



SOCIAL NETWORKING POLICY FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

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Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
Communications Office



Communication is integral to our humanity. Social networking opens up new channels of communication and there are immense gifts and challenges that are still being unwrapped in this ever-evolving world.

Social networks offer new ways in which we can dialogue with others, build relationships and learn about our shared humanity.

Social networking has been endorsed by the Holy See and Catholics are wholeheartedly encouraged to seek the good that can come of such networking, and observe its effects.

“The media can help communication when they enable people to share their stories, to stay in contact with distant friends, to thank others or to seek their forgiveness, and to open the door to new encounters.” (World Communications Day Message, 2015)

Through our considered use of social networks, we can seek to understand some of their benefits, and some of the difficulties that can be overcome with social media training.

The Catholic Church in Australia provides these guidelines for how we might engage with the most popular social networks. This advice will be offered in the light of the Gospel, and relying on some of the advice given by the Holy See in their annual messages for World Communications Day.

Church personnel engage with social media on a daily basis. More and more, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Google +, and Pinterest (the seven most popular networks) are used to disseminate information, advertise events, share stories and offer pastoral care. When used well, the potential for evangelisation is limitless.

In the 2015 message for World Communications Day, Pope Francis has written about the impact of modern media on family life. His advice reasons that oftentimes, our use of media can help, but also hinder our communication. It is useful when navigating the area of social media and policies around it for Church agencies to carefully discern how they might use them.

“By growing daily in our awareness of the vital importance of encountering others, these ‘new possibilities’, we will employ technology wisely, rather than letting ourselves be dominated by it.” (World Communications Day Message, 2015)

HUMAN DIGNITY IN OUR ENCOUNTERS

Online and offline behaviour of clergy, Church employees and members of Church organisations should always demonstrate a Christ-centred love for others.

Even those working in Church organisations who might not be Christian should still ensure that when representing the Church, their behaviours demonstrate a respect for human dignity. Boundaries should always be taken into consideration and observed.

In particular, those involved in work with young people should be aware of the Church’s child protection protocols and policies of both the Church and of civil authorities.

Those who engage in social networking as part of their Church ministry should do so in the name of evangelisation, to build appropriate relationships that can encourage and foster growth in faith. This engagement should facilitate a growing in relationship with Christ.

The sharing of information on sites should be of appropriate materials for faith formation or catechesis. Social-Networking sites can be ideal for promotion of Church events or activities and for sharing worship resources in a wide range of formats, be it video, text or sound.

The teachings of the Catholic Church should be consistently upheld in these social-networking activities, and should not move beyond appropriate personal communication with those being ministered to.

Clear distinctions should be maintained between personal and professional communication in the social networking environment.

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PRIVACY ONLINE

For people working in Church agencies, there can be a fine line when using both a personal and an organisational social networking account. It is always best to err on the side of caution when updating our profiles, whether they be one that is our own or not.

Privacy is an important consideration, and care should be taken about displaying contact details on any social networking site.

While we might like to argue that we have a private account on Facebook or Twitter, nothing online is ever completely private. Keep in mind that if you are not comfortable with your employer, your bishop, or your parish priest reading your post, simply put: don't post it.

In particular, photos should never be posted without the express permission of the person being photographed or their guardian.

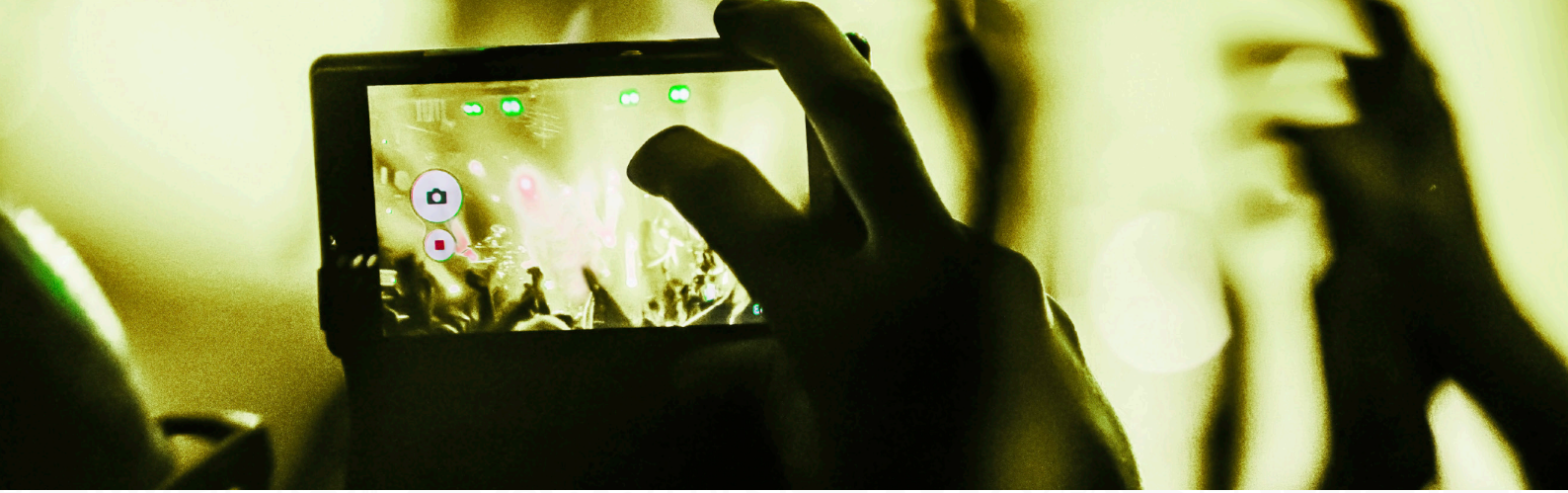
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GENERAL ADVICE FOR SOCIAL NETWORKING

