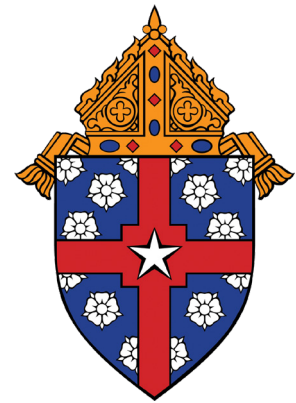


ARCHDIOCESE of GALVESTON-HOUSTON

# SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

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## Introduction

“The Catholic Church, since it was founded by Christ our Lord to bear salvation to all people and thus is obliged to preach the Gospel, considers it one of its duties to announce the Good News of salvation also with the help of social communication and to instruct people in their proper use.” (Inter mirifica, 4 xii 63)

With these words, Blessed Paul VI declared the importance of using every legitimate means to evangelize the world, but also called upon the ones doing so to “be acquainted with the norms of morality and conscientiously put them into practice.” (Id.)

Social media and other digital communications offer the Catholic Church extraordinary new ways to teach, evangelize and build greater communion among the faithful, as well as reach out to those who are not Catholic or are no longer practicing their faith. Social media has redefined the way people relate to one another – and it is therefore imperative that the Church participate in all forms of digital communication in a manner that is safe and responsible.

As Pope Benedict XVI noted in his 2010 World Communications message, “The world of digital communication, with its almost limitless expressive capacity, makes us appreciate all the more Saint Paul’s exclamation: ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.’”

**This policy applies to all Church and School personnel, which includes bishops, priests and deacons with faculties to function in this diocese, seminarians of the diocese, men and women religious working for the diocese, lay ecclesial ministers, employees and volunteers.**

## Section 1 | Communication with Minors and Vulnerable Adults

The primary purpose of digital communications between Church and School personnel and minors and vulnerable adults engaged in ministry is to provide information related to a ministry, school or other event and to encourage online engagement and evangelization. Personal or private interaction via any form of communication between adults to minors and/or to vulnerable adults is not permitted.

All [Safe Environment policies](#), mandated compliance requirements, and procedures must be followed and upheld. It is most important to remember that in using social media, the boundary issues are the same as in-person communication. Parents/guardians should be fully aware of all mediums being used to keep in contact with their young person for ministerial purposes.

Church and School personnel are expected to comply with the [Safe Environment Policy of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston](#), the [Children's Online Privacy Protection Act](#) and all other applicable federal and state laws.

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## Section 2 | Establishing a Social Media Site

Careful consideration should be made to determine the particular strengths of each social media platform, the needs of a particular ministry, parish or organization, and the audience they are trying to reach. The strengths should match the needs of both the audience and the admins.

### 1. Approval Process

Before being launched, permission must be approved by the pastor, principal or appropriate supervisor.

### 2. Account Administrators

An account must have at least two (2) authorized administrators. One must be a parish, school, or diocesan employee. Login credentials and/or administrator privileges must also be shared with/provided to the pastor, principle, or appropriate supervisor. Only authorized account administrators may have administrative access to an account or login credentials.

If an entity does not have enough employees to meet digital media needs, a volunteer or contractor may be authorized on a case-by-case basis by the pastor/administrator or director to be an administrator, editor or contributor. Since digital media can be accessed and used by any person, including minors and vulnerable adults, volunteers in this role must be compliant with the requirements of the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Policy.

An individual's access to an account must be removed immediately if the individual is no longer authorized to manage the account or has separated from his/her Church and School personnel role. Passwords are to be changed in each instance for security reasons.

Administrators are responsible for ensuring compliance with this and all Archdiocesan policies and codes of conduct, including the monitoring of social media accounts for content

and comments. All administrator functions should reserve the right to ban offenders.

### **3. Account Names and Passwords**

Digital media accounts are to be set up and maintained with diocesan, parish, or school email addresses, preferably the office's or ministry's main email address.

