

Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau Guidelines for the Use of Technology, Email, and Social Media

Church personnel are called to high standards of ethical conduct and personal integrity. In our work, including as it relates to conduct, all have a sacred responsibility to uphold Church teaching. Furthermore, those in leadership roles and ministerial positions have a responsibility to lead a personal life that bears witness to Catholic teaching and avoids scandal.

POLICY STATEMENT: The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau and its Affiliates (defined as “parishes, schools, offices, agencies, and other institutions which operate under the administrative authority of the Bishop”) recognize that in today’s environment, with the increasing prevalence of the Internet, employees, clerics, religious men and women, and volunteers will use the Internet to conduct ministry work and to communicate with associates, colleagues, and friends. The Internet provides various ways for individuals to interact and has changed the way we communicate and share information. The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau views the Internet as an important educational and evangelizing tool to promote school and ministerial programs. The Diocese encourages administrators, pastors, and principals to support Internet use and to give employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers the necessary training and tools to interact safely and responsibly Online. However, those using the Internet should bear in mind that certain comments and information may have a harmful effect on the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, its reputation, and its employees. In light of this, employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers are required to adhere to the following policy regarding the use of Personal and Ministry Websites including Social Networks, Email, and Blogs.

DEFINITIONS FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY:

Ministry Website: A Social Network Page, Blog or any Internet Website/tool created by employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers for the sole purpose of conducting Diocesan/Affiliate ministry.

Personal Website: A Social Network page, Blog, or any Internet Website/tool created by employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers primarily to share personal communication with friends and associates.

Social Networking Sites: A type of personal Website that is used by groups with a common interest for communication purposes.

Blog: A type of Website, usually maintained by an individual, whose primary purpose is to offer commentary or news on events or subjects (e.g. Church teaching, theology, morals, etc.).

Supervisor: The hiring and/or supervising agent: for parish staff, the pastor; for parish volunteers, the appropriate administrator (e.g. Parish Catechetical Leader or Director of Youth Ministry); for school personnel, the principal.

Employee: Any person who is employed by the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or an Affiliate. An employee may be a cleric, religious, or a lay-person who may also be a member of a religious institute.

Cleric: An ordained priest or an ordained deacon who is incardinated in the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau as well as a religious priest or deacon, or a priest or deacon incardinated in another diocese, who is engaged in a ministry under the control or auspices of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or an Affiliate.

Religious: A consecrated religious woman (sister) or man (brother) who is engaged in ministry under the control or auspices of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or an Affiliate.

Adult: An individual who is eighteen (18) years of age or older.

Child/Minor: Anyone under the age of 18 or an adult who habitually lacks the use of reason. For the purposes of this document, the term “minors” also includes high school students age 18 or older.

Volunteer: An adult who works without financial or material gain on behalf of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or its Affiliates who is not an employee, a cleric, or religious (for example, an intern, catechist, Scout leader, coach, student teacher and others in similar capacities).

PROCEDURE

As established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and adapted by the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau:

Key Rules of the Road for Establishing Sites:

- Abide by diocesan/parish guidelines, including Diocesan Safe Environment Procedures and Code of Conduct guidelines.
- Practice Christian charity.
- Know that even personal communication by Church personnel reflects upon the Church. Practice what you preach.
- Write in first person.
- Do not claim to represent the official position of the organization or teachings of the Church, unless authorized to do so.
- Identify yourself. Do not use pseudonyms or name the parish, program, etc., as your identity, unless authorized to do so.
- Abide by copyright, fair use, and IRS financial disclosure regulations.
- Do not divulge confidential information about others. Nothing posted in the Internet is private. The name, address, or other personal identifying information of minors (anyone under age 18) is forbidden.
- Do not cite others, post photos, or videos of them, link to their material, etc., without their approval.
- Do not create a Website or Web page designed to look like an official Diocesan, Affiliate, Agency, Institution, or School posting without the written permission of the Director of Communications, Principal, Pastor, or Agency/Institution Administrator, or other designated official.
- Do not use insignia (logos/school seals, etc.), mottos, or another “corporate” or “official” badging/visual branding without written permission of the Diocese, Affiliate, Principal, or Pastor
- At least one institutional representative (principal or pastor or designated diocesan official represented on any Website/Blog/Post must be an administrator and monitor of the site.
- Adults may not create a Website/Blog/Personal Post with photos of students or links or gateways to student Webpages or blogs. Students should not be on an adult “buddy list”.
- Communication should always be generated from official (school/parish/diocesan/agency) Email. Adults should refrain from using personal email accounts or cell phones for non-official or non-parish/school-related communications, instant- or text-messaging with individual students.
- In responding to student initiated communication, boundaries must be maintained. Adults can be friendly with students but they are never friends.
- Keep all communications brief, to the point, and in line with Diocesan Safe Environment Procedures and Code of Conduct guidelines.
- *Be watchful of “Links”: Do not identify a Website on a Web page as “Catholic” without approval. Sites must be vetted for content.

