



*The Episcopal Church
in Wyoming*

Social Media Guidelines and Policies

1) APPLICABILITY

These guidelines and policies are intended for:

- a) All members of the clergy (Bishops, Priests and Deacons);
- b) Diocesan staff;
- c) Lay employees and volunteers of Episcopal parishes and other bodies within the Episcopal Church in Wyoming;
- d) All aspirants, postulants, candidates, or seminarians sponsored by, or working in the Episcopal Church in Wyoming, including those enrolled in the Wyoming Iona School.

2) DEFINITIONS

- a) **Social Media:** All forms of electronic communication (as well as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos). Typical social media applications include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat.
- b) **Text:** An electronic communication sent and received by mobile phone.
- c) **Email:** A method of exchanging digital messages between people using digital devices such as computers and mobile phones.

3) GUIDELINES FOR USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- a) Social media can be an appropriate and effective means of communicating basic factual information such as responding quickly to questions, correcting misunderstandings, giving a personal perspective about a breaking story in the news media, etc. Responding quickly doesn't mean doing so without due consideration. Social media is not an appropriate communication method for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or that require extensive conversation.
- b) Use privacy settings wisely. Not all of your Facebook "friends" are really your friends. In the virtual world, "friend" can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate through that medium. In the physical world, "friend" can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self-disclosure, mutuality and expectations for relationship.
- c) You are an ambassador. If you are ordained, lead, or are employed by the Church, others will see you in your public role as a representative of the Church. A priest is a priest is a priest, a deacon is a deacon is a deacon, a

lay leader is a lay leader is a lay leader. Taking off the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace does not remove the vows and responsibilities of that calling.

- d) Beware and be aware that your personal opinions may be interpreted to be representative of the Episcopal Church or the Episcopal Church in Wyoming. Emotionally charged political opinions, protected class targeting of gender, race, religion or other topics not in harmony with one's baptismal covenant to respect the worth and dignity of every human being should not be posted or shared.
- e) Social media updates are immediate and will outdate quickly. BUT, they can have a more lasting impact; you should assume that anything you post is permanent. Even if you later delete, the post may have been seen, shared, tagged or referred to elsewhere.
- f) Before becoming involved in an online forum, take time to listen to others, get a feel for the tone of a particular forum, and give thought to how, or if, you might participate.
- g) Is this my story to share? If in doubt, don't. Use of social media does not change the Church's understanding of confidentiality. Breaking confidentiality is as wrong as it would be in any other context. Indeed, via social media a broken confidence could spread rapidly and be impossible to retract.
- h) Everything you post online is public and a part of your witness. Don't overshare personal information or photos that might compromise your ministry.
- i) Individuals should seek permission before tagging others on photos or written posts.
- j) Participants in a photo, video chat or blog should consider what will be shown in the photo or video such as the surroundings, clothing, state of dress, etc.
- k) In response to pastoral concerns for those who suffer from any substance abuse or addictions, posts or photos depicting alcohol, tobacco, or illegal substances in an inappropriate manner are to be avoided.
- l) Bullying, posting or sharing pictures that depict abuse, violence, sexual acts, drug or alcohol abuse, or harassment, are never acceptable. Violators may be subject to legal consequences or other sanctions as determined by appropriate parties.
- m) Social media cannot communicate tone or context, and meaning can be lost. Humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted in a post.
- n) Take a moment to consider the ramifications of a message before clicking on the "share," "like," "send" or "reply all" button.
- o) Social media can be one-way communication; unless the receiver responds, the sender may not know that the message was misinterpreted.

4) GUIDELINES FOR USE OF TEXTING AND EMAIL

- a) Texting and email, like social media, cannot communicate tone or context, and meaning can be lost. Humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted.
- b) Take a moment to consider the ramifications of a message before clicking on the "send" or "reply all" button.

- c) Texting and email can be one-way communication; unless the receiver responds, the sender may not know that the message was misinterpreted.

5) GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

- a) Beware of any disparity of power. Clergy, staff and lay leaders should consider the impact of submitting friend requests to parishioners and others to whom they minister. Because of such disparity of power, the other person may feel unable to decline such a request.
- b) Clergy, staff and lay leaders should consider the impact of declining a friend request from parishioners or of unfriending parishioners. These encounters may create tension in real world relationships.

