



# ARCHDIOCESE of GALVESTON-HOUSTON SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Revised: MAY 24, 2019



**Archdiocesan Office of Communications**  
1700 San Jacinto St. • Houston, TX • 77002  
(713) 659-5461 • Fax: (713) 659-3444  
[www.archgh.org](http://www.archgh.org)

# **TABLE of CONTENTS:**

<b>1. POLICY DEFINITIONS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. GENERAL STANDARDS.....</b>	<b>2</b>
• 2.1 Transparency .....	2
• 3.3 Ownership and Privacy.....	2
<b>3. PHOTOS AND VIDEO.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4. ESTABLISHING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PARISH, MINISTRY, OR SCHOOL.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5. COMMUNICATION WITH MINORS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>6. PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>7. ENFORCEMENT.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>8. ONGOING DISCERNMENT.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>9. ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES AND INTERPRETATION .....</b>	<b>6</b>
 <b>APPENDIX</b>	
• Media Release Form for Minors .....	A

# 1. Definitions for the Purpose of This Policy

**Archdiocesan Entity:** Any parish, school, office, ministry, or entity of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

**Church and School personnel:** Bishops, priests, deacons, religious, seminarians, pastoral ministers, administrators, lay employees, officers, directors, trustees, governors, members and volunteers in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston or a Diocesan entity, including a parish, agency, school, or other organization sponsored by the Diocese or for which the Diocese has the direct or indirect right (whether alone or in conjunction with others) to elect or appoint officers, directors, trustees, governors, and/or members (collectively, “Diocesan Entities”). Designation as “Church personnel” for purposes of this policy shall not be construed as creating an employment or agency relationship between the Diocese or any diocesan entity and any person not subject to an express employment agreement with the Diocese of a diocesan entity.

**Volunteer:** An adult who works without financial or material gain on behalf of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston or its affiliates and who is not an employee or a cleric (for example, an intern, catechist, scout leader, coach, student teacher and others in similar capacities).

**Supervisor:** The hiring and/or supervising agent: for parish staff, the pastor; for parish volunteers, the appropriate administrator (e.g., Director of Religious Education or Director of Youth Ministry); for school personnel, the principal; for Chancery employees, the Department Director or Secretariat Director.

**Social Media:** Mobile and web-based technologies, through which individuals and communities distribute, co-create, share, and modify user-generated content. *Examples: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google+, Blogger, Flickr*

**Social Networking Sites:** A platform to build social networks or social relations among people with similar interests, activities, background and real-life connections. Social networks encourage engagement and interaction. *Examples: Facebook, Twitter, Yelp*

**Website:** A website, also written as web site, or simply site, is a set of related web pages typically served from a single web domain. The pages of a website can usually be accessed from a simple Uniform Resource Locator (URL) called the web address.

- **Personal website:** A social network page, blog or any Internet website/tool created by Church personnel to share personal communication with friends and family.
- **Ministry website:** A social network page, blog or any Internet website/tool created by Church personnel to conduct parish, diocesan, or affiliate business.

## 2. General Standards

These policies apply to authorized users of social media on behalf any school, parish, office, or ministry of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, including personnel affiliated with third parties.

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston recognizes that Clerics, Employees and Volunteers use the internet to conduct the affairs and pursue the mission of the Archdiocese and its affiliates. The Archdiocese supports and encourages church and school personnel to join these conversations to proclaim the Gospel. It is important that we make every effort to ensure the safety of producers and consumers of social media, while at the same time ensuring the integrity of the message we proclaim. This requires responsible, focused, and intentional use of new and yet-to-be-developed technologies.

All content published on behalf of a Archdiocesan entity must be consistent with and affirm the teachings and tenets of the Roman Catholic Church, for which the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston has responsibility and authority, and must not otherwise be inappropriate, create a risk of reputational harm to the Archdiocese or any Archdiocesan entity, or create legal exposure for the Archdiocese or any Archdiocesan entity.

Examples of 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 an Archdiocesan website or social media account.

### 2.1 Transparency

The intent of any communication policy is to give witness to the Good News to create a safe environment for all vulnerable populations, which is open, transparent and involves the parents, guardians, and caregivers as partners. Websites and social media accounts should clearly display the contact information of the account manager. Archdiocesan entity websites and social media accounts should declare that they are an “Official” website or account of the Archdiocesan entity.

### 2.2 Ownership and Privacy

Any social communications that are used as part of the work or volunteering within the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, such as websites, blogs, social ministry accounts and the like are the property of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, regardless of the creator or administrator. This applies to social media profiles, pages or groups that contain the name, act in the name of, or act as an extension of any Archdiocesan entity.