Account names and profile descriptions are to reflect the name or purpose of sponsoring entity, eg. "St. Laurence Catholic Church", "St. Rose of Lima Catholic School", or "Family Life Ministry - Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston". Changes must have the approval of the designated supervisor.

Email addresses used as a login credential for administrative access should be generated through a entity-owned domain (@archgh.org or @[parishname].org). The exception is a social media platform that requires a pre-existing personal email address to access the account, e.g., Facebook.

Campus ministers are permitted to use their official college email system for school- specific communication and college system access.

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## **Section 3 | Content**

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston recognizes that Clergy, Employees and Volunteers use the internet to conduct the affairs and pursue the mission of the Archdiocese and its affiliates. The Archdiocese supports and encourages church and school personnel to join these conversations to proclaim the Gospel. It is important that we make every effort to ensure the safety of producers and consumers of social media, while at the same time ensuring the integrity of the message we proclaim. This requires responsible, focused, and intentional use of these communication tools.

All content published on behalf of an Archdiocesan entity must be consistent with and affirm the teachings and tenets of the Roman Catholic Church, for which the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston has responsibility and authority, and must not otherwise be inappropriate, create a risk of reputational harm to the Archdiocese or any Archdiocesan entity, or create legal exposure for the Archdiocese or any Archdiocesan entity.

Examples of content that would be prohibited under this standard include, but are not limited to, content that would reasonably be considered dishonest, derogatory, sexually suggestive, sexually explicit, defamatory, fraudulent, degrading, malicious, disrespectful, or threatening. Church and School personnel must maintain an appropriate professional demeanor when communicating on or through an Archdiocesan website or social media account.

### **1. Links**

Accounts should link to and "follow" the official Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston digital media sites. Links to official sites of the Vatican, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

and Texas Conference of Catholic Bishops are also encouraged.

Be cautious of linking to or posting information from outside organizations, including those who self-identify as “Catholic,” without approval from the pastor/administrator, principal or director.

## **2. Ownership**

Any digital communication accounts that are used as part of the work or volunteering within the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, such as websites, blogs, social ministry accounts and the like are the property of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, regardless of the creator or administrator. This applies to social media profiles, pages or groups that contain the name, act in the name of, or act as an extension of any Archdiocesan entity.

## **3. Copyrights and Use of Official Logos or Trademarks**

All users must comply fully with copyright law when using social media and technology. Do not post any non-original content (e.g., photographs, artwork, articles, etc.) unless and until you have obtained written permission from the copyright owner to do so. This also extends to posting videos or recordings of Masses or other events that contain performances of copyrighted music or other copyrighted material.

Archdiocesan trademarks, logos or taglines (including the Archdiocesan shield) cannot be used without explicit permission from the Archdiocesan Communications Office. Requests for consent to use such Archdiocesan trademarks, logos or taglines are to be made to the Archdiocesan Communications Office (in the case of the Archdiocese, its institutions or entities, and its administration), the appropriate Archdiocesan office or ministry director (in the case of Archdiocesan trademarks, logos or taglines specific to those departments and ministries), the pastor (in the case of the parish and its ministries or administration) and the principal (in the case of the school).

Employees, clergy and volunteers may not use Archdiocesan trademarks, taglines or logos on their personal websites in any way that could reasonably suggest Archdiocesan sponsorship or agreement with any views expressed.

## **4. Photos and Video**

Appropriate photographs and videos may be posted on official social media sites. While there is no expectation of privacy at public events (including Masses, parish festivals or bazaars, etc.), there may be attendees at private events or activities (including religious education classes, retreats, bible studies, parish council meetings, etc.) that do not wish to have their picture taken or used either online or offline. If an individual requests that his or her photograph be deleted or removed (or, in the case of a minor, a parent makes such a request), that request should be promptly honored.

Photographs of minors should never be posted or published without a Media Release Form signed by the parent/guardian (see Appendix A). Media Release Forms should be kept on file with the parish/school/entity that uploaded the media. Under no circumstances should



photographs of minors with any identifying information be posted. We encourage parishes to include a Media Release Form or section on all registration forms for minors.

