



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

## Social Media Policy

Parishes of the Archdiocese of Melbourne

16 April 2015

## **Purpose**

1. The Church recognises that the development of social media has provided significant opportunities for evangelisation and spreading of its message. The use of social media allows groups to share information, build friendships and promote Church activities.
2. The Church understands that the use of social media to spread its message should only be undertaken to the extent that it promotes growth in faith and in communion with others. Accordingly, the overarching principle in all uses of social media should be that of human dignity, and care should be taken by staff members to ensure that the innate dignity of each person is upheld.
3. Staff members should carefully consider their contributions to social media in light of the fact that the instantaneous and reactive environment of social media can lead to ill thought-out statements that may be hurtful or offensive.
4. Staff members should also be mindful of the permanence of electronic communication.
5. This policy is not a term of any contract, including any contract of employment. This policy may be varied by the Archdiocese from time to time.

## **Coverage**

6. This policy shall apply to employees, priests, deacons, seminarians, brothers and sisters (staff members) of parishes of the Archdiocese of Melbourne. The term parish priest encompasses parish administrators and priests-in-charge.

## **Guiding principles**

7. The use of social media by staff members, particularly those identified as representing the Church, should always demonstrate a Christ-conscious love for others and a respect for human dignity.
8. Staff members should always be considerate of boundaries and ensure they are observed, particularly in communications with young people and with use of social media in a youth ministry setting. Those involved in work with young people should be particularly aware of the child protection protocols and policies, both of the Church and of civil authorities. Those who engage in use of social media as part of their Church ministry should do so in the name of evangelisation to build appropriate relationships that can encourage and foster growth in faith and a growing in relationship with Christ.
9. The sharing of information on social media platforms should be of appropriate materials for faith formation or catechesis. Social media platforms can be ideal for promotion of Church events or activities and for sharing worship resources in a wide range of formats.
10. The teachings of the Catholic Church should be consistently upheld in the use of social media, and should not move beyond appropriate communication with those being ministered to. Clear distinctions should be maintained between personal and professional communication in the social networking environment.

## **Content of social media contributions**

11. When a staff member is contributing to social media it is not appropriate for the staff

member to make a public comment that is, or could be perceived to be:

- (a) made on behalf of the Church, parish or parish priest;
  - (b) embarrassing to the Church, parish or parish priest;
  - (c) inconsistent with the Church's doctrines, beliefs or principles;
  - (d) critical of the Church, parish or parish priest so as to compromise the relationship of trust between the employer or engaging party and the staff member;
  - (e) a gratuitous or personal attack on the Church leaders and clergy, its staff members, parishioners or affiliated institutions;
  - (f) compromising public confidence or trust in the Church's moral or theological leadership in the community.
12. Staff members should not make any unlawful or inappropriate contributions to social media, including, but not limited to, posting:
- (a) material that is illegal, defamatory or incites racial or religious hatred;
  - (b) material that is sexually explicit or violent or would otherwise cause offence to a member of the public, parish or Church community;
  - (c) material that amounts to bullying, harassment or discrimination;
  - (d) material that is in contravention of intellectual property laws.
13. When posting photographs or videos, permission should always be obtained from those who appear in them, before they are posted or tagged. It may not always be clear to people in the circumstances that they are being photographed for material to be placed on a social networking page. Such materials should always be appropriate and staff members should avoid sharing embarrassing or offensive videos or photos.
14. Protection of privacy should be a priority. Care should be taken to protect people, particularly youth, from having their personal information such as phone numbers and email addresses, displayed on a social networking site.

#### **Directions as to interactions with specific social media platforms**

15. The Church recognises that online social media platforms and blogs can be an important part of personal and religious expression. Staff members must recognise that anything published on a public website is no different to a statement made in a public forum. Staff members are responsible for ensuring that their contributions to social media are consistent with the Archdiocese's social media policy. Any information that could cause embarrassment to the Church should not be included on a website or blog.
16. Parish priests reserve the right to direct a staff member to remove content from a personal website or social media platform at any time.
17. The establishment and operation of social media platform accounts for the purposes of

advancing the works of a parish is to be by or through the parish priest in the first instance. The endorsement of the Archdiocesan Director Media & Communications and agreement on usage protocols are to be in place prior to any interaction on the platform occurring.

## **Facebook**

18. There are a number of options for setting up a profile on Facebook or MySpace, which could be considered by staff members.
19. Establishing a public profile on Facebook, which would display the person as a public figure. For example, the parish priest would be listed as a public figure, with a photo and information about his work and ministry. This allows Facebook users to become a 'fan' of the parish priest as a public figure and avoids the tensions that may arise with accepting or denying 'friend requests'.
20. Establishing a personal profile on Facebook and controlling who appears as an associate on a page by accepting friend requests. This approach requires a more consistent engagement with the page. Any staff members working in a capacity that could involve social media should seek permission of his or her parish priest and the endorsement of the Archdiocesan Director Media & Communications before engaging in this, particularly if it involves accepting friend requests of people to whom they minister.
21. Establishing a page for a group of Church organisations, to allow administration of the page by a number of people. For example, the name of the parish might be the name given to the profile, rather than the name of one of the staff members. This would be an appropriate way to set boundaries in the ministry relationship. This would not prevent Church staff members from having their own personal profiles; it would simply place a clear line between personal and work.
22. All pages for Church groups and organisations should be placed under the 'Religious Organisations' grouping on social networking sites and should clearly identify that they are members of, or coordinators of the parish. This is particularly important for those officials recognised as speaking for the Church on various matters.
23. Staff members who use social media sites in a professional capacity should keep this distinct from a private capacity and care should be taken in accepting or adding 'friends'. It is important to ensure that boundaries between professional and private are not blurred.
24. Staff members must also ensure that any material posted to Facebook is consistent with the Archdiocese's social media policy.