Ministry Websites

The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau and its Affiliates support the creation of Ministry Websites as a means to conduct Diocesan/Affiliate ministry. The use of Ministry Websites is encouraged when conducting Diocesan/Affiliate educational and evangelizing programs. Supervisors who approve individuals to create a Ministry Website for dispersal of information are responsible for monitoring the Ministry Website.

Personal Websites

The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau and its Affiliates recognize that employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers may create Personal Websites as a medium of self-expression. Employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers must recognize that anything published on a Personal Website is no different from making such information available in any public forum. Any information that causes or has the potential to cause harm and/or embarrassment to the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or its Affiliates should be avoided.

Personal sites of Church personnel should also reflect Catholic morality and values. Businesses are cautioning their employees that, while employees have a right to privacy and confidentiality regarding what their employers know about them, an employee's use of social networking—because of its very nature—means he or she relinquishes some privacy and could be construed as representing the company's ethics and values. Likewise, Church personnel are encouraged to understand that they are witnessing to the faith through all of their social networking, whether “public” or “private”.

Password-Protected Sites

Both Ministry Websites and Personal Websites may involve the use of a username/password or other such means to access all or portions of the site. In the event that a cleric, employee, religious, or volunteer, subject to approval by the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or its Affiliate, gives a child access to a Website that is not otherwise openly accessible to the public, that same access must also be provided to the child's parent/guardian, if the parent/guardian so desires. Be aware of logging off to ensure no one not authorized to view may do so.

Ministry Email/Blogs

The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau and its Affiliates support the use of Email and Blogging as a ministry communication tool. It is an excellent platform for creating and distributing information. Although Emailing and Blogging is a powerful communication tool, Ministry Email or Blogs may not be used for: 1) conducting outside business; 2) defaming the character of any individual or institution; 3) causing harm and/or embarrassment to the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or its Affiliates; or 4) divulging any personal information about anyone, particularly children, that would jeopardize their safety or well-being in any way.

Personal Email/Blogs

In the event an employee, cleric, religious identifies himself/herself as, or is manifestly understood to be, an employee or cleric of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or its Affiliates on a Personal Email/Blog (or other Website with a similar purpose), to help reduce the potential for confusion, the employee is required to put the following notice in a reasonably prominent place on the Website/Email/Blog:

“The views expressed on this Website/Email/Blog are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer.”

Even with this notice, any information that causes or has the potential to cause harm and/or embarrassment to the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or its Affiliates should be avoided.

Social Networking Websites

Because of the increasing popularity of social networking Websites, parish use of these Websites is permitted as a means to effectively communicate for ministry and education purposes. It should not be used for the primary purpose of befriending people or socializing. Rather, social media is to be directly related to academics, ministry, and evangelization. Every effort should be made in order to provide a safe and secure environment and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety when using the Internet as a ministry tool. To achieve this goal, the following guidelines should be adhered to when using social networking Websites for programs that involve youth under the age of 18. (The use of social networking sites is not recommended for groups that include students younger than high school age.)

- Always obtain the Diocese's/pastor's/principal's permission before using a social networking medium for a parish program. Be specific which platform: i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.
- Inform parents in writing that the parish is planning to use a social networking site; and obtain releases engendering necessary permissions for specific posts.
- Establish a parish account; never use a personal account.
- The site administrator must be an adult and at least ONE Supervisor/Pastor/Principal. The site administrator is considered to work with minors and thus should have completed the Safe Environment Training in accordance with diocesan policy, and signed a Code of Conduct.
- It is recommended that the site be set up as a public rather than private site in order to allow for transparency in all communications and postings. The administrator should pre-approve or regularly monitor all comments and postings. Any inappropriate content should be deleted and the person who posted it should be contacted and reminded that improper content is not acceptable.
- Post rules of conduct on the site.
- The main purpose of the site should be for general communication about group events rather than for chatting or socializing.
- All information displayed on the site should reflect and uphold the Catholic faith.
- Write as if you are certain others will read it. Communications can easily be shared with others for whom they are not intended.
- Keep copies of any communications sent to youth. ALWAYS send copies of all communication to parents as well as youth members.
- Do not invite a minor to be a "friend." The minor must make the request.
- Always follow diocesan rules regarding taking and posting photographs. Do not "tag" any pictures (to identify someone in a photo for the purposes of Social Networking).
- Use caution and deliberate carefully when posting photos/videos/audio on social media sites. Never personally ID youth—"global" identification is preferred, e.g. "third grade students in St. Ambrose School, Chaffee, and marked Veteran's Day with local community."
- The name, address, or other personal identifying information of minors is forbidden under diocesan policy. Always obtain necessary releases for any social media post.
- STRONGLY consider archiving component/time-frame for post/project releases ensuring that no archival of posts occurs. **Specifically, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter. Once a post is submitted, it is always on the Internet/searchable unless an administrator removes it after 30 days, etc. Even then, it may remain visible. Be cautious and vigilant.
- Consider how pop-up advertising comes into play. Choose sites that have this at a minimum and those that conform to Christian morality and other appropriate contexts. **YouTube, for example, "suggests" other posts for users that are not always appropriate. Other sites may prove more ideal.
- Bottom-line: be prudent, intentional, and aware.