The Church in Australia, both officially and unofficially has members on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Google +, and Pinterest. To varying degrees, each of these networks can be used for the promotion of the Gospel message. As an appendix to this document, there is a short description of each of these networks in the document "The Social Networks" and how they might be used by Church personnel.

The following points are relevant to all of the different social networks.

- Those working in a youth ministry or other Church capacity which could involve social networking should seek permission from a Diocesan leader (Bishop, Business Manager, or Communications Manager) before engaging in this area, and establish clear boundaries in ministry-based relationships.
- Bishops conference agencies are encouraged to have a social media present, however, it is not appropriate for an advisory council or a taskforce established by a bishops' commission to develop a Facebook page or a Twitter account. Their social media engagement should always take place through the agency with which they have liaison.



- Clergy, Church workers or religious who use social networking sites in a professional capacity should keep this distinct from a private capacity and care should be taken in accepting or adding 'friends'. There is great potential for a blurring of boundaries in the social networking field.
- Those Church organisations which wish to engage officially in social networking activities might choose to do so as a group, and found a page which can be administered by a number of people. This system does not prevent Church workers from having their own personal profiles; it simply places a clear line between personal and work. This can also remove any ambiguity about friendship relationships or ministry relationships.
- The use of photographs or videos should be carefully considered. Where possible, photographic release forms should be signed, and permissions should be sought from all who appear in photographs or videos before being posted or tagged. For example, if holding an event, it is useful to announce at the beginning if a photographer will be present, and where photos may end up. Then people who are uncomfortable about their photos appearing can mention this to the organisers.
- Church networking activities should be monitored by a third-party where possible, and where this is difficult, the Church worker should refer to the underlying principles and teaching of the Church. Commentaries appearing on social networking sites of a rude or offensive nature or those which are vulgar or which could be interpreted as bullying should be removed immediately.

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SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Church in Australia has shown much leadership in the area of social networking and is recognised internationally. Much of this has to do with access to resources.

We must remember, as Pope Francis reminds us, that not all parts of the world have the same access. Some live in poverty, others live in remote areas with limited access to technology. Hearing others talk about their social networking experiences can be profoundly isolating for those unable to take part. Social Networking should never replace authentic human relationships, but rather enhance them.

As we are reminded in this year's message for World Communications Day, our use of technology should never be the cause of relationship breakdown, particularly in that most important of relationships, with our families.

"Families should be seen as a resource rather than as a problem for society. Families at their best actively communicate by their witness the beauty and the richness of the relationship between man and woman, and between parents and children. We are not fighting to defend the past. Rather, with patience and trust, we are working to build a better future for the world in which we live." (World Communications Day 2015)

There is much to be discovered on social media, and ways in which we can use it to enhance our endeavours as a Church. The Catholic Church has a rich and beautiful message to share, and we should make use of these networks in the best way possible.

Beyond this policy, the Communications team of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has worked to develop a number of resources, which may assist in the area of social networking. At www.catholic.org.au, there are free downloads, written information as well as some tips for your organisation.



THE SOCIAL NETWORKS

Appendix A to Social Media Policy of the Catholic Church in Australia

The following information is taken largely from the book *"Tweet others as you would wish to be tweeted | A scripture-based guide to social media for the Church"* a book written specifically to address some of the issues around social media for the Church, to coincide with the World Communications Day 2015. It is available as an eBook or hard copy at www.catholic.org.au.

It is important to mention before defining these social networks some of the difficulties that can arise in using them in a Church-based or pastoral setting.

Social media is, by nature, social. At its best it can generate conversations and sharing between people of different social backgrounds, cultures, faiths and other walks of life. It's important, however, that Church representatives engage in respectful conversations, and do not allow their social media spaces to be used for conversations that fail to respect the dignity of others or which might be seen to promote teachings contrary to the Catholic faith.