## **5. Comment Policy**

The purpose of any a social media page is to provide an interactive forum where readers can gather and discuss information about the wide range of issues addressed by the work and mission of the Catholic Church, specifically through the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. Followers are encouraged to post questions, comments and concerns, but should remember this is a moderated online discussion hosted by an entity of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston appreciates healthy, constructive debate and discussion; that means we ask that comments be kept civil in tone and reflect the charity and respect that marks Christian discourse. Comments that may be hidden, deleted, or necessitate the banning or blocking of a user include those that contain:

- Personal attacks/inflammatory remarks against a person or group
- Content/comments off topic
- Spam/ Promotion of services, products, political organizations/agendas
- Links to sites that contain offensive material or attack the Church's hierarchy and mission
- Information that is factually incorrect
- Vulgar Language

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## **Section 4 | Personal Social Media Accounts**

Personal social media accounts are created by an individual to stay connected with family and friends, and to interact with the online community, not specifically for the purpose of ministry. Some social media sites require the user to log in with a personal account in order to access the account of a ministry or organization and do not allow for the creation of two accounts, i.e. a personal account and a work account (ex. Facebook).

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston recognizes that Church and School personnel may create personal digital media accounts for their own use. Church and School personnel should be aware that they may be seen by members of the public as representing the diocese and its ethics and values, even when posting on personal accounts.

By their nature, social networking accounts are public. Online comments and posts are part of the public forum, and content will be considered public. Church and School personnel may be held responsible for electronically communicated and publicly expressed opinion. Any information that causes or has the potential to cause embarrassment to the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, create a risk of reputational harm to the Archdiocese or any Archdiocesan entity, or create legal exposure for the Archdiocese or any Archdiocesan entity should be avoided.

Clergy and religious have a particular responsibility to be witnesses in word and sacrament of the Gospel and should avoid the appearance of scandal, disunity, imprudence or the taking of a position contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church when posting online.

Church and School personnel should maintain boundaries between their personal and professional lives. Personal accounts should not be used to conduct business for the diocese or diocesan entity.

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## **Section 5 | Enforcement**

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and its administrators intend to enforce the policy set forth here and expect all employees, religious, clergy and volunteers to comply.

These rules are in place to protect authorized users and Archdiocesan entities. Inappropriate use exposes Archdiocesan entities to risks and legal issues. Anyone with knowledge of inappropriate use of social media that is in violation of this or any other Archdiocesan policy should report this information verbally and in writing to the individual's supervisor.

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston reserves the right to review any employee's, cleric's or volunteer's Archdiocesan ministry websites, personal websites, and his/her personal and ministry-related social media accounts if there are reasonable grounds for believing that this policy is being violated.

Failure to comply with any of the provisions of this Social Media Policy will be grounds for discipline, up to and including termination, if an employee or cleric, or removal from position, if a volunteer.

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## **Section 6 | Addendum for Additional Policies**

Parish pastors/administrators, school principals, directors and similar management employees may develop written directives particular to their Archdiocesan entity's mission and operation that provide additional guidance to employees in the use and management of websites and social media. No such directive will contradict the contents of this policy. If such an addendum is created, it should be included with this policy when presented to employees so that they understand their full responsibilities and accountability

Questions concerning interpretation of this document should be directed to the Archdiocesan Communications Director. This document may be updated and modified at any time. This document and any future modifications will be made available at [www.archgh.org](http://www.archgh.org) will be available in its entirety.

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston reserves the right to make changes to this policy at any time and at its sole discretion. It also reserves the right to interpret and administer the policy in light of changing circumstances and events.



In areas where this policy does not provide a direct answer for how members of our Church faithful should conduct themselves, personnel should contact their supervisor. Questions on interpretation of this policy may be sent to the Archdiocesan Communications Office at [web@archgh.org](mailto:web@archgh.org).

