

# **DIOCESE OF BEAUMONT**

## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

**POLICY STATEMENT:** The Diocese of Beaumont and its Affiliates (defined as “parishes, schools, offices, agencies and other institutions which operate under the administrative authority of the Bishop”) recognize that in today’s environment, with the increasing prevalence of the internet, employees, clerics and volunteers will use the internet to conduct ministry work and to communicate with associates and friends. The internet provides various ways for individuals to interact and has changed the way we communicate and share information. The Diocese of Beaumont views the internet as an important educational and evangelizing tool to promote school and ministerial programs. The Diocese encourages administrators, pastors and principals to support internet use and to give employees, clerics and volunteers the necessary training and tools to interact safely and responsibly online. However, those using the internet should bear in mind that certain comments and information may have a harmful effect on the Diocese of Beaumont, its reputation and its employees. In light of this possibility, employees, clerics and volunteers are required to adhere to the following policy regarding the use of Personal and Ministry Websites including social networks and blogs.

### **DEFINITIONS FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY:**

**Ministry Website:** a social network page, blog or any internet website/tool created by employees, clerics and volunteers for the sole purpose of conducting Diocesan/Affiliate ministry.

**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.

**Social Networking Sites:** a type of personal website that is used by groups with a common interest for communication purposes.

**Blog:** a type of website, usually maintained by an individual, whose primary purpose is to offer commentary or news on events or subjects (e.g. Church teaching, theology, morals, etc.).

**Supervisor:** the hiring and/or supervising agent: for parish staff, the pastor; for parish volunteers, the appropriate administrator (e.g. Parish Catechetical Leader or Director of Youth Ministry); for school personnel, the principal.

**Employee:** any person who is employed by the Diocese of Beaumont or an Affiliate. An employee may be a cleric or a lay person who may also be a member of a religious institute.

**Cleric:** an ordained priest or an ordained deacon who is incardinated in the Diocese of Beaumont, as well as a religious priest or deacon, or a priest or deacon incardinated in another diocese, who is engaged in a ministry under the control or auspices of the Diocese of Beaumont or an Affiliate.

**Adult:** an individual who is eighteen years of age or older.

**Child:** a person under 18 years of age or a physically or mentally disabled person under 21 years of age.

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

## **PROCEDURE**

As established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and adapted by the Diocese of Beaumont,

### **Key Rules of the Road for Establishing Sites:**

- **Abide by diocesan/parish guidelines**
- **Know that even personal communication by church personnel reflects the Church. Practice what you preach.**
- **Write in first person. Do not claim to represent the official position of the organization or teachings of the Church, unless authorized to do so.**
- **Identify yourself. Do not use pseudonyms or name the parish, program, etc as your identity, unless authorized to do so.**
- **Abide by copyright, fair use, and IRS financial disclosure regulations.**
- **Do not divulge confidential information about others. Nothing posted in the Internet is private.**
- **Do not cite others, post photos or videos of them, link to their material, etc without their approval.**
- **Practice Christian charity.**

### **Ministry Websites**

The Diocese of Beaumont and its Affiliates support the creation of Ministry Websites as a means to conduct Diocesan/Affiliate ministry. The use of Ministry Websites is encouraged when conducting Diocesan/Affiliate educational and evangelizing programs. Supervisors who approve individuals to create a Ministry Website for dispersal of information are responsible for monitoring the Ministry Website.

### **Personal Websites**

The Diocese of Beaumont and its Affiliates recognize that employees, clerics and volunteers may create Personal Websites as a medium of self-expression. Employees, clerics and volunteers must recognize that anything published on a Personal Website 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 Diocese of Beaumont or its Affiliates should be avoided. Note: if employees, clerics and volunteers elect to use Personal Websites to conduct Diocesan/Affiliate ministry, the Personal Websites must be approved, and are subject to monitoring, by their supervisor or designee.

Personnel 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 are encouraged to understand that they are witnessing to the faith through all of their social networking, whether "public" or "private".