- a. **Use of Official Name and Logo:** Archdiocesan trademarks, logos or taglines (including the Archdiocesan shield) cannot be used without explicit permission from the Archdiocesan Communications Office. Requests for consent to use such Archdiocesan trademarks, logos or taglines are to be made to the Archdiocesan Communications Office (in the case of the Archdiocese, its institutions or entities, and its administration), the appropriate Archdiocesan office or ministry director (in the case of Archdiocesan trademarks, logos or taglines specific to those departments and ministries), the pastor (in the case of the parish and its ministries or administration) and the principal (in the case of the school).

Employees, clerics and volunteers may not use Archdiocesan trademarks, taglines or logos on their personal websites in any way that could reasonably suggest Archdiocesan sponsorship or agreement with any views expressed.

- b. **Individual Judgment:** Even when engaging in social media for personal use, the comments of employees, clerics and volunteers may be viewed as a reflection on that community and the Catholic Church universal. All users should use prudent and reasonable judgment when engaging in social media activities and should be on guard against actions and discussions that could harm the interests of themselves, the community, or the Church.
- c. **Copyright Laws:** All users must comply fully with copyright law when using social media and technology. Do not post any non-original content (e.g., photographs, artwork, articles, etc.) unless and until you have obtained written permission from the copyright owner to do so. This also extends to posting videos or recordings of Masses or other events that contain performances of copyrighted music or other copyrighted material.
- d. **Privacy:** All users are to safeguard the privacy interests of others. In particular, personally identifiable information (that is, name, phone number, address or email address), should not be disclosed without the prior consent of the person identified. In cases where an individual has consented to the publication of such information, appropriate privacy settings should be utilized. Personnel using social media are required to abide by the confidentiality policies of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

### 3. Photos and Video

Appropriate photographs and videos may be posted on official social media sites. While there is no expectation of privacy at public events (including Masses, parish festivals or bazaars, etc), there may be attendees at private events or activities (including religious education classes, retreats, bible studies, parish council meetings, etc.) that do not wish to have their picture taken or used either online or offline. If an individual requests that his or her photograph be deleted or removed (or, in the case of a minor, a parent makes such a request), that request should be promptly honored.

Photographs of minors should never be posted or published without a Media Release Form signed by the parent/guardian (see Appendix A). Media Release Forms should be kept on file with the parish/school/entity that uploaded the media. Under no circumstances should photographs of minors with any identifying information be posted. We encourage parishes to include a Media Release Form or section on all registration forms for minors.

Again, just because content is available on the Internet does not mean that the content can be freely used for any purpose. Do not post any non-original content (e.g., photographs, artwork, articles, etc.) unless and until you have obtained written permission from the copyright owner to do so. This also extends to posting videos or recordings of Masses or other events that contain performances of copyrighted music or other copyrighted material.

Church and School personnel should not post a recording of anything connected to their duties as employees or volunteers unless the parish or school has given permission for the posting and has obtained the appropriate releases.

## 4. Establishing Social Media for a Parish, Ministry, or School

- Careful consideration should be made to determine the particular strengths of each social media platform, the needs of a particular ministry, parish or organization, and the audience they are trying to reach. The strengths should match the needs of both the audience and the admins.
- You must receive permission from your pastor, principal or appropriate supervisor about the formation of a social media account prior to its creation.
- There should be at least two (2) Safe Environment cleared adult Administrators for each social media account. One of the administrators must be a parish or diocesan employee. Login credentials and/or administrator privileges must also be shared with/provided to the pastor, principle, or appropriate supervisor. Administrators are responsible for ensuring compliance with this and all Archdiocesan policies and codes of conduct, including the monitoring of social media accounts for content and comments. All administrator functions should reserve the right to ban offenders.
- The purpose of any a social media page is to provide an interactive forum where readers can gather and discuss information about the wide range of issues addressed by the work and mission of the Catholic Church, specifically through the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. Followers are encouraged to post questions, comments and concerns, but should remember this is a moderated online discussion hosted by an entity of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston appreciates healthy, constructive debate and discussion; that means we ask that comments be kept civil in tone and reflect the charity and respect that marks Christian discourse. Comments that may be hidden, deleted, or necessitate the banning or blocking of a user include those that contain:

- Personal attacks/inflammatory remarks against a person or group
- Content/comments off topic
- Spam/ Promotion of services, products, political organizations/agendas
- Links to sites that contain offensive material or attack the Church's hierarchy and mission
- Information that is factually incorrect
- Vulgar Language

## 5. Communication with Minors

All Safe Environment policies and procedures must be followed and upheld. It is most important to remember that in using social media, the boundary issues are the same as in person-to-person communication. Parents/guardians should be fully aware of all mediums being used to keep in contact with their young person for ministerial purposes.

Adults must avoid private one-on-one communication with minors via social media. No one under 18 and still in high school should be on any adult personnel or volunteer's social media contacts or "Friends" lists. Official ministry, school and personal social media accounts should not be used to contact minors privately (e.g., Facebook Messenger, Twitter Direct Message). Online "chatting" with children is not permitted (Google Hangouts, etc.).

