



## Province III Youth Ministry Network

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Dear Friends,

We are excited to present to you the attached document, ***Social Media: Safe Church***, on guidelines for the safe and responsible use of social media in youth ministry. This document is the result of a collaborative effort between the youth coordinators from the dioceses of Province III. It reflects a great deal of collective wisdom and experience, and it is our hope that it will serve as a helpful framework for how you approach social media in your own ministry. The information we detail in this document is not a set of rules, but rather a set of helpful guidelines and pastoral considerations which we feel will assist in utilizing new technologies and communications outlets in the safest and most effective way possible.

Please share with us your thoughts and comments. We hope this work proves to be useful in your ministry settings.

Faithfully,

The Province III Youth Ministry Network

# Social Media : Safe Church

## Province III Youth Ministry Network

We believe in a God who radically loves us, so much so, he entered creation as Jesus Christ and modeled and formed relationships giving us power through the Holy Spirit to continue His incarnational ministry in the world today. The ways we develop and form our incarnational relationships in the church, home and community are rapidly changing. Social media and imagined communities, and information sharing which deepens and develops relationships offers new ways of communication which may at times bring challenges to living out our Baptismal faith. Social Networking Sites and Media are a reality in the lives of most of our students, young adults and even adults, and it's essential for the Church to fully engage in this arena. Technological advancements in communication have diminished traditional thoughts on privacy – it is now a matter of reputation and integrity.

The following recommended practices and guidelines apply commonly accepted principles of healthy boundaries for digital networking and communication. They are intended to raise awareness of issues and open doors of conversations with ministry teams. They are not intended to be hard and fast “rules” but rather an invitation to explore the changing landscape of pastoral relationships with students and adults. We encourage all ministry teams to discern together what guidelines to adopt, considering the nature of your ministry and being mindful that our calling is to meet students where they are; model healthy boundaries; and love and care for students safely.

This is a pastoral document, not binding legal guidelines. If you are concerned with the legal ramifications of your ministry's guidelines you are encouraged to review your covenant with a lawyer.

### Recommendations –

1. Use prudent judgment in the time you contact students through social media. The "home phone rule" is a basic rule of thumb to use – *normally* do not text, chat, or email back-and-forth with students at a time you would not normally call their home phone line, i.e. before 8:00 AM or after 9:00 PM.
2. Implement privacy settings and personal boundaries
  - a. Creating separate private and professional profiles on networking sites
  - b. Applying privacy settings that are consistent with all students, across all platforms.
  - c. Reviewing accessible content and photos frequently.
  - d. If a student texts you after hours and it's not an emergency – wait until morning to reply
3. If you choose to utilize any social networking site to communicate with students associated with your community of faith, we recommend that other youth workers (within the same community of faith) have full access to all of your profiles and correspondence.

- a. Parents of a student should be aware of and how you utilize social network platforms
  - b. When Possible, communication should be sent to entire groups, on their wall or in public areas - not in private messages – this includes images
  - c. When ongoing pastoral communication are private (ie: Emails, FB Messages, Texting, etc) – Who they are with and their frequency should be disclosed to the parent or a supervisor
  - d. Someone on Staff has access to or may ask for your Username & Password and can login to investigate activity
  - e. Consistency with all student on all platforms is of the utmost importance
4. Covenants should be created to govern digital groups, addressing:
    - a. appropriate & inappropriate language and behavior
    - b. who may join and/or view group activity and when they should leave the group
    - c. content that can be posted/published on the site or page
    - d. who, how and when may photos be tagged (ie: did guardians give you permission to post pictures of their student)
    - e. mandatory reporting laws will be followed
    - f. consequences for breaking the covenant
  5. Any inappropriate material posted in your online groups should be deleted and addressed or reported if necessary.
  6. Parents should be informed that content, including images, that appears on student pages or groups that are not sponsored by the church are **NOT** within the purview of your Youth Ministry.
  7. Video Chatting with student is strongly discouraged – if you must, be aware of what you're wearing and of your surroundings.
  8. Transcripts of on-line chats (video or text) should be saved.
  9. Your emails should communicate facts not feelings. When the content of received email raises concerns or questions share it with a member of your Pastoral team, or supervisor.
    - a. Phone conversations and face-to-face meetings are the preferred mode of communication, when responding to emotionally driven communication or pastoral emergencies
  10. There are further considerations when using photos and videos of minors for ministry purposes.
    - a. Respect the dignity of every person depicted in an image
    - b. Include a media release statement on a signed consent form
    - c. It is **strongly discouraged** to attach student names with their image (ie: captions, tagging on facebook)