



Social Media and Photo Permission Policy

Social media has become an everyday part of our lives. Its exponential growth provides congregations with great opportunities for evangelism, for building communities, and for providing newcomers with a view into their ministries and activities. However it's also a tool with endless reach that can spread stories and photos across the internet within seconds. What began as "email and the Internet" has evolved into dozens of popular platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Reddit, Tumblr, and many more. It's easier than ever to promote events, youth programs, community ministries, and more using social media, but legal precautions must be made when using images of parishioners and especially children online.

While individual parish staffs should regularly review their individual social media policies, the diocese has compiled these general guidelines with particular emphasis on managing permissions for the use of adults' and children's images online. These guidelines should not be seen as a substitute for individual written or oral policies used by individual parishes and schools.

Definition of Social Media

For the purpose of these guidelines, the term "social media" includes online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Snapchat; photo sharing sites such as Flickr and Shutterfly; video sites such as Vine & Vimeo; blogs and any other electronic mediums; and email including prayer lists and parish e-blasts.

Media Permissions

Parishes should obtain written permission from attendees when hosting events that will be photographed and posted on social media or used in newsletters. This ideally can be done prior to the event, preferably as part of the advance registration process. Another approach is to have attendees sign media permission slips at the door, or a sign-in sheet which states that photos will be taken and used for promotional and publication use.

Churches are generally considered public spaces and photos of a church service showing the entire congregation shouldn't require permission. Use your best judgement in obtaining permissions, as you don't want to discourage visitors and/or first-time guests from returning.

Typical media permission text:

[Church name] has my permission to use photographs, slides, videos, or statements in which I appear for publicity purposes, for communications and publications, and for posting in our website and/or social media. I also understand that no royalty, fee, or other compensation shall become payable to me in return for such use."

Children Media Permissions

If posting photos of children online or in any publication, always obtain a photo release from their parents and/or legal guardians. This should be done annually for schools and programs. Again, it's highly recommended to include this step as part of the registration process for Sunday School, summer camps, vacation bible school, or other programs/special events for children and young people.

When posting pictures on websites, newsletters, or social media, it's prudent to not provide names or identifying information about the children or youth pictured (unless the parent or guardian gives written permission). Also, if a child or parent objects to having their photo taken, that should be honored. Keep children's photo releases on file for four years past each child reaching 18 years.

Sample media permission text for children/ youth:

"[Church name] has my permission to use photographs, slides, videos, or statements in which my child, _____, appears for publicity purposes, for communications and publications, and for posting in our website and/or social media. I understand that my child's identifying information will not be provided unless I give permission at a later time. I also understand that no royalty, fee, or other compensation shall become payable to me or my family in return for such use."

Social Media Guidelines

Below are tips and suggestions to consider for clergy, staff and parishioners who manage an official social media page for their parish community, youth program, or other ministries:

- All communications sent digitally (email, social networking, notes, posts, tweets etc.) are not confidential and potentially may be shared or reposted anywhere without permission.
- Posts on social media sites should project a positive image by being professional in tone and in good taste.
- Never post any confidential, private, or restricted information.
- Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected child abuse or exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world. Suspected abuse must be reported to Child Protective Services by those who are mandated to report.
- When using social media, it is critical that personal and institutional privacy settings are applied regularly, reviewed and upgraded as needed.

Social Media "Golden Rules" for Clergy

- If you wouldn't share it during your announcements or in a sermon, don't share it on social media.
- If it isn't edifying, it is probably not worth posting.
- If it's something you wouldn't want your Bishop or mother to read, don't share it. Sarcasm translates poorly on social media.
- Social media is not a substitute for a phone call or personal interaction.

For questions regarding photo permissions and/or social media – or for creative tips and ideas – please contact Elrond Lawrence, Communications Director, at elrond@realepiscopal.org.