

ADDENDUM TO THE STANDARDS OF MINISTERIAL BEHAVIOR AND BOUNDARIES



For Priests, Deacons, Religious, Pastoral Ministers, Administrators, Staff and Volunteers

Information and Communication Technology

Introduction

The goal of all activities in the Church is to share the Good News of God's love, salvation and mercy with all people. Advances in technology have increased the ways to communicate with others concerning this powerful message.

- ▶ In recognition of the changing technologies available to enhance efforts to share the message and mission of Jesus Christ, Pope Benedict XVI chose the theme, ***New Technologies, New Relationships: Promoting a culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship*** for his message on World Communications Day in 2009.
- ▶ In this document Pope Benedict stated, *"The new digital technologies are, indeed, bringing about fundamental shifts in patterns of communication and human relationships. ... These technologies are truly a gift to humanity and we must endeavour to ensure that the benefits they offer are put at the service of all human individuals and communities, especially those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable."*

Those who serve in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia need to be aware of the impact that their words and actions can have in bringing people closer to God. This applies to all interactions, whether face to face or remotely through the use of technology.

The purpose of this addendum is to provide standards and guidance regarding the access we have to communicate with minors through various means which include, but are not limited to, text messaging, websites, e-mail, and social networks such as Facebook. Communication and the use of technology are always changing.

These standards are written with the understanding that young people use computers and cell phones including various applications routinely. Reaching out to young people through these means is the norm and not the exception. Using technology can enhance our outreach to youth. However, it creates a need to provide guidance in how boundaries in pastoral and professional roles with children can be maintained to foster and model a Safe Environment.

Electronic Communication with Minors

Regardless of the manner or method, all communication with minors must be faithful to the teachings and values of the Catholic Church. As leaders and role models for children our communication with minors must respect the psychological, physical and behavioral boundaries of the young person and be appropriate to the ministerial and professional relationship.

Permission of the parent or guardian must be obtained, in writing, in order for an adult leader to communicate with minors via telephone, cell phone, text messaging, e-mail, social networks, or other electronic means.

In order to protect the privacy of youth, permission must also be obtained, in writing, from the parent or guardian before sharing/posting pictures or videos of minors, and before sharing e-mail, telephone numbers, or other contact information with other minors or adults who are part of the class, group or organization.

Adults should never consider typed conversations that take place via electronic means (e-mails, social networking sites, text message, etc.) to be private.

Electronic communication between an adult and a minor should not be used to address/discuss confidential matters. These are to be discussed in a face to face meeting which is more appropriate and professional. Remember young people often feel that electronic communication is more private and gives them a sense of availability and anonymity. However, records of these conversations can be obtained and accessed. These means of communications can also be saved and forwarded.

If a minor sends an adult an inappropriate message, the adult should not reply to it. The adult should print it and notify his/her immediate supervisor. A minor may also send a message that causes the adult leader to have concerns for the health and safety of that young person. Adult leaders should notify their immediate supervisor for direction in these cases.

Adults must set appropriate boundaries around the times when phone calls will be made and electronic communications will be sent.

Adults should take time to review internet safety with minors in their classes, groups, organizations, etc., especially if they are utilizing web-based technology to enhance outreach to the minors with whom they work.

****The following sections refer to specific uses of technology tools. For use of these tools, those working in parish, regional and secondary schools of the Archdiocese need to refer to the Office of Catholic Education Appropriate Use Policy for Technology (AUP) in place. There may be other organizations and institutions with additional policies related to information technology which need to be referenced as well.***

E-Mail, Instant Messaging, and Text Messaging (SMS—short message service)

Teachers and administrative staff should communicate with students through the use of school based e-mail accounts and/or school sponsored websites.

Parish staff involved in youth ministry should have a parish based e-mail account, whenever possible. If it is not possible for an adult leader or volunteer to obtain a parish or school based e-mail account, the adult leader or volunteer will need to establish an e-mail account that is separate from his/her personal e-mail.

In order to protect the e-mail addresses of minors, the adult leader should use the blind carbon copy (BCC) feature when sending an e-mail to more than one minor.

If a group of youth need to be in contact with each other via e-mail, permission must be obtained from the parent or guardian before sharing a minor's e-mail address with other members of the group. (A youth leadership team would be one example of a situation where adult leaders may seek permission to share e-mail addresses among group members.)

Adults should never consider electronic mail to be private. Adult leaders may wish to copy another responsible adult (parent, supervisor, athletic director or alternate youth ministry leader) when sending an electronic message to a minor. This action demonstrates transparency and appropriateness when communicating with minors. All electronic messages should be relevant to the ministerial/professional relationship the adult has with the minor with due consideration for the age of the minor.