6) GUIDELINES AND POLICIES FOR CHURCH-SPONSORED SITES AND/OR GROUP PAGES

- a) Churches are encouraged to set up group social media pages that all parishioners may join. 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.
- b) Materials posted on church sponsored sites and/or group pages are not confidential and all sites should so note.
- c) Content, language, pictures or materials deemed inappropriate by the site Administrator, rector, or vestry, as appropriate, are to be removed from the site or group page by the site administrator.
- d) Bullying, posting or sharing pictures that depict abuse, violence, sexual acts, drug or alcohol abuse, or harassment, are prohibited. Violators may be subject to legal consequences or other sanctions as determined by appropriate parties.
- e) Individuals should seek permission before tagging others on photos and in no case shall a person under age 16 be tagged without the permission of the child's parent or guardian.
- f) Those posting to church sites should display appropriate background (such as a no illegal activity), appropriate dress, photos depicting excessive use of alcohol, etc., in any photo, video chat or blog.
- g) In response to pastoral concerns for those who suffer from any substance abuse or addictions, posts or photos depicting alcohol, tobacco, or illegal substances in an inappropriate manner are prohibited on church-sponsored sites.

7) GUIDELINES AND POLICIES FOR INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH RELATIONSHIPS ON SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

- a) In the virtual world, healthy boundaries and Safeguarding God's Children practices must be adhered to just as they are in the physical world.
- b) 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. Adults should not submit friend requests to minors or youth; youth may not feel able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between youth

and adults. If youth send friend requests to adults, adults should carefully discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests.

- c) 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. 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.
- d) Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child, youth, elder or vulnerable adult, has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy and/or the Department of Family Services (DFS) or local law enforcement. If the material is on a church affiliated site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with DFS and/or local law enforcement.

8) CHILDREN AND YOUTH GROUP SITE GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

- a) Social media groups should have at least two unrelated adult administrators as well as at least two youth if the group is specifically set up for youth.
- b) Closed groups, but not secret groups, should be used for youth groups (pilgrimage, mission trips, etc.).
- c) 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.
- d) Behavioral covenants should be created to govern what content is appropriate and inappropriate for an online youth group.
- e) Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child, youth, elder, or vulnerable adult, has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy and/or DFS or local law enforcement. If the material is on a church affiliated site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with DFS and/or local law enforcement.
- f) Inappropriate material shall immediately be removed from the site.
- g) Any content that details inappropriate behavior outside the bounds of the established behavioral covenant during a church sponsored event or activity shall be addressed by adult youth leaders and parents.
- h) Social media groups for youth should be open to parents of current members.
- i) Parents should be informed that the content of youth pages or groups not sponsored by the church are not within the purview of adult youth leaders.
- j) Adult leaders of youth groups and former youth members who, due to departure, removal from position, or those who are no longer eligible,

should be removed from digital communication with youth groups via social media sites, list serves, etc.

9) GUIDELINES FOR PUBLISHING/POSTING CONTENT ONLINE

- a) All communities of faith should take care to secure verbal or written permission from adults and guardians of minor children who will, or may, participate in activities that may be photographed or videoed for distribution.
- b) Photos that are published on church-sponsored sites should not include names or contact information for persons under 18 without written parental permission.

10) PROCEDURES FOR FILING AND INVESTIGATION OF A COMPLAINT

- a) If an inappropriate post is observed by anyone subject to these guidelines and policies, it is preferable, if possible, to reach out to the one posting the inappropriate material and remind them of these guidelines. If no action is taken to remove the post or inappropriate photo, the individual should express concerns directly to the Bishop.
- b) Upon receipt of a complaint for a violation of these guidelines and/or policies, the Bishop may contact the complainant and other affected parties to investigate the alleged violation and determine whether additional action is appropriate.

Reference is also made to General Canon IV.4.1(h)8, requiring Clergy to refrain from “any Conduct Unbecoming a Member of the Clergy”, which is defined as “any disorder or neglect that prejudices the reputation, good order and discipline of the Church, or any conduct of a nature to bring material discredit upon the Church or the Holy Orders conferred by the Church.”

**Use social media responsibly to build friendships and share the Gospel.
Use your common sense. If in doubt, ask someone you trust!**

“FAITH ON THE NEW FRONTIER”

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