



ROMAN CATHOLIC

DIocese of Springfield–CAPE GIRARDEAU

Office of Child and Youth Protection

Policy and Guidelines for the Use of Technology, Email, and Social Media

Diocesan 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 diocesan personnel 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, its employees, and its members. In light of this, diocesan personnel 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:

Adult: Any person who is eighteen (18) years of age or older.

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.).

Child/Minor: means any person under the age of eighteen, or who is considered by law to be the equivalent of a minor. For the purposes of this document, the term “minors” also includes high school students age 18 or older.

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.

Diocesan personnel: All clergy, deacons, seminarians, religious, diocesan, parish and school employees and adult volunteers who work or volunteer on a regular or part-time basis within any organization designated as a diocesan entity.

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.

Ministry Website: A Social Network Page, Blog or any Internet Website/tool created by diocesan personnel for the sole purpose of conducting Diocesan/Affiliate ministry.

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

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.

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

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.

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 for Establishing Sites:

- Abide by all diocesan/parish policies including the Diocesan Safe Environment Policy and Procedures and the Code of Conduct.
- Electronic communications, via text, email, or other means, should always be generated from official diocesan, parish, school, or agency accounts and devices.
- Electronic communications with students/minors should also include the parents of the student/minor, the entire group/class, and/or other appropriate staff (e.g., Principal, Pastor, Supervisor, or Colleague).
- Adults should refrain from using personal email accounts or cellphones when communicating/text-messaging with individual students/minors.
- Appropriate and professional boundaries must be maintained when communicating with students/minors.
- Keep all communications brief, to the point, and in compliance with the Diocesan Safe Environment Policy and Procedures and the Code of Conduct.
- Be aware that even personal communication by diocesan personnel reflects upon the Church and that you may be held responsible for any electronically communicated and publicly expressed opinions.
- 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 misrepresent yourself, use pseudonyms or name of the parish, school, or program, etc., as your identity, unless authorized to do so.

- Abide by all applicable laws and regulations (e.g., copyright, fair use and IRS financial disclosure regulations).
- Do not divulge confidential information about others. Using the name, address, or other personal identifying information of minors (anyone under age 18) is prohibited without the expressed written consent of the Parent/Legal Guardian (signed Media Release Statement).
- Obtain permission or written consent when citing others, posting photos, or videos, or links to their material.
- 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 and visual branding without written permission of the Diocese, Affiliate, Principal, or Pastor.
- At least one institutional representative (the pastor, principal, or another designated diocesan official) listed on any Website/Blog/Post, must also be an administrator of and monitor the site.
- Adults may not create a Website/Blog/Personal Post with photos of students/minors, link or create gateways to Webpages or blogs belonging to students/minors. Students/Minors should not be on any personal “buddy” or “friends list” of an adult.
- It is the sole responsibility of all diocesan personnel to protect their login credentials and passwords at all times. Be sure to log off all electronic devices to ensure unauthorized access is prevented.
- Be cautious 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.

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:

- Conducting outside business;
- Defaming the character of any individual or institution;
- Causing harm and/or embarrassment to the Diocese of Springfield – Cape Girardeau or Affiliates; or
- Divulging any personal information about anyone, particularly minors, that could jeopardize their safety or well-being in any way.

Personal Websites

The Diocese of Springfield – Cape Girardeau and its Affiliates recognize that diocesan personnel may create Personal Websites as a medium of self-expression. However, they must be aware 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 diocesan 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, diocesan personnel are encouraged to understand that they are witnessing to the faith through all of their social networking, whether "public" or "private."

Personal Email/Blogs

In the event an employee, cleric, religious identifies himself/herself as, or is 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.

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 gives a student/minor access to a Website that is not otherwise openly accessible to the public, that same access must also be shared with/provided to the child's parent/guardian when requested. Be aware, every person is responsible for protecting their own passwords, for logging off any electronic device, email or social media platform, and to prevent unauthorized access.

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.

Social Networking should not be used for the primary purpose of befriending people or socializing. Rather, it 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 permission of the Diocese, Pastor, or Principal 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. Provide parents necessary passwords and access.
- Establish a parish account; never use a personal account.

- The site administrator must be an adult and at least ONE Supervisor, Pastor, or 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 current 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 and supervisors, 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.

- Be prudent, intentional, and aware.

Confidential and Proprietary Information

Consistent with our policy on “Confidentiality” as stated in the employee handbook, diocesan personnel are prohibited from disclosing information that is understood to as proprietary or held in confidence by the Diocese of Springfield – Cape Girardeau or its Affiliates without proper knowledge and consent of the appropriate authority. Also, upon resignation or 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

Diocesan personnel 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, Media, and Publications. Diocesan personnel 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, Media, and Publications.