Adults should be brief in one to one, electronic conversations with a minor. Messages should be kept short, and to the point, and related to the professional/ministerial relationship between the adult and minor.

When using this technology, care must be taken to adhere to the guidelines for “Electronic Communication with Minors” stated in this document.

Video Chatting (i.e. Skype)

Adults may communicate with minors using video chatting. There are educational benefits to utilizing this technology appropriately. Distance or disability may create some instances when this type of communication is necessary. If the minor is engaged in a video chat session that is private, care should be taken to make sure that the parent/guardian gives permission for the minor to participate. Another adult may supervise the interaction by either being present with the minor or the adult leader during the chat.

When using this technology, care must be taken to adhere to the guidelines for “Electronic Communication with Minors” stated in this document.

Social Networking

A social networking service utilizes software to build online social networks for communities of people who share interests and activities. Most services are primarily web based and provide various ways for users to interact, such as chat, messaging, video, file sharing, blogging and discussion groups. The most popular sites for this activity have been Facebook and MySpace.

Interaction with minors on MySpace is prohibited because of the lack of privacy protection inherent in this social networking site.

The pastor, administrator or immediate supervisor must give permission for an employee or volunteer to establish a social networking site related to the parish, school or organization.

A supervisor or another adult leader must have access to the site so that there is more than one adult monitoring all activity on the site. The site must be monitored regularly by both adults for appropriate use. Inappropriate or hurtful comments need to be removed.

Adult leaders who use social networking sites, such as Facebook, to communicate with minors about their ministry should create a separate account and/or group for this specific use whenever possible. For example, in Facebook where maintaining more than one account is currently prohibited by the company’s policy, the creation of a group would provide an appropriate way for an adult to establish a means to communicate with minors.

Precautions should be taken to guard the privacy of any one who has access to the page. The highest privacy settings must be used. In addition, adults should encourage minors who join the online community to set their privacy settings at the highest levels.

Written permission from a parent/guardian should be obtained prior to a minor’s participation on a social networking site, such as Facebook, sponsored by a parish organization.

Minors should not be given access to the private or personal postings of an adult. All interactions should reflect the ministerial/professional role of the adult.

When using this technology, care must be taken to adhere to the guidelines for “Electronic Communication with Minors” stated in this document.

Blogs and Microblogs (i.e. Twitter)

Blogs are web logs, which are public and can be accessed by anyone. Blogs are used for many reasons—to share information, educate or express opinions.

Those who wish to publish and utilize a blog for an educational or ministerial purpose, should make their pastor, principal or supervisor aware of the blog and make contents easily accessible.

Blogs used for educational or ministerial purposes should be conducted in a professional manner and the content should reflect the purpose.

It is recommended that the blog be set up so that comments are not posted until they are reviewed and approved by the owner of the blog. The practice prevents inappropriate and hurtful comments from being posted (i.e. bullying).

Personal blogs should not be shared with minors.

When using this technology, care must be taken to adhere to the guidelines for “Electronic Communication with Minors” stated in this document.

Websites

Websites used to represent a parish or parish organizations must be owned and managed by the parish. An adult leader must obtain permission from the pastor or pastor’s delegate to set up a web page that represents the parish.

Websites may be linked to other sites. It is recommended that all persons add this statement to any site created:

“Links to other sites are provided on this site. These sites are provided for informational purposes only and are not necessarily sponsored by the parish or church organization.”

When using this technology, care must be taken to adhere to the guidelines for “Electronic Communication with Minors” stated in this document.

Videos, Photographs, Other Images

Adult leaders must seek permission from a parent or guardian to share a photograph or video with another party for any reason.

Videos and photographs, which are posted by electronic means with the permission of the parent or guardian, should not give identifying information about the child (i.e. full name, addresses, birth date, etc.).

On-line Gaming

This recreational activity is used by peers to play games and socialize. Adults involved in service and ministry to youth are not peers of the youth. For this reason, adult leaders should not be involved in on-line gaming with the youth whom they serve.

When using this technology, care must be taken to adhere to the guidelines for “Electronic Communication with Minors” stated in this document.

Illegal or Immoral Materials

Adults should never access, transmit, or create materials that are illegal or immoral. These include but are not limited to pornographic, stolen, sexist or discriminatory materials. Illegal activity such as “sexting” or the transmission of illegal material must be reported immediately to the proper authorities.

Important Reminders:

Electronic communication is not private. E-mails, text messages, and web postings establish a permanent record, which can be obtained and accessed. These means of communications can also be saved and forwarded.

Anything of concern should be brought to the attention of the pastor, principal or program administrator.

All expectations regarding the reporting of suspected child abuse are in effect regardless of the method by which the information reaches the adult ministering to youth. All questions concerning this can be directed to the **Office for Child and Youth Protection at 215-587-2466.**

Effective July 1, 2011