Ways of avoiding these pitfalls include changing privacy settings on sites such as Facebook to prevent unwanted posts, reviewing posts before they are made public, deleting and not responding to inflammatory messages.

Indeed, while one might not expressly post information on their Facebook page or Tweet something about the Church, there are still ways in which conversations or private messages between two parties might be contrary to the position of the Church.

Care should be taken, across social media that the dignity of our office is preserved and that Gospel values are communicated.



FACEBOOK

www.facebook.com

Facebook is the most visited site on the internet. Founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, it allows people to create an online profile where they can post information about themselves, chat with one another, share items of interest, build pages and promote events and causes.

Before starting on Facebook, it's useful to consider whether you would like to have a personal profile, a professional profile or a page.

In the case of the Catholic Church, a bishop may choose to have a page, and an organisation, such as the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference or Caritas would also have a page. This is recommended.

By using high privacy settings, these public figures or organisations can effectively administer and control the content on the page. They can prevent others from posting unwanted content on their pages, and communicate a consistent message. A bishop can then communicate with people in his diocese and beyond about events, liturgies, or special occasions.

Church personnel often also have a personal profile, which is perfectly appropriate and encouraged. Representatives of the Church however should read this and other protocols carefully to discern their engagement online, keeping in mind their position and behave accordingly.



TWITTER

www.twitter.com

Twitter is now utilised by the majority of Church agencies in Australia on some level.

Twitter is described as a microblogging site, which means, you reduce a message to the shortest possible form. That information can be shared with followers through a "tweet". People can then share with their followers by "retweeting".

Twitter is particularly useful for journalists, politicians, media people and advertisers.

In recent years, news has started to break on Twitter. Before the camera crews and journalists can arrive at an event, citizen journalists often share images and their perceptions on Twitter. News journalists will often share information live.

When Pope Benedict XVI resigned, the news hit Twitter before a single article was published, simply

because a journalist present in the room when he made the announcement understood Latin.

Like with all social networking engagement, Church entities should reflect carefully before posting on Twitter about whether their messages reflect Church teaching and Christ-centred principles.



LINKEDIN

www.linkedin.com

LinkedIn is a social network which allows people to share their professional skills. People upload their resumes and network with people based on their abilities and professional capacities. LinkedIn is used by recruitment companies, and it is an excellent way to network and communicate about upcoming events, job opportunities and to find people with particular skills and talents. These days, many companies when recruiting will research potential candidates using this social network.

Many Catholic Church employees showcase their abilities and skills on LinkedIn, and are encouraged to do so. It's worth remembering that employers within Church are very likely to access this social network in order to find out more information about potential employees, so, put your best foot forward, and keep your profile up-to-date!



PINTEREST

www.pinterest.com

Pinterest is a network in which people share ideas, images, recipes and short quotes. It is also called a visual bookmarking tool. People share and create these bookmarks on what are called boards. People can choose pages or websites of interest, and pin them to a board which exists, or a newly created board. People use Pinterest for event planning, to give ideas for decorating a house, to share recipes and so on.



INSTAGRAM

www.instagram.com

Instagram is extremely popular among young people and works in a similar way to Facebook and Twitter, except that it is image based. Rather than posting words or links, people will post images, and are given options to make their image look a little

fancier before posting.

For example, you might take a picture of the choir singing at mass in a beautiful church, give it a vintage filter through Instagram and share it with your contacts. Instagram works with likes and follows in the same way as Facebook and Twitter.

Many church organisations use images with a scripture quote added to share these with others.



YOUTUBE

www.youtube.com

YouTube is the internet's number one video-sharing site. With so many applications and programs available for video or slideshow editing, YouTube has millions of people accessing it every day. The Catholic Church has an extensive presence on YouTube in both official and non-official capacities.

Like with all social networking, the use of YouTube can assist in the work of evangelisation and promotion of the activities of the Church. Church entities should ensure that all material posted on YouTube or other video-based sites is in accordance with Church teaching and respects human dignity. Ethical

considerations should be applied when uploading content, and explicit or offensive material should be avoided at all times.



GOOGLE +

www.google.com

Google plus is a networking tool in which you can use the following tools to connect: 1) Circles are categories for your networks (for example, friends, work, office, family, interests). 2) Google hangouts are like a video-conferencing an option for people to spend time with one another. These hangouts can include up to 10 people. 3) Huddle is an option for people wanting to chat with one another on iPhone, Android or SMS devices and 4) Instant Upload is a service which allows you to automatically upload photos to a private album. Some Catholic organisations have organised Google hangouts in their work for the New Evangelisation.

There is always much more information that we could provide about social-networking, but we hope these short summaries will help you decide what might be best for you personally, and for your organisation.

If you have any questions about how to get started on these networks, visit our website www.catholic.org.au where we have lots of resources, or give the communications team a call on (02) 6201 9859



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