Social-Networking Protocol

for the Catholic Church in Australia

Bishops Commission for Mission and Faith Formation
ACBC 2011

http://mediablog.catholic.org.au/?p=335

Social-Media Guidelines

Department of Communications
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
June 2010

http://www.usccb.org/about/communications/social-media-guidelines.cfm

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC
YOUTH MINISTRY
CONVENTION
CAMPBELLTOWN 2012

Social-Networking Protocol

for the Catholic Church in Australia

Introduction

In the vast world of new technology, a myriad of possibilities for communication has been opened up for evangelisation and for building bridges. The Catholic Church recognises the enormous potential which these new technologies bring.

Addressing young people who have grown up in a digital world, Pope Benedict XVI in his message for the World Day of Communications 2011 recognised the great opportunities and challenges brought by social networking and the internet.

> *'The new technologies are not only changing the way we communicate, but communication itself, so much so that it could be said that we are living through a period of vast cultural transformation. This means of spreading information and knowledge is giving birth to a new way of learning and thinking, with unprecedented opportunities for establishing relationships and building fellowship.'*

Social networking, using platforms such as Facebook, MySpace or Xt3, is a phenomenon which allows groups to share information, build friendships and promote activities. Indeed, social networking has already proven to be a powerful way to engage with and promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a wide variety of fora.

The Church, in her desire to use technology for the greater glory of God, understands that this technology should be pursued only to the point to which it allows growth in faith and in communion with others.

The overarching principle in this communion should be that of human dignity, and at each step in the social networking endeavour, care should be taken by Church personnel to ensure that the innate dignity of each person is upheld.

These protocols are intended as a guide for those working at various levels of Church organisations. They are by no means exhaustive and may simply form the basis for more comprehensive and specific protocols at local levels.

On-line or off-line, respect for human dignity rules

On-line and off-line behaviour of clergy, Church employees and members of Church organisations – particularly those representing the Church – should always demonstrate a Christ-centred love for others. Even those working in Church organisations who might not be Christian should still ensure that when representing the Church, their behaviour off-line and on-line should demonstrate a respect for human dignity. Boundaries should always be taken into consideration and observed, particular in relating to young people in a youth ministry setting.

In particular, those involved in work with young people should be aware of the Church's child protection protocols and policies of both the Church and of civil authorities.

Those who engage in social networking 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. This engagement should facilitate a growing in relationship with Christ.

The sharing of information on sites should be of appropriate materials for faith formation or catechesis. Social-Networking sites can be ideal for promotion of Church events or activities and for sharing worship resources in a wide range of formats, be it video, text or sound.

The teachings of the Catholic Church should be consistently upheld in these social networking activities, and should not move beyond appropriate personal communication with those being ministered to.

Clear distinctions should be maintained between personal and professional communication in the social networking environment.

The following pointers might be helpful to Church organisations which wish to engage in social networking on the wide variety of platforms available.

On public sites

Catholic Bishops around Australia have developed some presence on social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook during recent years, and other Church personnel, members of the clergy or religious, might wish to also extend their engagement in this field. There are a number of options for setting up a profile on Facebook or MySpace which others working in Church might like to consider, based on these experiences.

» Some Bishops have elected to set up a public profile on Facebook, which displays them as a public figure – for example, the Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn would be listed as a public figure, with a photo and information about his work and ministry. Those using these sites may wish to become a 'fan' of the Archbishop as a public figure. This can avoid some of the tensions which can come with accepting or denying 'friend' requests.

» Other Church personnel and some Bishops have chosen to set up a personal profile, and accept 'friend' requests which a personal profile requires. This allows some control over who appears as an associate on a page, but requires a more consistent engagement with the page.

» Those working in a youth ministry or other Church capacity which could involve social networking should seek permission from their Bishop before engaging in this area – particularly if this involves 'friending' people to whom they minister.

» Clergy, Church workers or religious who use social networking sites in a professional capacity should keep this distinct from a private capacity and care should be taken in accepting or adding 'friends'. There is great potential for a blurring of boundaries in the social networking field.

