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**The Episcopal Diocese of Western Kansas**

**Social Media Policy and Suggestions**

*As an ever-increasing number of people use and prefer digital communication, it is essential that the diocese be present in this mission field. Social media sites, smart phones and email can enhance communication, faith-sharing and deepen relationships. The following recommended practices and guidelines apply lessons from the Safeguarding God’s People training and commonly accepted principles of healthy boundaries to the virtual world of digital media and communication.*

**Commonly Accepted Principles of Healthy Boundaries and Safeguarding God’s People**

1. Adults have more power than children and youth.

2. Clergy have more power than people with whom they have a pastoral relationship.

3. The mutuality of friendship cannot exist when there is a disparity of power.

4. Two unrelated adults must be able to maintain visual contact with each other any time they engage

in ministry with children or youth.

5. Windows in doors allow transparency of interactions with children, youth and adults who may be

vulnerable.

**General Information about Digital Communications**

1. All communication sent digitally (i.e. email, messages on social media sites, notes or posts, etc.) are **not confidential** and may be shared or reposted to others.

2. Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent, just as a window in the door provides transparency in the physical world.

3. In the virtual world, healthy boundaries and Safeguarding God’s People practices must be adhered to as they are in the physical world.

4. In the virtual world, “friend” can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate with through that medium. In the physical world, “friend” can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self- disclosure, mutuality and expectations for relationship.

5. Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world.

6. Everything you post online is public and a part of your witness.

7. Clergy, especially, should not post if they are under the influence of alcohol.

* Be safe. The safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must be maintained.
* Be respectful. Do not post or share content that is sexually explicit, inflammatory, hateful, abusive, threatening or otherwise disrespectful.
* Be kind. Treat others how you would wish to be treated and assume the best in people. If you have a criticism or critique to make, consider not just whether you would say it in person, but the tone you would use.
* Be honest. Don’t mislead people about who you are.
* Take responsibility. You are accountable for the things you do, say and write. Text and images shared can be public and permanent, even with privacy settings in place. If you’re not sure, don’t post it.
* Be a good ambassador. Personal and professional life can easily become blurred online so think before you post.
* Disagree well. Some conversations can be places of robust disagreement and it’s important we apply our values in the way we express them.
* Credit others. Acknowledge the work of others. Respect copyright and always credit where it is due. Be careful not to release sensitive or confidential information and always question the source of any content you are considering amplifying.
* Follow the rules. Abide by the terms and conditions of the various social media platforms themselves. If you see a comment that you believe breaks their policies, then please report it to the respective company.

**The Episcopal Diocese of Western Kansas** developed this social media policy to govern the publication of and commentary on - social media by **the diocese, all churches, employees, clergy and volunteers.** For the purposes of this policy, social media means any facility for online publication and commentary, including without limitation blogs, wikis, social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and new tools as they emerge.

**The Episcopal Diocese of Western Kansas, churches, employees, clergy and volunteers** may publish or comment via social media in accordance with this policy. This policy applies to all uses of social media, including personal, by **The Episcopal Diocese of Western Kansas,** churches,employees, clergy and volunteers.

**Recommended Practices for Interactions with Children and Youth**

**Relationships on Social Media Sites**

1. Adults who minister to children and youth are strongly encouraged to set stringent privacy settings on any social media profile, or to only post things they feel comfortable sharing with the youth to whom they minister. Individual personal profiles are to be used to interact with real friends, family and peers. Adults should not submit friend requests to minors or youth. Youth may not be able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between youth and adults. Youth may ask to be friends and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests.

2. If an adult chooses to accept friend requests from minors or youth who are associated with their faith community, other adult leaders must have full access to all aspects of that adult’s profile and correspondence.

3. Adults who want to connect via a social media website with youth to whom they minister may want to set up a closed group account that youth may join. Youth requesting to friend an adult can then be invited to join this group rather than be accepted as a friend on an adult’s personal profile account. The purpose of this is to create a line of privacy between youth and one’s family, friends and colleagues. Alternatively, the youth minister could also post only that which he or she feels comfortable sharing with the youth to whom he or she ministers.

4. Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy and/or the Bishop. If the material is on a church affiliated site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site.

**Groups on Social Media Sites**

1. Groups should have at least two unrelated adult administrators as well as at least two youth.
2. Closed groups, but not hidden groups, should be used for youth groups.
3. Invitations to youth to join the group should be made by youth administrators, unless a youth previously asked an adult administrator to invite another youth to join the group.
4. Inappropriate material that does not raise suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should immediately be removed from the site.
5. Any content that details inappropriate behavior, which is outside of the bounds of the established behavioral covenant, during a church sponsored event or activity should be addressed by adult youth leaders and parents.
6. Social media groups for youth should be open to parents of current members.

Parents should be informed that the content of youth pages or groups that are not sponsored by the church are not within the purview of adult youth leaders.

1. Adult leaders of youth groups and former youth members who, due to departure, removal from position, or those who are no longer eligible because they aged-out of a program, should be removed from digital communication with youth groups via social media sites, list servs, etc. In some cases, the discretion of the youth minister must be trusted in this area.

**Recommended Practices and Guidelines for Interactions with Adults**

**Relationships on Social Media Sites**

1. Clergy are strongly encouraged to set stringent privacy settings on any social media profile to shield both adult and youth members from viewing content that may be inappropriate. Or, clergy may have the mindset that they will only post that which they feel comfortable sharing with their whole congregation on a Sunday morning.

2. Clergy should consider the impact of declining a friend request from parishioners. These encounters may create a tension in real world relationships. Clergy can direct friend requests from parishioners to the parish’s group page.

3. Clergy who work directly with youth are encouraged to establish church sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with youth members.

4. Clergy should make use of private messages for matters that should be discussed privately.

5. All individuals relating to one another on the church Facebook page should behave in the same way as they would during a fellowship moment at church. The atmosphere should be friendly, kind and safe. Opinions are welcome, but nastiness is not.

**Some Do’s & Don’t’s**

**Do:**

1. Proofread. Make sure what is posted is spelled correctly and uses proper grammar. Nothing can derail social media reputation than sloppy editing or missed errors.
2. Lift others up. Use social media to highlight key volunteers and leaders in your church and lift others up. Post a picture of the Youth Ministry volunteers and let them know how awesome they are or post a picture of the Hospitality Team and let them know how well they did last Sunday.
3. Respond to comments. Good or bad, it is best to respond. If you’re responding to a negative comment, it is always a good idea to have another person check your response. It is likely that a simple “Thank you for your feedback” will suffice, too, if the comment is negative, but contains actionable information. People who care enough to comment might be open to a meaningful and helpful conversation.
4. Promote events. Social media is a great marketing tool, so use it! Promote church events on your social media through viral marketing, too. Produce events that are easily shared with all appropriate information for outsider who might see the event because someone else shared the event.
5. Celebrate. Use social media to celebrate what is going on in your church! Celebrate the baptism, the new staff member, the record high attendance, the winner of the chili cook-off, the anniversary of the church, etc. Celebrate with others what is going on in your church!
6. Be consistent. Make social media a priority and be sure that your posts are consistent every week. Make a content calendar and follow it! Social media should be used at least 3 times per week.

**Don’t**

1. Post negatively. Keep the posts and shared content positive. Remember that social media is a platform with watching eyes and listening ears. Conversations are not private if they are on someone’s wall. Always remember social media is a powerful way of communication. Carefully Consider before you post.
2. Overuse hashtags. There is a time and place for hashtags. Be sure to search a hashtag before you use it and only use a hashtag if it has a purpose! #Hashtags #can #get #distracting #quickly.
3. Put just anyone in charge. Make sure the person in charge can represent the church well in every social media post. Remember, social media does not give a second chance at explanation.
4. Do not be a false witness. Check sources and confirm stories and facts before sharing or posting.
5. Post stories with misleading or contain misinformation. This is gossip.
6. Always remember social media is a powerful way of communication. Carefully Consider before you post.