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## Internet Resources Policies and Best Practices

“In the final analysis, the truth of Christ is the full and authentic response to that human desire for relationship, communion and meaning which is reflected in the immense popularity of social networks. Believers who bear witness to their most profound convictions greatly help prevent the web from becoming an instrument which depersonalizes people, attempts to manipulate them emotionally or allows those who are powerful to monopolize the opinions of others. On the contrary, believers encourage everyone to keep alive the eternal human questions which testify to our desire for transcendence and our longing for authentic forms of life, truly worthy of being lived. It is precisely this uniquely human spiritual yearning which inspires our quest for truth and for communion and which impels us to communicate with integrity and honesty.”

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI FOR THE 45th WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY “Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age”

### Introduction

Electronic/digital communications have become integral to the work of the Church. The resources of the internet such as blog sites, e-mail, social networking sites, websites, etc., are now widely used in parishes and schools to communicate with parishioners, parents and youth.

The Diocese of Baker encourages use of today’s technology and digital resources. The purpose of the policies and guidelines presented here are to ensure safe and effective ways of using these resources in the work of the Church.

We are grateful to the Archdiocese of Portland for permission to use their *Policies and Best practices for using the Internet and Social Media*, and to the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry for permission to use parts of *Recommended Technology Guidelines for Pastoral Work with Young People*, which was developed in consultation with the USCCB Secretariat for Child and Youth Protection and the Secretariat for Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth.

Created January 2013

**Internet Resources Policies:**  
**Procedures that must be followed by staff and volunteers serving the Diocese of Baker**

The following policies apply to all forms of internet, social media, electronic and digital communications to include but not limited to: blog sites, e-mail, online chat tools, twitter, social media, and websites. Hereafter referred to as “**internet resources.**”

- Diocese, parish and school internet resources are for the purposes of evangelization, education and information related to the Catholic Church, and must be consistent with the teachings and values of the Catholic Church.
- Internet resources developed and used on behalf of the Diocese, a parish or school must be authorized respectively by the Bishop, Pastor or Principal/Head Teacher.
- Internet resources must follow the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops “Political Activity Guidelines for Catholic Organization” (<http://www.usccb.org/about/general-counsel/political-activity-guidelines.cfm>)
- Unless exempt by Fair Use or in the public domain, use of any copyrighted material including but not limited to images, music, text, or video, must be done with the expressed permission of the copyright holder.
- Photographs or video images of minors may be included on the Diocese, parish or school internet resources provided that:
  1. The minor’s parent or legal guardian has given permission in writing.
  2. There is no identifying information about the minor on the web page.
- Diocesan, parish or school internet resources should not include personal information about staff or volunteers. Personal information includes family pictures, personal social events, home phone numbers, addresses, or personal e-mail accounts, etc.
- Internet resources should not include advertising or links to advertisers.
- Internet resources should not be used to conduct or promote an individual’s personal business and/or personal activities.
- Professional and personal internet resources must be separate.
- Staff and volunteers utilizing internet resources, either for professional or personal use, must be vigilant in representing themselves as appropriate representatives of the Catholic Church in all interactions that can be viewed publicly. When presenting personal opinions and engaging in online chats or discussions, it is essential for staff and volunteers to remember that even on the World Wide Web others may recognize them as representing the values of the Catholic Church.
- Personal internet resources must not be publicized or accessible to minors with whom staff or volunteers associate through their work for the Diocese, parish or school.
- Staff and volunteers communicating with minors with whom they associate through their work for the Diocese, parish or school, must use professional e-mail and text messaging accounts, not personal email or text messaging accounts.
- An acknowledgement page of donors contributing to a diocesan, parish or school event is allowed, provided there are no links to commercial internet resources.

- Links to other Catholic and religious internet resources are permitted; such links must be reviewed and approved by diocesan, parish or school leadership for appropriateness.
- Employees of the Diocese, affiliated parishes and schools are subject to whatever additional policies and procedures their employers may have covering technology and the use of technology equipment.

**Internet Resources Best Practices:**  
**Recommended practices for staff and volunteers serving the Diocese of Baker**

The following best practices apply to all forms of internet, social media, electronic and digital communications to include but not limited to: blog sites, e-mail, online chat tools, twitter, social media, and websites. Hereafter referred to as “**internet resources.**”

- The Diocese, affiliated parishes and schools should make every effort to establish a website and commit to regularly updating its content.
- Internet resources should be utilized as an efficient method for disseminating educational, informational or faith formation resources, to include such items as:
  - Fliers for upcoming activities, permission/consent forms, calendars and ministerial updates;
  - Posting links and references for faith formation;
  - Communicating sacramental preparation information or parent resources;
  - Communicating daily Scripture passages, prayers or spiritual links/resources;
- Streaming video can be used for education, communication, formation and promotional purposes.
  - Care and caution should be taken with online video distribution.
  - Extreme care must be taken to protect the privacy of minors.
- A minimum of two adults should be delegated as authorized administrators of internet resources; at least one authorized administrator should be an employee of the organization
- The organization’s official logo or standard image(s) should appear on all internet resources to distinguish it as belonging with the organization and not associated to a specific person or third party organization
- Internet communications should be done through the organization’s official e-mail whenever possible
- Obtaining written permission from adults whose photograph will appear on internet resources is a good practice
- Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc., have been the most popular social networking sites. Users should be aware of the “terms of use” of each site including changes and updates, age restrictions, and privacy options and controls for each site prior to establishing a ministry presence.