» Those Church organisations which wish to engage officially in social networking activities might choose to do so as a group, and start a page which can be administered by a number of people – for example, Darwin Youth Ministry might be the name given to the profile, rather than the name of one of the Youth Ministers in the Diocese as an appropriate way of setting boundaries in that ministry relationship. This system does not prevent Church workers from having their own personal profiles; it simply places a clear line between personal and work. This can also remove any ambiguity about friendship relationships or ministry relationships.

» Church groups and organisations – particularly those which are officially recognised as speaking for the Church on various matters, 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 Official Group of the Diocese/Parish/Catholic organisation.

» The use of photographs or videos should be carefully monitored, and permissions should be sought from all who appear in photographs or videos before being posted or tagged. While in some public contexts, it can be assumed that people know they are being photographed to go on a website or a Facebook page; other situations might not be so obvious. Material should always be appropriate, and the sharing of embarrassing or offensive photos or videos should always be avoided.

» Church networking activities should be monitored by a third-party where possible, and where this is difficult, the Church worker should refer to underlying principles and teaching of the Church. Commentaries appearing on social networking sites of a rude or offensive nature or those which are vulgar or which could be interpreted as bullying should be immediately removed.

» Privacy should be of the utmost importance, and care should be taken to protect people, especially youth, from their personal information being displayed on a social networking site. This particularly refers to phone numbers, email addresses and date-of-birth.

Twitter

More and more, Twitter is being used in the news media, by celebrities and by organisations to promote events, to share information and to provide quick updates about various issues. By 'tweeting' a sentence or two about a Church website or event, potentially thousands could be pointed back to this information. Twitter is a free social networking tool, yet has the power to disseminate information quickly and efficiently. Like with all social networking engagement, Church entities should reflect carefully before posting on Twitter that their messages reflect Church teaching and Christ-centred principles.

Blogs

The Catholic Church is more and more engaged in the blogosphere, and the official Church recognises the influence of Blogs as a medium. Pope Benedict in 2011 encouraged bloggers to consider the importance of their message to the world as the measure of their success, and not just focus on the number of 'hits' they receive. 'We must be aware that the truth which we long to share does not derive its worth from its "popularity" or from the amount of attention it receives.'

Blogging is a conversational and reflective mode of communicating which is cost-effective and allows people to express their views in a relatively unmoderated forum. A number of priests, religious and lay people within Australia maintain excellent blogs which can be helpful for the promulgation of faith. Once again, Church workers should try to consistently represent the Church in a positive light and communicate evangelically using this medium.

YouTube

YouTube is an online video site which allows individuals and groups to post videos of up to 15 minutes on any topic. The Catholic Church has an extensive presence on YouTube in both official and non-official capacities. Like with all social networking, the use of YouTube or Vimeo can assist in the work of evangelisation and promotion of the activities of the Church. Church entities should ensure that all material posted on YouTube or other video-based sites is in accordance with Church teaching and respects human dignity. Ethical considerations should be applied when uploading content, and explicit or offensive material should be avoided at all times.

The Church's social networking sites

One of the gifts provided through World Youth Day 2008 was the foundation by the Archdiocese of Sydney of the faith-based social networking site, Xt3. While the website is more than simply a social network, it does contain many of the features of sites like Facebook and MySpace. The difference is its commitment to Christ-centred content. Xt3 contains portals for video; catechetical materials; homilies; blogs; sound and video. It also gives opportunities to ask questions of priests or chaplains about faith and life. The above guidelines on appropriate social networking behaviour are, of course, applicable to all social networking sites, including those which are faith-based.

The Digital divide

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 solely digital relationships.

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.

Pope Benedict XVI's message for the World Day of Communications reiterates this:

> '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.'

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.

Social-Media Guidelines

Introduction

These guidelines are offered as a synthesis of best practices. They include material compiled from church entities, for-profit corporations, and non-profit organizations.

In this document, "church personnel" is defined as anyone—priest, deacon, religious, bishop, lay employee, or volunteer—who provides ministry or service or is employed by an entity associated with the Catholic Church.

