Social Media: Safe Church Guidelines
Created by the Province III Youth Ministry Network
Updated September 2015

We believe in a God who radically loves us and entered creation as Jesus Christ. Through Christ, God modeled and formed relationships giving us power through the Holy Spirit to continue incarnational ministry in the world today. The ways we develop and form our incarnational relationships in the offer new ways of communicating, which may at times bring challenges to living out our Baptismal faith. Social networking platforms are a reality of life, and it's essential for the Church to engage. Technological advancements in communication have altered traditional thoughts on privacy. Thus is it more critical today to safeguard our reputations and integrity.

The following recommended practices and guidelines apply commonly accepted principles of healthy boundaries for social networking, communication, online forum and gaming. They are intended to raise awareness of potential issues and foster conversations within ministry teams. These guideline are not intended to be "rules" but rather an invitation to explore the changing landscape of pastoral relationships. We are called to model healthy boundaries while serving. We encourage all ministry teams to discern together what guidelines to adopt in the context of your ministry.

This is a pastoral rather than a legal document. If you are concerned with the legal ramifications of your ministry practices - you are encouraged to consult with a lawyer.

Recommendations –
1. Use prudent judgment in the timing of your communications. For example, consider work hours, school hours, meal times, vacations and sleep schedules.

2. Implement consistent privacy settings and personal boundaries – with all students across all platforms

3. Routinely review your accessible content and photos frequently.

4. Be Accountable
    a. Parents should be aware of how you utilize social network platforms
    b. When possible, communication should be with groups, in public areas rather than in private messages – this includes image sharing.
    c. When ongoing pastoral communications are private this should be saved and disclosed to the parent or a supervisor
    d. When possible use your ministry platforms over personal accounts
    e. Ministry presence on platforms should have more than one administrator

5. Covenants should be created to govern group communication, addressing:
    a. appropriate & inappropriate language and behavior
    b. who may join and/or view group activity
    c. content that can be posted/published on the site or page
    d. how images will be taken and shared
    e. consequences for breaking the covenant
    f. mandatory reporting laws

6. Any inappropriate material posted in your online groups should be deleted and addressed or reported if necessary.

7. Parents should be informed that content, including images, appearing on student pages or groups that are not sponsored by the church are NOT within the purview of your ministry.

8. When video chatting be mindful of what you're wearing and of your surroundings. One-on-One video chatting with students is strongly discouraged.

9. Phone conversations and face-to-face meetings are the preferred mode of communication, when responding to emotionally driven communication or pastoral emergencies. When received communication raises concerns or questions share it with a member of your pastoral team or supervisor.

10. There are further considerations when using photos and videos of minors for ministry purposes.
    a. Respect the dignity of every person depicted in an image (*ie: consider if the image is uplifting, if it may damage esteem or give one an unintended or unfavorable reputation*)
    b. Media release statements on a signed consent form (ie: *"I understand and agree that photos and video may be taken of my child and used for promotional purposes."*)
    c. Strongly discourage attaching students' names with their image (*ie: in captions and by tagging*)
    d. When and where it is not appropriate to take photos or video footage (*ie: changing areas, restrooms, or where people sleep*)

11. Choose your platforms wisely
    a. Be aware of the reputations, privacy settings, possible objections to and potential for harm or abuse of or on platforms
    b. Determine which platforms work best for your context
    c. Use multiple platforms to include and reach everyone in your ministry
    d. No one should feel forced to adopt or conform to using any platform they don't want to