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Archdiocesan Communications Office.

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## **Section 7 | Definitions**

**Archdiocese or Archdiocesan Entity:** Any organization, department, office, ministry, outreach, parish, school, agency, committee, task force, advisory board or institution by, or with the supervision of, the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

**Administrative access:** Access to website management tools or a social media account/profile that allows a person to modify, create, delete or publish content or the account itself.

**Boundaries:** Role-appropriate social, emotional and behavioral rules of interactions between individuals.

**Child, Youth, Minor or Vulnerable Adults:** Any person under the age of 18 or an adult considered to be vulnerable, that is, unable to perform activities or normal daily living due to a mental, intellectual, emotional, long-term physical or developmental disability or dysfunction, brain damage, the infirmities of aging or other causes. In the case of clergy, the Motu proprio “Vos Estis Lux Mundi” gives the definition of vulnerable person as: any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offence.

**Church and School personnel:** Bishops, priests and deacons with faculties to function in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, seminarians of the diocese, men and women religious working for the diocese, lay ecclesial ministers, employees and volunteers. Designation as “Church or School personnel” for purposes of this policy shall not be construed as creating an employment or agency relationship between the Archdiocese or any Archdiocesan entity and any person not subject to an express employment agreement with the Archdiocese or an Archdiocesan entity.

**Content:** Any digital information that communicates a message, including, but not limited to, text, photos, audio files and video files.

**Diocesan account:** Website, social media or other digital communications account that is owned or managed by or on behalf of the diocese or a diocesan entity. This does not include personal websites or social media accounts.

**Ministry account:** Digital communications account created by Church personnel for the sole purpose of conducting diocesan/affiliate ministry.

**Personal account:** Digital media account of an individual or external group that is not owned, managed or published by or on behalf of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston or a diocesan entity.

**Supervisor:** The hiring and/or supervising agent: for parish staff, the pastor; for parish volunteers, the appropriate administrator (e.g., Director of Religious Education or Director of Youth Ministry); for school personnel, the principal; for Chancery employees, the Department Director or Secretariat Director.

**Volunteer:** An adult who works without financial or material gain on behalf of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston or its affiliates and who is not an employee or a cleric (for example, an intern, catechist, scout leader, coach, student teacher and others in similar capacities).

**Website:** Any web presence, including blogs or any website, that displays social media content or features.

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*The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston would like to thank the Dioceses of Arlington, Dallas, La Crosse, Orlando, Palm Beach, Richmond and Springfield-Cape Girardeau, whose own policies were instrumental in the development of this policy.*



*This form is available to groups or ministries which do not already have an established media release form for minors. Groups or ministries already operating with forms approved by the Chancery should continue use of their approved media release forms.*

## **MEDIA RELEASE FORM for MINORS** **for Photography and Video**

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, 1700 San Jacinto, Houston, Texas 77002

I hereby grant permission to the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston (hereinafter referred to as AGH), its successors and those acting under its permission or upon their authority, or pursuant to their request, the unqualified right and permission to photograph, interview, reproduce, publish, or circulate or otherwise use, my child/children's name(s), and any photographic/digital reproduction or other likeness of my child/children.

It is my understanding that this photograph/video or portions thereof may be used for public view, including use on the Archdiocesan Website, [www.archgh.org](http://www.archgh.org), or its official Social Media Accounts.

I agree to allow my child to participate in these projects without financial remuneration, and the consideration for this Release is my desire and intent to assist AGH. I further understand that this form releases AGH from any future claims or liabilities arising from the use of said photograph/video.

This authorization and Release authorizes use of said name(s) and material in any published form and applies to any medium of advertising or publicity, including the Internet, for an unlimited period of time.

Name of Child/Children: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print or type)

Date(s) of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

If needed, please attach additional forms for additional children. A photostatic copy hereof shall be considered as effective and valid as the original.

Signature of Parent or Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_