Guiding Principles

The world of digital communication, with its almost limitless expressive capacity, makes us appreciate all the more Saint Paul's exclamation: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).—Pope Benedict XVI, 44th World Communications Day message (2010)

Social media are the fastest growing form of communication in the United States, especially among youth and young adults. Our Church cannot ignore it, but at the same time we must engage social media in a manner that is safe, responsible, and civil.

As Pope Benedict XVI noted in his message for the 44th World Communications Day (2010), this new form of media "can offer priests and all pastoral workers a wealth of information and content that was difficult to access before, and facilitate forms of collaboration and greater communion in ways that were unthinkable in the past."

The Church can use social media to encourage respect, dialogue, and honest relationships—in other words, "true friendship" (43rd World Communications Day message [2009]). To do so requires us to approach social media as powerful means of evangelization and to consider the Church's role in providing a Christian perspective on digital literacy.

Before beginning work on social media guidelines, you may want to read both the 43rd and 44th World Communications Day messages.

The Church and Social Media: An Overview

The online encyclopedia Wikipedia defines social media as "media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Social media use web-based technologies to transform and broadcast media monologues into social media dialogues."

A longer and perhaps more philosophical definition is offered by Jon Lebkowsky, a longtime social media specialist, on his site, weblogsky.com:

> Social Media is a fundamental transformation in the way(s) people find and use information and content, from hard news to light entertainment. It's an evolution from broadcast delivery of content—content created by a few and distributed to many—to network delivery, where content can be created by anyone and published to everyone, in a context that is "many to many." Said another way, publication and delivery by professionals to mass audiences has changed—now publication and delivery can be by anyone, professional or not, to niche audiences through networks of many channels. This is because the means of production are broadly accessible and inexpensive.

As a result of all this, attention and mindshare are fragmented, there's emphasis on relationship, new forms of media are conversational, and transaction costs for communication approach zero.

Social media offer both opportunities and challenges to Catholic organizations. These can be grouped into three primary categories:

» Visibility

» Community

» Accountability

Visibility

Online social media communities are vast and are growing at a rapid pace. For example, there are more than 400 million active users on Facebook, which is greater than the population of the United States. Given the size and scope of these communities, they offer excellent forums for the Church's visibility and evangelization.

The key question that faces each church organization that decides to engage social media is, How will we engage? Careful consideration should be made to determine the particular strengths of each form of social media (blogs, social networks, text messaging, etc.) and the needs of a ministry, parish, or organization. The strengths should match the needs. For instance, a blog post may not be the most effective way to remind students of an event. However, a mass text message to all students and their parents telling them that the retreat begins at 9 a.m. may be very effective.

Because of the high volume of content and sites, and the dynamics of search engines and computer networking, social media require constant input and monitoring to make the Church's presence effective. To keep members, a social networking site, such as a blog, needs to have new content on a regular basis. In the case of social media, the axiom "build it and they will come" is not applicable. It is important to set internal expectations regarding how often posts will be made, so that your followers can become accustomed to your schedule.

Community

Social media can be powerful tools for strengthening community, although social media interaction should not be viewed as a substitute for face-to-face gatherings. Social media can support communities in a myriad of ways: connecting people with similar interests, sharing information about in-person events, providing ways for people to engage in dialogue, etc.

A well-considered use of social media has the ultimate goal of encouraging "true friendship" (43rd World Communications Day message [2009]) and of addressing the human longing for meaningful community.

Accountability

Social media provide tools for building community. Membership in communities also requires accountability and responsibility. Users of social media expect site administrators to allow dialogue, to provide information, and to acknowledge mistakes. The explosion of information available to social media consumers has meant that they often only use information from trusted sites or sites recommended by those whom they trust.