Confidential and Proprietary Information

Consistent with our policy on “Confidentiality” as stated in the employee handbook, Employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers are prohibited from disclosing via the Internet information that is understood to be held in confidence by the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or its Affiliates. Employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers are prohibited from disclosing via the Internet any information that is proprietary to the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or its Affiliates, except by explicit permission of the appropriate authority. Also, in the event of termination, if an employee or cleric has identified himself/herself as an employee or cleric of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or its Affiliates on a personal Website, he/she should remove mention of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or its Affiliates from their Website.

Trademarks and Logos

Employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers may use Diocesan or Affiliate trademarks or logos on Personal Websites only in ways that clearly promote or call positive attention to Diocesan events, Websites, or organizations associated with the trademark or logo after receiving prior authorization from the Director of Communications. Employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers may not use Diocesan or Affiliate trademarks or logos on their Personal Websites in any way that could reasonably suggest Diocesan or Affiliate sponsorship or agreement with any views expressed. Employees are similarly prohibited from providing a link or otherwise referring to the diocesan Website on their personal Website, social networks, or blogs without receiving prior authorization from the Director of Communications.

Inappropriate Language and Images

The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau and its Affiliates will not tolerate employees, clerics, religious, or volunteers posting obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory, defamatory, or otherwise potentially-scandalous comments, links, and/or images which reflect discredit or cause harm and/or embarrassment to the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau or its Affiliates, employees, vendors, partners, agencies, schools, and others. Employees are reminded of their obligations under our employee “Code of Conduct” policy as stated in the diocesan employee handbook. In particular, employees should not take any action against the Church, its teachings, or its leaders on social media; nor affiliate with any organization or movement with an animus toward the Church or which is directed or has as its prime principles the criticism, rejection, or disrespect of the Church.

Right to Review

The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau and its Affiliates reserve the right to review an employee’s, cleric’s, religious’, and volunteer’s Personal Website, if there are reasonable grounds for believing that policy is being violated.

Protection of Children

Employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau and its Affiliates will comply with all aspects of the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (<https://www.ftc.gov/enforcement/rules/rulemaking-regulatory-reform-proceedings/childrens-online-privacy-protection-rule>) and the Safe Environment Procedures of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau (<http://dioscg.org/index.php/about/child-youth-protection/>).

Employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers are forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information including pictures of any child under the age of eighteen (18) without verifiable consent of a parent or guardian. Personal identifiable information includes full name, photos, home address, Email address, telephone number, or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a child. Verifiable consent can take the form of a release/permission form that includes use of photographs, an Email from a parent or guardian, or spoken permission by a parent or guardian in the presence of another authorized adult.

The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau and its Affiliates will review alleged violations of the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act, the Safe Environment Procedures, or the Policies of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau on a case-by-case basis. In the event that a provision of the Guidelines for the Use of Technology, Email and Social Media cannot be reconciled with the Safe Environment Procedures of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, the provisions of the Safe Environment Procedures of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau will be in force.

Enforcement: The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, its Affiliates and their respective administrators intend to enforce the policy set forth here and expect all employees, clerics, religious, and volunteers to comply. Failure to comply with any of the provisions of the Guidelines for the Use of Technology, Email and Social Media will be grounds for discipline, up to and including termination, if an employee or cleric, or removal from position, if a volunteer. The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau and its Affiliates reserve the right to make changes to this policy at any time and at its sole discretion, and interpret and administer the policy in light of changing circumstances and events.

APPROVED on September 1, 2015 by Most Reverend James V. Johnston, Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau

REVIEWED and APPROVED on June 28, 2017 by Most Reverend Edward Rice., Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau

A suggestion of online resources here:

**“Social Media Best Practices and Guidelines,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

**“Schools must weigh risks and benefits of social media for networking,” by Sr. Mary Angela Shaughnessy, SCN, JD, PhD

NOTE from Leslie Anne Eidson/Director of Communications, Media, Publications [leidson@dioscg.org]:
The Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, Diocese of Beaumont, and Archdiocese of Seattle in their guidelines as a resource for the development of this policy; and the USCCB for resource material in the development of this policy.

To follow:

Various releases for use in Schools, Parishes, and Affiliates, etc., as signed pages indicating the understanding of the policy. Particularly, school forms to be issued to both parents and students.