Inappropriate Language and Images

The Diocese of Springfield – Cape Girardeau and its Affiliates will not tolerate diocesan personnel 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, parishes or schools, members, employees, vendors, partners, or agencies. Employees are reminded of their obligations under the diocesan “Code of Conduct”, as stated in the diocesan employee handbook. In particular, diocesan personnel 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 the Personal Website of any diocesan personnel if there are reasons to believe that this and other related policies are being violated.

Protection of Children

Diocesan personnel 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 Policy and Procedures of the Diocese of Springfield – Cape Girardeau: (<http://dioscg.org/index.php/about/child-youth-protection/>).

Diocesan personnel 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 verbal permission by a parent or guardian witnessed by 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 Policy and Procedures, or the Policies of the Diocese of Springfield – Cape Girardeau on a case-by-case basis. In the event that a provision of this Policy and Guidelines for the Use of Technology, Email and Social Media cannot be reconciled with the Safe Environment Policy and Procedures of the Diocese of Springfield – Cape Girardeau, the provisions of the Safe Environment Policy and 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 diocesan personnel to comply. Failure to comply with any of the provisions of this Policy and 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, REVISED, and APPROVED on June 28, 2017 by Most Reverend Edward Rice, Diocese of Springfield – Cape Girardeau. Revised 2019, 2021.

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 Eidson, Director of Communications, Media, and 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.



DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD – CAPE GIRARDEAU
Parental/Guardian Consent and Media Release Form

Dear Parent/Guardian:

In completing and signing this Parental Consent and Media Release Form, it is hereby understood that, as part of the catechesis and education in parishes and schools, my child/student may be engaged in live and/or recorded electronic communications and activities, such as group email, group texting, social media, and/or audio-video conferencing (using only the specific platforms designated below).

These activities and images may be recorded and included in official Diocesan, Parish, or School Webpage or Social Media posts, materials and campaigns, as well as other media initiatives (e.g., Print or Electronic News Media, Newsletters, Webpages, Fund-Raising, Promotional and Development Efforts, Grant Applications, and Video, PowerPoint or other Electronic or Media Presentations), only in compliance with the Diocesan *Policy and Guidelines for the Use of Technology, Email and Social Media* and other related policies, without compensation to child or parents/guardians.

Photographs, video and audio conferencing and recordings, social media posts, and other print and electronic media may be available for an undetermined amount of time, unless otherwise noted: _____
and restricted to specific groups of people: _____
and, for a specific purpose: _____

- Parents/Guardians who have completed and are in compliance with the Safe Environment requirements, Training and Background Screening, and have submitted the current Code of Conduct for Adults to the Parish/School Safe Environment Coordinator may request to participate in video/audio conferencing sessions involving their child. Parents/Guardians may, at any time, request copies of materials sent to their child regarding electronic communications.
- I understand that, due to the nature of the electronic communication and media platforms, confidentiality and/or protections from unauthorized dissemination cannot be guaranteed.
- I understand that any photographs, audio-video recordings will only be used by the Diocese, Parish or School in a legal manner and that in no way will my child be depicted in an unethical manner.
- I verify that I am aware of, understand, and agree to comply with the *Policy and Guidelines for the Use of Technology, E-Mail, and Social Media*, which is available on the diocesan Child and Youth Protection webpage
- I understand that unauthorized personal (one-on-one) conversations between diocesan personnel and minors violate the *Policy and Guidelines for the Use of Technology, E-Mail, and Social Media*, and that I may report any concerns or violations to the Diocesan Office of Communications, Media and Publications, the Diocesan Office of Child and Youth Protection, Law Enforcement, or the Missouri Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline **800-392-3738** or **844-CAN-TELL**.
- This Consent and Release is effective for the current academic year, beginning July 1 and ending June 30 the following year, and may be revoked by parent/guardian at any time by written notice.

Child/Student Name: _____ DOB: _____

Parish/School/Group and Location: _____

Permission is granted for these contact preferences (initial and complete):

___ Group Email for Parent/Guardian: _____ Child: _____

___ Group Text for Parent/Guardian: _____ Child: _____

___ Video/Audio Conferencing Platform: _____

___ Designated Social Media Platform: ___ Facebook ___ Twitter ___ Instagram ___ YouTube

___ **NO, I do not consent to my child being contacted through any electronic communication.**

Parent/Guardian Name (printed): _____ Phone No: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____