While not every demand or inquiry can be met, it is important that creators and site administrators of social media understand how much social media are different from mass media and the expectations of their consumers. Creators and consumers of mass media generally accept their one-way conversations (letters to the editor being the exception). Social media's emphasis is on the word "social," with a general blurring of the distinction between creators of content and consumers of content. Many communication experts are describing the adaption of social media as a paradigm shift in how humans communicate, a development as important as that of the printing press and the discovery of electronic communication.

Definitions

Definitions provide clarity and a common language. They are even more important in guidelines for social media, since the usage of terms is rapidly evolving.

↗ Web 2.0:

The term "Web 2.0" is commonly associated with Web applications that facilitate interactive information sharing. A Web 2.0 site allows its users to interact with other users, to change website content, to provide reaction to content, to share the site's content with others, or to filter content being provided by the site creator. This is in contrast with non-interactive websites, where users are limited to the passive viewing of information that is provided to them. * Example: Amazon.com's inclusion of users' reviews and offering of recommendations based on the consumer's past use of the site make it a Web 2.0 site.

↗ Blog:

A blog (a contraction of the term "web log") is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog. * Examples: There are many types of blogs on sites throughout the Internet. They are common for celebrities, writers, journalists, etc. WordPress is one of the more popular tools used to create blogs.

↗ Micro-blog:

This form of multimedia blogging allows users to send brief text updates or to publish micromedia such as photos or audio clips, to be viewed either by anyone or by a restricted group, which can be chosen by the user. These messages can be submitted by a variety of means, including text messaging, instant messaging, e-mail, digital audio, or through a Web interface. The content of a micro-blog differs from a traditional blog in that

it is typically smaller in actual size and aggregate file size. A single entry could consist of a single sentence or fragment, an image, or a ten-second video. * Example: Twitter is a form of micro-blogging in which entries are limited to 140 characters.

↗ Social network:

A social network is a Web 2.0 site that is entirely driven by content of its members. Individuals are allowed flexibility in privacy settings; in posting text, photos, video, links, and other information; and in level of interaction with other members. * Examples: Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr are often included in lists of social networking sites, although sometimes YouTube and Flickr are designated as multimedia sharing sites, while Twitter is currently more often designated as a micro-blogging application.

↗ Ministry website:

An Internet website/tool created by employees, clerics, and volunteers for the sole purpose of conducting diocesan/affiliate business.

↗ Personal website:

A social network page, blog, or any Internet website/tool created by employees, clerics, and volunteers primarily to share personal communication with friends and associates.

Guidelines

When developing guidelines for church personnel to use social media, consider including the following elements:

↗ Define appropriate boundaries for communications

These should be in sync with diocesan codes of conduct for other areas, such as the diocese's standards for protection of children and young people, Internet acceptable use policies, etc. Define what is considered confidential information, verifiable consent, personal identifiable information, contact with a minor, etc. Topics that are in current debate will generate more comments/responses. These include issues in which the Church's teachings are often in contrast to some popular positions (gay rights, abortion, immigration reform, health care reform). In other words, the Church's social justice teachings, including the pro-life aspects of those teachings, often elicit unfavorable comments. Some people determine that those topics will not be engaged with on official sites. Others provide guidance on how to engage in dialogue around these topics. (See "Rules of the Road" below for examples.)

↗ Include examples of Codes of Conduct

that should be posted on social networking sites. Codes of Conduct are for visitors to the site. These codes should always be brief and immediately apparent to visitors. Visitors should also be made aware of the consequences of violations of the Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct on the USCCB's Facebook site is as follows: "All posts and comments should be marked by Christian charity and respect for the truth. They should be on topic and presume the good will of other posters. Discussion should take place primarily from a faith perspective. No ads please." Always block anyone who does not abide by the Code of Conduct.

↗ Define instructions

Include instructions on how to report, block, etc., on the more popular social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. This provides guidance for those church personnel who may be entering into social media for the first time.

↗ Provide recommendations on how to deal with difficult "fans."

