as an employee of the diocese.
 5. Any unlawful activity.

¹ <http://www.constantcontact.com/learning-center/glossary/social-media/index.jsp>

² *Social Media and the Episcopal church: A New Way to Tell a 2,000-year-Old Story*. The Episcopal Church. 2011.

³ Ibid. pg. 28.

⁴ *Suggested practices & guidelines for use of social networking websites & other forms of digital communications*. Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut.

⁵ *Social Media and the Workplace: Managing Risks*. Jackson Lewis LLP. C. 1910

INTERNET USE POLICY:

Social Media An Addendum (cont.)

BEST PRACTICES FOR CONGREGATIONS:

Introduction

Social media is one of the fastest growing forms of communication in the United States, especially among youth and young adults and we must engage it in a manner that is safe and responsible. Social media provides a tool for building community. However, membership in communities also requires accountability and responsibility. **These best practices for congregations elaborate on and are in addition to the BEST PRACTICES found in the previous section and are primarily intended to keep our youth safe and apply specifically to minors under the age of 18. They should be followed by all church personnel whether paid or volunteer and, again, it is recommended that parishes as well as mission congregations follow these practices or an appropriate variation thereof.**

Review and strictly adhere to the terms of service and existing guidelines outlined by each individual social media site.

- The primary purpose of communication through a social media site shall be for providing information related to a ministry or event and not for socialization or other personal interaction. Counseling of minors through such communication methods is not permitted.
- Parents must be notified of the methods of communication which are used in each particular ministry and must be granted access to such communications.
- To help ensure that all communication on and through social media sites used by a congregation remains positive and safe, these sites must be public, and all communication on or through them must be public. There must be at least two adults with administrative rights for each social media account used by the congregation. No personal social media accounts, groups, pages, etc. are to be used. No private messages and no one-on-one direct contact through email, Facebook messages, Twitter direct messaging, chats, instant messaging, or other similar messaging features provided through social media sites are to be used.
- The administrator in charge must ensure that private information is not accessible on any publicly available web page. This includes the requirement that images should never include any names identifying any of the minors in the images.

INTERNET USE POLICY:

Social Media An Addendum (cont.)

BEST PRACTICES FOR CONGREGATIONS (cont.):

- Gain written permission from parents before publishing video, photographs, or other images of minors. The diocese can provide a waiver/release form for your use.
- If minors contact particular adults engaged in ministry, the ministry account should be used to reply by sending a group message (i.e., when the personal contact was for information relevant to all in the group). When the contact is such that a public response is not appropriate, the adult should not use social media to respond.
Private communication put both the youth and you at risk. If you feel the information you seek to share via social media sites should not be shared in public, you should not share that information via social media.
- Social media must be monitored. The vicar, rector or other clergy or lay person in charge of a congregation has the ultimate responsibility to see that social media is used appropriately and that the best practices outlined in this document are followed. While he or she may appoint a qualified staff member or volunteer to monitor such use on a daily basis, it falls to the person in charge of the congregation to ensure no inappropriate communication takes place.

NOTE: Additional editorial policies and best practices will be made available through the Communications Office.

Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut: Safe Church guidelines for Social Media

https://www.ctepiscopal.org/content/safe_church_guidelines_for_social_media.asp

Boy Scouts of America Social Media Guidelines

<http://www.scouting.org/scoutsource/Marketing/Resources/SocialMedia.aspx>

Praesidium. Social Media and Sexual Abuse: Establishing Healthy Boundaries. Webinar.