The use of smartphone and tablet messaging apps (Snapchat, WhatsApp, Kik, etc.) and “anonymous” apps (YikYak, Whisper, etc.) for one-on-one communication with minors is forbidden. Parish should use apps that function as third party administrators (i.e. Remind, Iris or other personal administrative apps). If you receive a text or must text a youth, always include the parent and/or a parish administrator on your text and responses.

## 6. Personal Social Media Accounts

Personal social media accounts are created by an individual to stay connected with family and friends, and to interact with the online community, not specifically for the purpose of ministry. Some social media sites require the user to log in with a personal account in order to access the account of a ministry or organization and do not allow for the creation of two accounts, i.e. a personal account and a work account (ex. Facebook, 2017).

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston recognizes that employees, clerics and volunteers may create personal websites or use personal social media accounts as a medium of self-expression. Employees and clerics must recognize that anything published on a Personal Website/Social Media Account is no different from making such information available in any public forum. Any information that causes or has the potential to cause embarrassment to the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, create a risk of reputational harm to the Archdiocese or any Archdiocesan entity, or create legal exposure for the Archdiocese or any Archdiocesan entity should be avoided.

## 7. Enforcement

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and its administrators intend to enforce the policy set forth here and expect all employees, religious, clerics and volunteers to comply.

These rules are in place to protect authorized users and Archdiocesan entities. Inappropriate use exposes Archdiocesan entities to risks and legal issues. Anyone with knowledge of inappropriate use of social media that is in violation of this or any other Archdiocesan policy should report this information verbally and in writing to the individual’s supervisor.

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston reserves the right to review any employee’s, cleric’s or volunteer’s Archdiocesan Ministry Websites, Personal Websites, and his/her Personal and Ministry-related Social Networking Accounts if there are reasonable grounds for believing that this policy is being violated.

Failure to comply with any of the provisions of this Social Media Policy will be grounds for discipline, up to and including termination, if an employee or cleric, or removal from position, if a volunteer.



## 8. Ongoing Discernment

It is recognized that as issues arise and as technologies expand additional guidelines will need to be created so the integrity and spirit of the guidelines already provided are maintained. The intent of all policies is to honor the privacy of our members, the protection of the vulnerable populations and advances the primary mission of the Church.

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston reserves the right to make changes to this policy at any time and at its sole discretion, and interpret and administer the policy in light of changing circumstances and events. This document and any future modifications will be made available at:  
<http://www.archgh.org/communications/policies>.

## 9. Additional Guidelines and Interpretation

In areas where this policy does not provide a direct answer for how members of our Church faithful should conduct themselves, personnel should contact their supervisor. Questions on interpretation of this policy may be sent to the Archdiocesan Communications Office at [web@archgh.org](mailto:web@archgh.org).

Supervisors, including pastors, principal and directors, may implement additional rules and guidelines for the use of social media and technology as they deem it appropriate for their particular entity or ministry.

Questions concerning interpretation of this document should be directed to the Archdiocesan Communications Director. This document may be updated and modified at any time. This document and any future modifications will be made available at [www.archgh.org](http://www.archgh.org) will be available in its entirety.

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston reserves the right to make changes to this policy at any time and at its sole discretion, and interpret and administer the policy in light of changing circumstances and events.

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, the Diocese of Raleigh, the Diocese of Dallas, and the U.S. Bishops' Communications Office in granting the use of its social networking policies and guidelines as resources in the development of this policy.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Archdiocesan Communications Office.





*This form is available to groups or ministries which do not already have an established media release form for minors. Groups or ministries already operating with forms approved by the Chancery should continue use of their approved media release forms.*

---

## **MEDIA RELEASE FORM for MINORS** **for Photography and Video**

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, 1700 San Jacinto, Houston, Texas 77002

I hereby grant permission to the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston (hereinafter referred to as AGH), its successors and those acting under its permission or upon their authority, or pursuant to their request, the unqualified right and permission to photograph, interview, reproduce, publish, or circulate or otherwise use, my child/children's name(s), and any photographic/digital reproduction or other likeness of my child/children.

It is my understanding that this photograph/video or portions thereof may be used for public view, including use on the Archdiocesan Website, [www.archgh.org](http://www.archgh.org), or its official Social Media Accounts.

I agree to allow my child to participate in these projects without financial remuneration, and the consideration for this Release is my desire and intent to assist AGH. I further understand that this form releases AGH from any future claims or liabilities arising from the use of said photograph/video.

This authorization and Release authorizes use of said name(s) and material in any published form and applies to any medium of advertising or publicity, including the Internet, for an unlimited period of time.

Name of Child/Children: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print or type)

Date(s) of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

If needed, please attach additional forms for additional children. A photostatic copy hereof shall be considered as effective and valid as the original.

Signature of Parent or Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_