Give church personnel permission to trust their instincts on blocking repeat offenders of a site's Code of Conduct. Argumentative participants can easily change the tone of every post. A good way to determine if they should be blocked is to go to their profiles and browse through the pages that they have "fanned." Do not allow those unwilling to dialogue to hold your site and its other members hostage. In particular situations, the moderator might determine it is best to ask a member to take a conversation "offline." These offline conversations can be conducted in person, over the telephone, or through private e-mail. The site moderators should be able to refer to the appropriate resources, such as the pastor, program director, diocesan communication office, etc.

↗ Provide trusted sites for reference, and recommend that site administrators have a thorough knowledge of these sites.

Often a link to the parish, diocesan, USCCB, or Vatican site can provide necessary information, thereby helping redirect the tone and substance of an online conversation.

↗ Remind site administrators they are posting for a broad audience.

Social media are global platforms. Online content is visible to anyone in the world who comes to their sites.

Establishing a Site

Websites or social networking profile pages are the centerpiece of any social media activity. The following are recommended guidelines for the establishment of a site. These can apply to a profile or fan page on a social networking site such as Facebook, a blog, a Twitter account, etc.

» Site administrators should be adults.

» There should be at least two site administrators (preferably more) for each site, to allow rapid response and continuous monitoring of the site.

» Do not use personal sites for diocesan or parish programs. Create separate sites for these.

» Passwords and names of sites should be registered in a central location, and more than one adult should have access to this information.

» Be sure those establishing a site know these key "Rules of the Road":

1. Abide by diocesan/parish guidelines.

2. Know that even personal communication by church personnel reflects the Church. Practice what you preach.

3. Write in first person. Do not claim to represent the official position of the organization or the teachings of the Church, unless authorized to do so.

4. Identify yourself. Do not use pseudonyms or the name of the parish, program, etc., as your identity, unless authorized to do so.

5. Abide by copyright, fair use, and IRS financial disclosure regulations.

6. Do not divulge confidential information about others. Nothing posted on the Internet is private.

7. Don't cite others, post photos or videos of them, link to their material, etc., without their approval.

8. Practice Christian charity.

Social Networking with Minors

Be sure to have permission from a minor's parent or guardian before contacting the minor via social media or before posting pictures, video, and other information that may identify that minor.

Parents must have access to everything provided to their children. For example, parents should be made aware of how social media are being used, be told how to access the sites, and be given the opportunity to be copied on all material sent to their children via social networking (including text messages). While parents should be provided with the same material as their children, it does not have to be via the same technology (that is, if children receive a reminder via Twitter, parents can receive it in a printed form or by an e-mail list).

Church personnel should be encouraged to save copies of conversations whenever possible, especially those that concern the personal sharing of a teen or young adult. (This may be especially important with text messaging.)

Make everyone aware of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act which is federal legislation that oversees how websites interact with children under age 13.

Personal Sites

Personal sites of church personnel should also reflect Catholic values. Businesses are cautioning their employees that, while employees have a right to privacy and confidentiality regarding what their employers know about them, an employee's use of social networking—because of its very nature—means he or she relinquishes some privacy and could be construed as representing the company's ethics and values. Likewise, church personnel should be encouraged to understand that they are witnessing to the faith through all of their social networking, whether "public" or "private."

Many employers and church organizations ask their personnel to consider including a disclaimer on their personal sites, especially if employees/church personnel are highly visible in the community and/or post material related to church work/ministry on their personal sites. One example: "The views expressed on this site are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer."

How to Report and Monitor

Ask church personnel to report unofficial sites that carry the diocesan or parish logo to the diocesan communication office or pastor. It is important that the owner (the diocese or the parish) is able to protect its brand and identity.

Inform church personnel whom to contact on the diocesan level (most likely the communication office) if they find misinformation on a site. This is especially important when responding to an incorrect wiki, such as Wikipedia, Masstimes.org, etc.

Have a clear policy on whether diocesan personnel should be expected to respond to defamatory, libelous, or slanderous comments—not original postings, but comments—on a site, such as a blog. Some policies indicate that the diocesan communication office will provide a response to a major news outlet's blog or a popular blogger, but not to every comment on those blogs or to other bloggers.

Consider posting these and similar policies and notices on your organization's social networks.