Guidelines for the Use of Websites and Social Media

For All Personnel and Volunteers in the Diocese of Raleigh

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NOTE: some words and phrases used throughout the Guidelines correlate with definitions listed on the last page.

I.   Purpose and Application

These guidelines are designed to aid all Diocesan entities in ensuring that personnel adhere to appropriate usage, boundaries, and best practices related to, and to define specific standards of conduct for the use of, websites and social media services including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You Tube, LinkedIn etc. These guidelines are offered by the Diocese of Raleigh as a resource for all Diocesan entities. Parish pastors/administrators, school principals, and similar management personnel may develop directives particular to
their Diocesan entity's mission and operation that provide additional guidance to personnel in the use and management of web media. No such directive should contradict the contents of these guidelines.

II.   Official Diocese Websites and Social Media Accounts

A. Establishing a Diocese Entity Website or Social Media Account

A website or social media Account that will be officially associated with any Diocesan entity, or through which content will be otherwise published on behalf of any Diocesan entity, shall not be established without the written approval of the parish's pastor/administrator. A website or social media account that will be associated with a Catholic school may be established with the principal's written approval, unless the pastor/administrator determines that the website or social media account should not be established or should be deleted after it has been created.

B. Diocese Entity Account Management

A Diocesan entity must ensure that it establishes and maintains control over any website or social media account associated with that Diocesan entity. Additionally, with respect to any website associated with a Diocesan entity, the Diocese of Raleigh or an appropriate legal entity controlled by the Diocese of Raleigh must be the registered owner of the domain. Note: In some cases, it may not be possible to obtain ownership over a website, such as a Diocesan entity's Facebook page because some social media organizations will insist on retaining ownership rights.

The Diocesan entity's head (pastors, pastoral administrators, school principals, catholic charities executive director, ministry/outreach director, etc.) may choose to delegate in writing the role of "account manager" for a website or social media account to a person who will manage and monitor day-to-day operations, including comment moderation where appropriate. To be considered an account manager, this individual must be a level C personnel in the Diocese of Raleigh. Whenever practical this person should be an employee or clergy.

For example, a pastor/administrator might delegate the role of account manager to the parish youth director who will manage the parish's Facebook page.

Only Diocesan entity heads, appropriate information technology personnel, and account managers may have Administrative Access to a Diocesan entity website or social media account or access to Administrative Access login credentials. Diocesan entity heads must

retain Administrative Access to their respective Diocesan entity's website(s) and social media account(s). Diocesan entity heads must ensure that, acting alone or through information technology personnel, they can terminate the Administrative Access of any designated account manager. Diocesan entity heads, information technology personnel, and account managers must ensure that login credentials are secured against unauthorized access, such as by storing them in an encrypted file.

Any email address used as a login credential to obtain Administrative Access to a Diocesan entity website or social media account should be generated through a corporately-owned domain that is controlled by the Diocese or the applicable Diocesan entity. For instance, the email address should not be a Gmail or Yahoo email address—rather, it should be through @raldioc.org or @[parishname].com.

For social media accounts, it is preferred that a tool such as Hootsuite or Tweetdeck be utilized by account managers in order to avoid sharing the account's primary login credentials with the account manager. This makes the granting and terminating of Administrative Access rights a smooth process whenever it is necessary.

C. Standards for Diocese Websites and Social Media Accounts

The Code of Conduct for Church Personnel of the Diocese of Raleigh applies to activity on social media and Diocesan entity websites. All content published on behalf of a Diocesan entity must be consistent with the teachings and tenets of the Roman Catholic Church, for which the Bishop of the Diocese of Raleigh has responsibility and authority, and must not otherwise be inappropriate, create a risk of reputational harm to the Diocese or any Diocesan entity, or create legal exposure for the Diocese or any Diocesan entity. Examples of Diocesan entity-published 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. Personnel must maintain an appropriate professional demeanor when communicating on or through a Diocesan website or social media account.

Individual site administrators are responsible for adequate monitoring and responding to content on their sites. Conflicts over posted content that are not resolved at the local ministry site are to be referred to the Diocese of Raleigh Communication Department for resolution.