## **Password-Protected Sites**

Both Ministry Websites and Personal Websites may involve the use of a username/password or other such means to access all or portions of the site. In the event that a cleric, employee or volunteer, subject to approval by the Diocese of Beaumont or its Affiliate, gives a child access to a Website that is not otherwise openly accessible to the public, that same access must also be provided to the child's parent/guardian, if the parent/guardian so desires.

## **Ministry Blogs**

The Diocese of Beaumont and its Affiliates support the use of **blogging** as a ministry communication tool. It is an excellent platform for creating and distributing information. Although blogging is a powerful communication tool, Ministry Blogs may not be used for: 1) conducting outside business 2) defaming the character of any individual or institution 3) causing embarrassment to the Diocese of Beaumont or its Affiliates or 4) divulging any personal information about children that would jeopardize their safety or well-being in any way.

## **Personal Blogs**

In the event an employee or cleric identifies himself/herself as, or is manifestly understood to be, an employee or cleric of the Diocese of Beaumont or its Affiliates on a Personal Blog (or other website with a similar purpose), to help reduce the potential for confusion, the employee is required to put the following notice in a reasonably prominent place on the website:

**"The views expressed on this website are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer."**

Even with this notice, any information that causes or has the potential to cause embarrassment to the Diocese of Beaumont or its Affiliates should be avoided.

## **Social Networking Websites**

Because of the increasing popularity of social networking websites, parish use of these websites is permitted as a means to effectively communicate for ministry and education purposes. It should not be used for the primary purpose of befriending people or socializing. Every effort should be made in order to provide a safe and secure environment and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety when using the internet as a ministry tool. To achieve this goal, the following guidelines should be adhered to when using social networking websites for programs that involve youth under the age of 18. (The use of social networking sites is *not recommended* for groups that include students younger than high school age.)

- 1) Always obtain the pastor's permission before using a social networking site for a parish program.
- 2) Inform parents in writing that the parish is planning to use a social networking site.
- 3) Establish a parish account; never use a personal account.
- 4) The site administrator must be an adult. The site administrator is considered to work with minors and thus should have completed the Safe Environment Training in accordance with diocesan policy.

- 5) It is recommended that the site be set up as a public rather than private site in order to allow for transparency in all communications and postings. The administrator should pre-approve or regularly monitor all comments and postings. Any inappropriate content should be deleted and the person who posted it should be contacted and reminded that improper content is not acceptable.
- 6) Post rules of conduct on the site.
- 7) The main purpose of the site should be for general communication about group events rather than for chatting or socializing.
- 8) All information displayed on the site should reflect the Catholic faith.
- 9) Write as if you are certain others will read it. Communications can easily be shared with others for whom they are not intended.
- 10) Whenever possible, keep copies of any communications sent to youth. Consider sending copies of all communication to parents as well as youth members.
- 11) Do not invite a minor to be a "friend." The minor must make the request.
- 12) Always follow diocesan rules regarding taking and posting photographs. Do not "tag" (to identify someone in a photo for the purposes of Social Networking) any pictures.

### **Confidential and Proprietary Information**

Consistent with our policy on "Confidentiality" as stated in the employee handbook, Employees, clerics and volunteers are prohibited from disclosing via the internet information that is understood to be held in confidence by the Diocese of Beaumont or its Affiliates.

Employees, clerics and volunteers are prohibited from disclosing via the internet any information that is proprietary to the Diocese of Beaumont or its Affiliates, except by explicit permission of the appropriate authority. Also, in the event of termination, if an employee or cleric has identified himself/herself as an employee or cleric of the Diocese of Beaumont or its Affiliates on a person website, he/she should remove mention of the Diocese of Beaumont or its Affiliates from their website.