- Authorized administrators should be registered to have e-mail alerts of activity on internet resources sent to the official organizational e-mail address. This allows for a quicker response time to urgent requests, and helps to ensure that all postings are appropriate.
- All online “friend request” to connect should be initiated by a minor, not the adult staff or volunteer representative of the Diocese, parish or school.
- When posting photographs of children or youth activities, minors should not be “tagged,” or identified by name in the photograph. On all social networking sites, it is recommended that the “no tagging” options be set.
- Parents should be informed of the organization’s guidelines for use of internet resource communications.
- When communicating via internet resources, staff and volunteers should avoid engaging in any postings/communications that could be misconstrued or misinterpreted.
  - The boundaries of professional relationships should not be overstepped.
  - Avoid any communication which might be construed as having sexual overtones.
  - In the case of an inappropriate communication (sexual or otherwise) initiated by a minor, staff or volunteers should not reply but should keep a copy and notify an administrator, pastor, or supervisor
  - Internet resource communications should be written as though they may be read by someone other than for whom it was intended as message may be shared or forwarded without one’s knowledge.
  - Internet resource communications are not private and may be viewed by the organization at any time, and may be subject to legal action.
- Clear guidelines or parameters should be established with regard to times of communication between adults and minors.
  - While minors may be e-mailing and/or texting in the late evening hours, staff and volunteers should pre-determine and communicate when it is appropriate to make a professional response, except in the case of serious urgency.
- If minors are to engage in internet resource communications as a part of an officially sanctioned organizational activity, such activity must be monitored by at least two authorized adult administrators
- In all internet resource communications minors may only be identified by first name with no other identifying and/or contact information be made available.

## Registration Technologies and Securing Private Information<sup>1</sup>

Capturing information on registration forms, surveys, etc. involves a higher degree of technical understanding and implementation than simple websites or blogs. Forms on web pages can use any number of technologies to record and transmit information, and the transmission of that information can be made more or less secure through the technical decisions and requirements used to develop that form. In simplest terms, no sensitive information should be transmitted through basic web interactions (“http://” in the URL). Only secure, encrypted transmissions (“https://” also known as “SSL” or “Secure Sockets Layer”) should be used.

In addition, though secure transmissions (“https://”) can happen through any web server, most modern browsers will display strongly worded warnings when the identity of the web server cannot be verified (particularly through third party verification services like VeriSign or GeoTrust). Therefore, registration processes that will capture sensitive data usually involve the additional expense of securing a third-party secure certificate.

- No sensitive personal information—particularly financial information (credit card numbers, checking account numbers) and secure identifiers (e.g., social security numbers) should ever be transmitted through email, web pages that convert form information into email, or web forms using regular hypertext transmission (“http://” pages).
- No sensitive personal information should be transmitted over SSL (“https://”) unless the user can receive assurance that the communication with the server can be verified through third party services (VeriSign, etc.)
- If the explanation of these technologies and the recommendations accompanying them are beyond the technical competence of the webmaster or staff person [authorized administrator] responsible for registration forms, that should be taken as a sign that the parish or organization should not be creating such forms. Those leaders should contact a technology/web solution provider for assistance.

### Best Practices

- Leave the creation and management of secure web forms to a qualified web solution provider unless you understand the demands of secure transmissions and can assure that your website can accommodate such security.
- If possible, handle all financial transactions “in real time;” that is, on a commerce website that can process credit card transactions online, thus assuring that no financial data needs to be communicated to the parish/organization.
- Even if a form will not include financial information, all security protocols described above are to be followed if other sensitive personal data is transmitted (such as social security numbers, passwords, unlisted phone numbers, etc.).
- Acquire a third party secure certificate (for example, VeriSign, GeoTrust, etc.) for any web server that will handle SSL (“https://”) transmissions.

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<sup>1</sup> This section is taken directly from Recommended Technology Guidelines for Pastoral Work with Young People, Developed by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, 2010.

## Definitions

- **Authorized administrator:** an individual delegated by the Bishop, Pastor, School Superintendent, or Principal as the manager of the organizations network operations and/or an internet application such as a website, social networking site, blog site, etc.
- **Best practices:** recommended procedures or methods that help ensure effective and safe use of social media.
- **Blog:** a blog (a contraction of the term “web log”) is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. “Blog” can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.
  - **Examples:** There are many types of blogs on sites throughout the Internet. They are common for celebrities, writers, journalists, etc. WordPress is one of the more popular tools used to create blogs.<sup>2</sup>
- **Minor:** a person who is under 18 years of age.
- **Online friend request:** an intentional action of establishing an association with another person through an online social network. Generally, one person submits a “friend request” to another via the online service. The person receiving the “friend request” may accept, reject, or ignore the request. Once “friended,” the two people can adjust their privacy settings to control how much information the other is allowed to access.
- **Organization:** the Diocese of Baker in Oregon, a parish, or parish school.
- **Personal:** not related to an individual’s work or other activities on behalf of the Diocese, a parish, or a parish school.
- **Personnel:** all seminarians, clerics, members of religious orders, lay employees and volunteers working on behalf of the Diocese, an affiliated parish, or a parish school.
- **Policies:** procedures that must be followed by staff and volunteers in the Diocese of Baker, affiliated parishes and parish schools using social media.
- **Professional:** related to an individual’s work or activities on behalf of the Archdiocese, a parish, parish school or Archdiocesan high school.
- **Social network:** a Web 2.0 site that is entirely driven by content of its 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, MySpace. 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.<sup>3</sup>
  - **Tagging** is an online social media action done with photos uploaded to the network site. A particular person in a specific photograph is “tagged” by either themselves or another person so that whenever that photo appears on the online social network, that person’s name will appear whenever a mouse pointer hovers over their image in the photo. This function can be turned off or limited and any person who is tagged in a photo can “remove” the tag.

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<sup>2</sup> Social Media Guidelines, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.