D. Commenting Policy and Disclaimer for Diocese Websites and Social Media Accounts

Every Diocesan entity website or social media account that offers the ability to "comment" should: 1) allow comments only with prior approval of the account manager or 2) be frequently checked to ensure that all comments are appropriate and in keeping with the standards for Diocese websites and social media accounts set forth in Section II. C above, including the teachings and tenets of the Catholic Church.

Additionally, whenever commenting is available, a clearly visible "Commenting Policy" should be displayed if possible.

Note: Displaying the policy, or the full policy, may not always be possible. In cases where it is possible to post a Commenting Policy, the following document offers two options for use,

both full and abbreviated versions. When using the abbreviated version, a link to the full policy should be provided.

Diocese of Raleigh Social Media Code of Conduct Policy:

All posts and comments should be marked by Christian charity and respect for the truth. Please keep discussions on topic, presume the goodwill of others, and engage from a perspective rooted in our Catholic faith.

This page is a moderated space intended for constructive conversation. Inappropriate or objectionable comments may be limited or removed at the discretion of the Diocese of Raleigh or site administrators, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Personal attacks, harassment, threats, or demeaning language toward individuals or groups
- Vulgar, profane, sexually explicit, racist or violent content
- Repeated or coordinated attacks, piling on or copy-and-paste campaigns
- Inflammatory content intended to antagonize or abuse
- Knowingly false or misleading claims, including misrepresentation of Church teaching
- Impersonation of clergy, diocesan staff or official Church entities
- Off-topic or spam-like comments that disrupt conversation
- Advertisements, solicitations or external links

Moderation actions may include removing or hiding comments, limiting replies or restricting repeat offenders.

Content submitted by users does not represent the official teaching of the Catholic Church or the official position of the Diocese of Raleigh.

Abbreviated version:
All posts and comments should be marked by Christian charity and respect for the truth. Please keep discussions on topic, presume the goodwill of others, and engage from a perspective rooted in our Catholic faith.

This page is a moderated space intended for constructive conversation. Inappropriate or objectionable comments – as described in our full policy – may be limited or removed at the discretion of the Diocese of Raleigh. Moderation actions may include removing or hiding comments, limiting replies or restricting repeat offenders.

Content submitted by users does not represent the official teaching of the Catholic Church or the official position of the Diocese of Raleigh.

Diocesan entity websites should clearly display a disclaimer that communicates, "Users of this website should have no expectation of privacy."

Diocesan entity blogs, social media websites, social networking sites, and similar websites or platforms that promote interactive dialogue that is not intended to represent the views of the Diocese or any Diocesan entity should clearly display an appropriate disclaimer that reads, "The opinions expressed are those of the author/commenter and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Diocese of Raleigh or its entities."

To assist diocesan, parish, school, and ministry account managers in maintaining charitable, orderly, and constructive online spaces, the Diocese provides the Social Media Moderation Guidelines. This resource outlines a clear, step-by-step framework for responding to concerns—from simple monitoring to limiting or closing comments—ensuring moderation is carried out consistently, proportionally, and in alignment with Catholic values. Administrators are encouraged to download and reference these guidelines regularly to support effective and unified moderation practices across all platforms.

Diocese of Raleigh Social Media Moderation Guidelines

PURPOSE

To maintain a charitable, respectful and constructive social media environment aligned with Catholic values, while moderating conversations consistently, proportionally and transparently.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Charity first**: Assume goodwill unless behavior shows otherwise
- **Behavior, not beliefs**: Moderate tone and conduct, not viewpoints
- **Least force necessary**: Escalate only when prior steps fail
- **Consistency matters**: Use shared language; avoid ad-lib responses
- **Protect the space**: Our goal is healthy dialogue, not winning arguments

LEVEL 0: OBSERVE CLOSELY

When to use:
- Sensitive or controversial content
- Early signs of tension or borderline tone to the conversation

Action: Monitor the thread closely, but do not engage publicly

LEVEL 1: PUBLICLY REMIND, REDIRECT, CLARIFY OR CORRECT

When to use:
- Misinformation begins spreading
- Comments framed as fact but inaccurate
- Good-faith confusion
- Passive-aggressive or dismissive language
- Repeated off-topic

engagement **Response style:** Factual,

respectful, calm, brief **Example post to**

the thread:

> *Just to clarify, the diocese has not announced this. Verified information will always be shared directly through our official channels.*
> *-or -*
> *Please keep comments focused on the topic of this post and avoid personal attacks, in keeping with our commenting guidelines (link here). Thank you for keeping this conversation on topic, presuming goodwill and engaging from a perspective rooted in our Catholic faith.*

Goal:
- Correct without escalating
- Reduce spread of confusion
- Give users a chance to self-correct

LEVEL 2: HIDE COMMENT

When to use:
- Policy violations
- Escalating conflict

Goal:
- De-escalate without further triggering
- Protect the space, not win the argument

LEVEL 3: REMOVE COMMENT, WARN USER

When to use:

- Severe policy violations – particularly profane, vulgar, sexually explicit, violent, racist comments
- Repeated behavior after public redirection
- Bad-faith persistence

Response style: Clear, calm, policy-referenced

Example (private message to user):
Your comment has been removed because it did not meet this page's commenting guidelines regarding (insert bullet item from policy here). This page is a moderated space for constructive conversation rooted in Christian charity and respect. We ask that comments remain on topic and respectful and avoid misleading or disruptive content. Please note that continued violations of our commenting policy (link here) may result in further moderation action. Thank you.

Goal:
- Set clear expectations
- Create a documented warning step

LEVEL 4: BLOCK USER

When to use:
- Repeated violations after warning
- Harassment, threats, impersonation
- Coordinated or automated behavior

Optional message to user:
After repeated moderation efforts, your account has been blocked from this page for violating our posted commenting guidelines.

Goal:
- Protect community
- Preserve moderator capacity

LEVEL 5: LIMIT OR CLOSE COMMENTS ON THE POST

When to use:
- Thread no longer productive
- Escalation despite multiple interventions
- External brigading or media attention

Response style: Transparent, neutral, brief

Action options:

1. Limit comments on the post to Established Followers, OR
2. Add an optional note, then close comments on the post

Optional note:
> *Comments are being limited at this time to maintain a respectful and constructive environment.*

Goal:
- End harm without assigning blame
- Preserve trust in moderation

WHEN TO TURN OFF COMMENTS: A '30-SECOND TEST'

If **2 or more** of the following are true, consider turning comments off:

1. The post is normative or directive (policy, rules, discipline).
2. The post involves moral teaching likely to be debated.
3. The post could be screenshot and misread.
4. The post is controversial and you do not plan to actively moderate for the next 24-48 hours.

HOW TO TURN COMMENTS OFF WITHOUT BACKLASH

Turning comments off triggers ratios when it feels defensive. Framing matters.
Avoid "Comments disabled due to negativity."
Use *"To keep this space focused and charitable, comments are turned off for this post." -or - "Because this is an official announcement, comments are closed."*

HYBRID OPTIONS

1. Turn comments **off and link** to:
   - A longer article
   - An FAQ
   - A pastoral letter
   - An email contact
2. Turn comments **off for 24-48 hours** as a "cool-down" period.

E. Transparency of Diocese Websites and Social Media Accounts

Websites and social media accounts should clearly display the contact information of the account manager. Diocesan entity websites and social media accounts should declare that they are an "Official" website or account of the Diocesan entity.

Any website or social media account operating under the guise of the Diocese of Raleigh or of one of its entities, without proper approval and refuses to remove the page/account, should be reported to the Diocesan Director of Communications immediately.

III. Proper Relationships and Online Communication

Parish personnel and volunteers must ensure that their use of web pages and social media accounts maintains a proper professional relationship, especially with minors, and does not create or give the appearance of an inappropriate relationship.

Appropriate boundaries must be maintained between adults and minors at all times. Excessive familiarity of a purely social relationship between adults and minors is not appropriate. Being "friendly" and being "friends" with children are very different, and should not be confused by Diocesan entity personnel or adult volunteers. As such, personnel and volunteers should not communicate one-on-one with minors through personal websites or social media accounts.