### **Trademarks and Logos**

Employees, clerics and volunteers may use Diocesan or Affiliate trademarks or logos on Personal Websites only in ways that clearly promote or call positive attention to Diocesan events, websites or organizations associated with the trademark or logo after receiving prior authorization from the Director of Information Technology. Employees, clerics, and volunteers may not use Diocesan or Affiliate trademarks or logos on their Personal Websites in any way that could reasonably suggest Diocesan or Affiliate sponsorship or agreement with any views expressed. Employees are similarly prohibited from providing a link or otherwise referring to the diocesan website on their personal website, social networks, or blogs without receiving prior authorization from the Director of Information Technology.

### **Inappropriate Language and Images**

The Diocese of Beaumont and its Affiliates will not tolerate employees, clerics or volunteers posting obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory, defamatory or otherwise potentially scandalous comments, links and/or images which reflect discredit or cause embarrassment to the Diocese of Beaumont or its Affiliates, employees, vendors, partners, agencies, schools and others. Employees are reminding of their obligations under our employee "Code of Conduct" policy as stated in the diocesan employee handbook. In particular, employees should not take any action against the Church, its teachings or its leaders on social media.

Nor affiliate with any organization or movement which is directed or has as its prime principles the criticism, rejection or disrespect of the Church.

### **Right to Review**

The Diocese of Beaumont and its Affiliates reserve the right to review an employee's, cleric's and volunteer's Personal Website, if there are reasonable grounds for believing that policy is being violated.


### **Protection of Children**

Employees, clerics and volunteers of the Diocese of Beaumont and its Affiliates will comply with all aspects of the *Children's Online Privacy Protection Act* (<http://www.ftc.gov/ogc/coppa1.htm>) and the *Safe Environment Training* of the Diocese of Beaumont (<http://www.dioceseofbmt.org/safeenvironment/pages/virtustraining.html>). Employees, clerics and volunteers are forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information including pictures of any child under the age of eighteen without verifiable consent of a parent or guardian. Personal identifiable information includes full name, photos, home address, email address, telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a child. Verifiable consent can take the form of a release/permission form that includes use of photographs, an email from a parent or guardian, or spoken permission by a parent or guardian in the presence of another adult. The Diocese of Beaumont and its Affiliates will review alleged violations of the *Children's Online Privacy Protection Act*, or the *Safe Environment Training* of the Diocese of Beaumont, on a case-by-case basis. In the event that a provision of this Social Media Policy cannot be reconciled with the *Safe Environment Training* of the Diocese of Beaumont, the provisions of the *Safe Environment Training* of the Diocese of Beaumont will be in force.

### **Enforcement**

The Diocese of Beaumont, its Affiliates and their respective administrators intend to enforce the policy set forth here and expect all employees, clerics and volunteers to comply. Failure to comply with any of the provisions of the 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.

The Diocese of Beaumont and its Affiliates reserve 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.

APPROVED BY:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Most Rev. Curtis J. Guillory, S.V.D., D.D.  
Bishop of Beaumont

Date: May 15, 2013

The Diocese of Beaumont gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati in granting the use of their social networking policy and guidelines as a resource and the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the U.S.C.C.B. for resource material in the development of this policy.

**DIOCESE OF BEAUMONT  
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

**PLEASE PRINT**

**Employee Name:**

---

Last First Middle Initial

**Job Title:** **Central Office/Parish/School**

---

**Verification Statement**

I verify that I have read and understand this policy. I agree to abide by this policy and also understand that the Diocese of Beaumont/Parish/School may amend or change the policy at its discretion without notice.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**RETURN SIGNED FORM TO EMPLOYER**

**DIOCESE OF BEAUMONT  
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

**PLEASE PRINT**

**Volunteer Name:**

---

Last First Middle Initial

**Job Title:** **Central Office/Parish/School**

---

**Verification Statement**

I verify that I have read and understand this policy. I agree to abide by this policy and also understand that the Diocese of Beaumont/Parish/School may amend or change the policy at its discretion without notice.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Volunteer Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**RETURN SIGNED FORM TO EMPLOYER**