“Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ. In the area of communications too, we need a Church capable of bringing warmth and of stirring hearts” – Pope Francis’ Message for the 48th World Communications Day, 2014.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND EVANGELIZATION

Social media accounts can be a useful evangelization tool for your community. In the increasing digital world, setting up social media accounts is a natural step in evangelization efforts.

Facebook and Twitter accounts are a great way to connect with your parishioners and the wider community about the events in your parish, as well as to evangelize and teach about the faith. Posts on Facebook or Twitter can empower your community and offer another way to reach members of your parish community with strong, positive messages of faith.

While they are helpful tools in your communications arsenal, social media accounts should not be:
- A replacement for a bulletin or newsletter.
- The only marketing tool for your parish.

Social media accounts should be used to support those modes of communication, not replace them.

As Pope Francis said in his message for the 48th World Communications Day, “The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge: may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy ad imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God.”

POSTING SUCCESSFULLY

The use of social media should be well integrated into the overall communication strategy of your parish and/or diocese. Users move seamlessly across multiple platforms, receiving information and entering into dialogue using print, oral, video, and digital communications, in a variety of settings. Effective communications strategies recognize the expectations and preferences of the community and develop messages suited to those expectations and preferences.

The social media team at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops suggests that of the weekly posts to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., 80 percent should be inspirational and 20 percent should be informational.

With the rapid acceptance of digital social networks, the “digital content” has become very crowded. The Church can be successful in being heard above the fray by creating engagement. Engagement is defined as the activity that happens around a message posted on a social network. This activity includes likes, comments and shares. The more engagement that happens on a particular message, the more it will be seen.
GUIDELINES FOR POSTING

When developing guidelines for church personnel to use social media, consider including the following elements:

• Define appropriate boundaries for communications. These should be in sync with diocesan codes of conduct for other areas, such as the diocese’s standards for protection of children and young people, Internet acceptable use policies, etc. Topics that are in current debate will generate more comments/responses. These include issues in which the Church’s teachings are often in contrast to some popular positions (gay rights, abortion, immigration reform, health care reform). In other words, the Church’s social justice teachings, including the pro-life aspects of those teachings, often elicit unfavorable comments. It is possible to set guidelines that allow administrators to remove comments. Others provide guidance on how to engage in dialogue around these topics.

• Include examples of Codes of Conduct that should be posted on social networking sites. Codes of Conduct are for visitors to the site. These codes should always be brief and immediately apparent to visitors. Visitors should also be made aware of the consequences of violations of the Code of Conduct.

• Define instructions. Help church personnel to model good digital citizenship. Include instructions on how to report, block, etc., on the more popular social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. This provides guidance for those church personnel who may be entering into social media for the first time.

• Provide recommendations on how to deal with difficult “fans.” Give church personnel permission to trust their instincts on blocking repeat offenders of a site’s Code of Conduct. Argumentative participants can easily change the tone of every post. A good way to determine if they should be blocked is to go to their profiles and browse through the pages that they have “fanned.” Do not allow those unwilling to dialogue to hold your site and its other members hostage. In particular situations, the moderator might determine it is best to ask a member to take a conversation “offline.” These offline conversations can be conducted in person, over the telephone, or through private e-mail. The site moderators should be able to refer to the appropriate resources, such as the pastor, program director, diocesan communication office, etc.

• Remind site administrators they are posting for a broad audience. Social media are global platforms. Online content is visible to anyone in the world who comes to their sites.

• Provide trusted sites for reference, and recommend that site administrators have a thorough knowledge of these sites. Often a link to the parish, diocesan, USCCB, or Vatican site can provide necessary information.

Do not be afraid to venture out into the digital world. Remember that the ultimate goal of a digital presence is the same as a physical one: to build up the kingdom of God and to bring others to Christ.
THE CODE OF CONDUCT ON THE USCCB’S FACEBOOK:

• The purpose of this Facebook page is to provide an interactive forum where readers can gather and discuss information about the wide range of issues talked about by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

• Followers are encouraged to post questions, comments, and concerns, but should remember this is a moderated online discussion hosted by the USCCB.

• The USCCB appreciates healthy, constructive debate and discussion; that means we ask that comments be kept civil in tone.

• Comments will not be removed simply because they express opinions in disagreement with the USCCB. However, comments that may be deleted include those that contain:

  1. Vulgar language
  2. Personal attacks/inflammatory remarks against a person or group
  3. Content/comments off topic
  4. Spam
  5. Links to sites that contain offensive material or attack a person
  6. Promotion of services, products, political organizations/agendas
  7. Information that is factually incorrect

The USCCB reserves the right to remove posters who violate this policy. Always block anyone who does not abide by the Code of Conduct.