



Social Networking, Websites, Digital Communication **Suggested Practices & Guidelines with Adults**

General Information about Digital Communications

- 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.
- All communication sent digitally (email, social networking sites, notes or posts, etc.) is NOT CONFIDENTIAL and may be shared or re-posted to others.
- Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent, as a window in the door provides transparency in the physical world.
- In the virtual world, healthy boundaries and safe church practices must be adhered to as they are in the physical world.
- 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.

Recommendations for Use of Email or Texting (Including Twitter)

- Email can be an appropriate and effective means of communicating basic factual information such as the time of an event, agenda for a meeting, text of a document, etc.
- Email is not an appropriate communication method for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or require extensive conversation.
- If an email message is longer than a couple of sentences, then the matter might more properly be addressed via live conversation.
- Humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted in an email.
- All email users should take a moment to consider the ramifications of their message before clicking on the “send” or “reply to all” button.

These guidelines were developed through the Office of Pastoral Response, the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut.

Social Networking Sites-Relationship

- While being Facebook “friends” with parishioners may be a useful way of keeping up to date with pastoral care concerns, it is important to recognize potential shortcomings. For example, a parishioner may develop an expectation that you will keep up with them via Facebook or Twitter and be disappointed when you don’t.
- Another option for clergy who want to connect via a social networking website with parishioners is to set up a group account that all parishioners may join.
- Clergy should not submit “friend” requests to parishioners and others to whom they minister. The disparity of power may not give the other person the ability to decline such request.
- 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.
- Clergy who work directly with youth are encouraged to establish church sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with youth members.
- When a cleric’s ministry at a parish or other ministry ends, the cleric should consider taking time off of Facebook or other forms of digital communications so as to protect the ministry of the new cleric. At all times, the cleric should refrain from discussing parish matters on social media sites or digital communication. Appropriate boundaries for renegotiating relationships with former parishioners

Recommendations for Publishing/Posting Content Online

- Congregations must inform participants when they are being videoed because church buildings are not considered public space.
- If your parish posts worship services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media, you **MUST** post signs that indicate the service will be broadcasted.
- Secure signed Media Release forms from adults and guardians of minor children participating in activities that may be photographed or videoed for distribution.
- Do not publish the names or contact info. of minors on church sponsored sites.
- Adults should refrain from initiating online chats with minors.
- All clergy and adults engaged in ministry with youth should consider the content and nature of any post that will be read by or visible to youth. Your voice is often considered the voice of the church.