IV. Guidelines for Personal Websites and Social Media Accounts

These guidelines (Section IV) apply to personal websites, social media accounts, and online content (i.e., websites, social media accounts, and content owned, managed, and/or created by Diocesan entity personnel and volunteers other than on behalf of a Diocesan entity). Personnel and volunteers are solely responsible for content they post online, including, but not limited to, Facebook posts, comments on blog posts, tweets, and Facebook or Instagram "likes" (which may suggest approval of a post or other related Content). Before creating online content, Diocesan entity personnel and volunteers should consider the risks and rewards that are involved. They should keep in mind that any conduct, including failure to adhere to these guidelines, that adversely affects their job performance, the job performance of other personnel or volunteers, or otherwise adversely affects other persons, the legitimate interests of the Diocese of Raleigh, or any Diocesan entity, may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment and/or their ability to serve as a volunteer.

Personal online postings should be in line with Catholic values, should not offend the faith, morals, and teachings of the Catholic Church, and should not be otherwise inappropriate. Efforts to adhere to this standard should include the following:

a. Personnel and volunteers should not post discriminatory remarks, harassment, or threats of violence or similar inappropriate or unlawful conduct.

b. Personnel and volunteers should always be fair and courteous to others, including clergy, personnel, volunteers, parishioners, and other persons associated with the Catholic Church. Personnel should keep in mind that they are more likely to resolve work-related complaints by speaking directly with their co-workers, rather than by posting complaints online. If personnel decide to post online content, they should avoid posting anything that reasonably could be viewed as malicious, obscene, threatening, or intimidating, or that disparages clergy, personnel, volunteers, parishioners, or other persons associated with the Catholic Church. Examples of such conduct might include offensive posts meant to intentionally harm someone's reputation or posts that could contribute to a hostile work environment.

c. Personnel and volunteers should not post sensitive or confidential information obtained in connection with their employment or volunteer status, such as banking information, Social Security numbers, and, in most cases, contact information.

d. Personnel and volunteers should be honest and accurate when posting content online.

e. Personnel and volunteers should never represent themselves as a spokesperson for the Diocese or a Diocesan entity. If they post content related to their position with a Diocesan entity, they should make clear that their views do not represent those of the Diocese or any Diocesan entity, such as by including a disclaimer such as "Posts are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Diocese of Raleigh or [the relevant Diocese Entity, such as a school if appropriate]." Such a disclaim does not exempt personnel and volunteers from accountability and responsibility for what they communicate.

Furthermore, all personal websites must be in accord with all Diocese of Raleigh policies and *Code of Conduct for Church Personnel of the Diocese of Raleigh*. Parish websites and social media accounts should be careful when linking to a minor's website or social media account and should be considerate of the wishes of the minor's parent(s).

Despite privacy setting options, all content posted or communicated via any website or social media account will be treated as though it is universally or publicly available.

V.   Definitions

The term "**Administrative Access**" shall mean access to website management tools or a social media account/profile that allows a person to modify, create, delete, or publish content.

The term "**Content**" shall mean any digital information that communicates a message, including but not limited to text, photos, audio files, and video files.

The term "**Diocesan Entity**" shall mean any organization, department, office, ministry, outreach, Parish, school, agency, committee, task force, advisory board, or institution within the Diocese of Raleigh.

The terms "**Diocese Entity Website**," "**Diocese Entity Social Media Account**," and "**Diocese Entity Website [and/or] Social Media Account**" shall mean a Website and/or Social Media Account—depending on the context—that is owned or managed by or on behalf of the Diocese or a Diocese Entity. This term does not include Personal Websites or Social Media Accounts.

The term "**Minor**" shall mean any person under the age of eighteen, or over the age of 18 but still enrolled in high school.

The term "**Personnel**" shall mean the bishop, priests, deacons, seminarians, non-ordained religious, lay employees, and lay volunteers who are involved in work for the Diocese of Raleigh, its parishes and agencies and who represent the Church by virtue of office, designated position, employment or contract.

The term "**Personal**" shall mean, with respect to any Website, Social Media Account, or online Content, the Website, Social Media Account, or Content of an individual or external group that is not owned, managed, or published by or on behalf of the Diocese of Raleigh or a Diocese Entity. This term does not include Diocese Entity Websites or Social Media Accounts.

The term "**Social Media**" shall mean an account associated with a social media service including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn,

etc.

The term "**Website**" shall mean any web presence, including any website that displays social media Content or features.