Archdiocese of Milwaukee
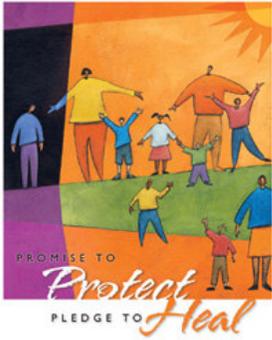## *Safeguarding All of God's Family*
Use of Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are online websites created so that individuals who share a commonality can communicate their interests. These sites have the ability to enhance communication between individuals as well as groups. In its most basic sense, social networking sites are a way for people to share news, information, opinions and insights by facilitating interactions using online technologies.

If used discreetly and responsibility, these forms of communication can be beneficial in ministry and education. However, just as there are boundaries when engaged in face-to-face communication, there are also boundaries when using the Internet as your source of communication. When using these technologies, every effort must be made and adhered to in order to create and maintain safe and secure environments; serious repercussions can be had if behaviors are careless. Therefore, individuals must keep the following guidelines in mind when considering the use of social networking sties, especially for programs that involve youth under the age of 18.

GENERAL RULES OF VISIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

➢ Sites must first and foremost representative of the values of our Catholic faith and reflect the teachings of the Catholic Church.
➢ A clear statement of intended purpose and outcome of the social networking site should be made available.
➢ All appropriate individuals at the parish and/or school (pastors, principals, and staff) must be aware of and have given approval for using a social networking site for parish and/or school programs.
➢ When a minor has access to an adult's network of personal friends, the dynamic between minor/adult can be compromised. Therefore, any parish/school/ministry site must be completely separate from personal sites.
➢ The site should maintain transparency in all communications and postings.
    ➢ The administrator of the site must be an adult.
    ➢ The administrator of the site must regularly monitor all comments and postings. Any inappropriate content should be deleted immediately and it should be made known to the individual who posted it that inappropriate content is not tolerated.
    ➢ All involved should know that what is posted isn't private or temporary.

- The main purpose of the site should be for general communication, not chatting or socializing.
- A professional image, not only to minors but also the general public, keeping in mind that humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted and a statement or joke may seem harmless, but may be offensive to someone else.
- Mandatory reporting guidelines apply to all social networking sites.
    - If any information raises suspicion that a minor has been abused/neglected/exploited staff and volunteers are obligated to report to local law enforcement officials or child protective service agencies.
    - The information must be communicated to the proper authorities, documented and then removed from the site.

ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES WITH YOUTH

- Parents must be made aware, in writing, of the parish and/or school intended use of a social networking site. Parents must be invited to have access to the site.
- Never be aggressive. There is a difference between initiating a "friend request" and accepting one. You should allow minors to request you as a "friend," do not seek them out.
- Set times you will be available on a social networking site. Minors should know that you are not available 24/7.
- All communication and interaction should always reflect your role as the adult.
- Do not communicate with a minor more than necessary on social networking sites.
- Social networking sites should be seen only as a means of communication, not a personal expression.
- Never say or do anything that wouldn't be said or be done in the classroom or in public.
    - Maintaining professional relationships with students on a social networking site avoids any bias in the classroom.
- Follow all policies and procedures for posting pictures.
    - Tagging pictures with names of minors or other identifiers is not permitted. This precaution will prevent them from showing up on search engines.

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