## **Twitter**

25. Twitter is a free social networking tool and can be used to disseminate information quickly and efficiently by 'tweeting' a sentence about a Church website or event. Staff members should reflect on the above principles before posting on Twitter. It is important to note that 'tweets' are public and can be accessed by all Twitter users, the media and members of the general public at any time. Accordingly, staff members should ensure that their contributions reflect Church and Christ-centred principles and are consistent with the Archdiocese's social media policy. The positing of 'tweets' by staff members in an official capacity is not to occur in the absence of an agreed protocol between the parish priest and the Archdiocesan Director Media & Communications.

## **Blogs**

26. The use of blogs is a conversational and reflective mode of communication, which is cost-effective and allows people to express their views in a forum with limited moderation. A number of priests, religious and lay people within Australia maintain informative blogs, that are helpful for the promulgation of faith. When using blogs staff members should ensure that they represent the Church positively and communicate evangelically.
27. The Catholic Church is becoming more involved in the blogosphere, and bloggers should focus on the integrity of their message rather than the number of 'hits' they receive.
28. It is important to note that while the Church recognises that blogs are an important part of personal and religious expression, it is necessary for staff members to ensure that views expressed are consistent with the doctrines, teachings and principles of the Catholic Church. It is also necessary that staff members ensure that contributions to blogs are consistent with the Archdiocese's social media policy.

## **YouTube and INSTAGRAM**

29. INSTAGRAM is an online mobile photo-sharing, video sharing and social networking service that enables users to take pictures and videos and then share them on a variety of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr.
30. The maximum duration for Instagram videos is 15 seconds. A distinctive feature of Instagram is that it confines photos to a square shape, similar to Kodak Instamatic and Polaroid images.
31. Instagram now has more than 300 million active users and similar to YouTube, has become an effective social media platform with the ability to assist in evangelisation and the promotion of Church activities.
32. YouTube is a website that allows individuals and groups to post videos of up to 15 minutes in length on any topic. The Catholic Church has an extensive presence on YouTube, in both official and unofficial capacities. YouTube is another effective social media platform that can assist in evangelisation and the promotion of activities of the Church. Church staff members should ensure that all material posted on YouTube or other video-based sites is in accordance with Church teaching and demonstrates respect for human dignity. Ethical considerations should be applied when uploading content, and explicit or offensive material should be avoided at all times. Staff members must also ensure that any material posted to YouTube is consistent with the Archdiocese's social media policy.

## **The Church's own social networking sites**

33. Church staff members should ensure that the networking activities comply with the underlying principles and teaching of the Church. Commentaries on social networking sites that are rude, offensive, vulgar or that could be interpreted as bullying should be removed immediately.
34. Parish Priests reserve the right to direct a staff member to add, remove or change material on a Church website at any time. Where it is necessary for staff members to access a parish

website, email address or other password protected site, the staff member must, when directed, make that password available to their parish priest. Where a minor has access to a Church website, email address or password protected site, the same access must be given to the minor's parent or guardian on request. Persons who hold passwords to password protected sites are responsible for monitoring those sites and ensuring that they are compliant with the Archdiocese's social media policy.

### **Anonymous contributions to social media**

35. The Church believes in accountability, honesty and transparency. Staff members should not use the cloak of anonymity to make inappropriate, embarrassing, offensive or misleading remarks on social media. Staff members should also be mindful of their privacy and the privacy of the Church, its staff members and parishioners when contributing to social media. Parish priests reserves the right to direct a staff member to remove anonymous content from a social media platform at any time.

### **The Digital Divide**

36. While the gifts of social networking are vast, it is important to remember in our engagement that the digital world is not exclusive. Social networking should never replace real relationships with people, and particularly in a ministry context, efforts should be made to avoid simply digital relationships.
37. This is also important in the sense of retaining the Church's focus on the poor. The majority of the world still cannot afford a computer, many have little access to educational possibilities and as such struggle with literacy; or perhaps they live in remote areas with limited access to technology. Hearing others talk about their social networking experiences can be profoundly isolating for those unable to take part.
38. As with every other fruit of human ingenuity, the new communications technologies must be placed at the service of the integral good of the individual and of the whole of humanity. If used wisely, they can contribute to the satisfaction of the desire for meaning, truth and unity which remain the most profound aspirations of each human being.'
39. Ultimately, while there are many strengths and much to be gained from social networking, it should be just one of a variety of means we might use in our Church organisations to bring about a message of Christ in the world.

### **Enforcement**

40. The Church takes breaches of the social media policy very seriously. Failure to comply with the social media policy may, at the discretion of the Parish Priest, result in disciplinary action up to and including, where applicable, termination of employment.