



DIOCESE OF ALEXANDRIA

*Pastoral Code of Conduct*

For Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Ministers, Administrators,  
Staff, and Volunteers

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# PASTORAL CODE OF CONDUCT

## DIOCESE OF ALEXANDRIA

*For Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Ministers, Administrators, Staff, and Volunteers*

### *Preface*

The Code of Pastoral Conduct for Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Ministers, Administrators, Employees, and Volunteers (Code of Pastoral Conduct) was developed by the VIRTUS® program of The National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc. Permission has been given to the Diocese of Alexandria for both its use and adaptation. The Presbyteral Council has recommended its adoption for this Diocese. It is approved for the Diocese of Alexandria by the Apostolic Administrator. The purpose of the Code of Pastoral Conduct is to assist in developing and implementing uniform guidelines for appropriate behavior in situations of pastoral ministry, counseling and spiritual direction. The Code of Pastoral Conduct is not intended to address all situations that may arise in pastoral counseling relationships. It is intended to create a structure for addressing a variety of circumstances that, if not appropriately addressed, may create a risk of incidents, allegations, claims and/or lawsuits.

The Church must be exemplary. Clergy, staff, and volunteers should and will be held accountable for their behavior. In order to maintain the highest level accountability, there must be a clear and unambiguous blueprint of appropriate and inappropriate behavior. The Code of Pastoral Conduct provides a basic structure for identifying limits. It is intended as a “continuous improvement document.” Therefore, your suggestions and recommendations for additions and revisions are encouraged.

The Code of Pastoral Conduct is intended to provide a foundation for implementing effective and enforceable standards of conduct for persons serving in pastoral ministry, counseling and spiritual direction in this Diocese. In addition to this Code of Pastoral Conduct, the Diocese of Alexandria also a written Policy Concerning Communication and Information Systems and Policies for Youth Ministry with accompanying procedures as they pertain to the supervision of minors, travel and transportation, and planned events.

The Code of Pastoral Conduct and the various other policies and procedures of the Diocese for helping to provide a safe environment for children and young people rest on the basic teachings of the Gospel. Recognition and respect for human persons, even the very youngest, along with love and a caring attitude, receive in this code and

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in diocesan policies specific applications to real life situations.

Part of our Catholic tradition is to foster the culture of life, truth, justice and peace. One might say that we are attempting to help realize Christian love in action; not offer a book of rules, but rather guidance in living and fostering Christian Communion.

## **I. Preamble**

Priests, deacons, pastoral ministers, administrators, staff and volunteers in our parishes, institutions and religious communities must uphold Christian values and conduct. The Diocese of Alexandria Code of Pastoral Conduct provides a set of standards in certain pastoral situations.

## **II. Responsibility**

The public and private conduct of clergy, staff and volunteers can inspire and motivate people, but it can also scandalize and undermine people's faith. Clergy, staff and volunteers must, at all times, be aware of the responsibilities that accompany their work. They must also know that God's goodness and grace supports them in their ministry. Responsibility for adherence to the Code of Pastoral Conduct rests with the individual. Clergy, staff and volunteers who disregard the Code of Pastoral Conduct will be subject to remedial action. Corrective action may take various forms, from verbal reproach to removal from ministry, depending on the specific nature and circumstances of the offense and the extent of the harm.

## **III. Pastoral Standards**

### **1. Conduct for Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors, i.e. clergy, staff and volunteers who provide pastoral, spiritual and/or therapeutic counseling services to individuals, families or other groups.**

*Pastoral counselors and spiritual directors must respect the rights and advance the welfare of each person.*

1.1 Pastoral counselors and spiritual directors shall not step beyond their competence in counseling situations and shall refer clients to other professionals when appropriate.

1.2 Pastoral counselors and spiritual directors should carefully consider the possible consequences before entering into a counseling relationship with someone with whom they have a preexisting relationship, i.e. employee, professional colleague, friend or other pre-existing relationship. (See Section 7.2.2)

1.3 Pastoral counselors and spiritual directors should not audiotape or videotape sessions.

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1.4 Pastoral counselors and spiritual directors must never engage in sexual intimacies with the persons they counsel. This includes consensual and nonconsensual contact, forced physical contact and inappropriate sexual comments.

1.5 Pastoral counselors and spiritual directors shall not engage in sexual intimacies with individuals who are close to the client, such as relatives or friends of the client.

1.6 Pastoral counselors and spiritual directors assume the full burden of responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear, appropriate boundaries in all counseling and counseling-related relationships.

1.7 Physical contact of any kind – i.e. touching, hugging, holding – between pastoral counselors and spiritual directors and the persons they counsel can be misconstrued and should be avoided.

1.8 Sessions should be conducted in appropriate settings and at appropriate time.

1.8.1 No sessions should be conducted in private living quarters

1.8.2 Sessions should not be held at places or times that would tend to cause confusion about the nature of the relationship for the person being counseled.

1.9 Pastoral counselors and spiritual directors shall maintain a log of the times and places of sessions with each person being counseled.

## **2. Confidentiality**

*Information disclosed to a pastoral counselor or spiritual director during the course of the counseling, advising or spiritual direction shall be held in the strictest of confidence possible.*

2.1 Information obtained in the course of sessions shall be confidential, except for compelling professional reasons or as required by law.

2.1.1 If there is clear and imminent danger to the client or others, the pastoral counselor or spiritual director may disclose only the information necessary to protect the parties affected and to prevent harm.

2.1.2 Before disclosure is made, if feasible the pastoral counselor or spiritual director should inform the person being counseled about the disclosure and the potential consequences.

2.2 Pastoral counselors and spiritual directors should discuss the nature of confidentiality and its limitations with each person in counseling.

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2.3 Pastoral counselors and spiritual directors should keep minimal records of the content of sessions.

2.4 Knowledge that arises from professional contact may be used in teaching, writing, homilies or other public presentations only when effective measures are taken to absolutely safeguard both the individual's identity and the confidentiality of the disclosures.

2.5 While counseling a minor, if a pastoral counselor or spiritual director discovers there is a serious threat to the welfare of the minor and that communication of confidential information to a parent or legal guardian is essential to the child's health and well-being, the counselor or spiritual director should:

- Attempt to secure written consent from the minor for the specific disclosure.
- If consent is not given, disclose only the information necessary to protect the health and wellbeing of the minor.
- Consultation with the Diocese's Director Office of Child and Youth Protection is required before disclosure.

**2.6 These obligations are independent of the confidentiality of the confessional. Under no circumstances whatsoever can there be any disclosure – even indirect disclosure – of information received through the confessional.**

### **3. Conduct with Youth**

*Clergy, staff and volunteers working with youth shall maintain an open and trustworthy relationship between youth and adult supervisors.*

3.1 Clergy, staff and volunteers must be aware of their own and others vulnerability when working alone with youth. Use a team approach to managing youth activities.

3.2 Physical contact with youth can be misconstrued and should occur a) only when completely nonsexual and otherwise appropriate, and b) never in private.

3.3 Clergy, staff and volunteers are to abstain from a) the illegal use or possession of drugs and/or alcohol at all times and b) the use of alcohol at any time when working with youth.

3.4 Clergy should not allow individual young people to stay overnight in the cleric's private accommodations or residence.

3.5 Staff and volunteers should not provide shared, private or overnight accommodations for individual young people where there is no other adult supervision present, including, but not limited to, accommodations in any church-owned facility,

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private residence, or hotel room.

3.5.1 In rare, emergency situations, when accommodation is necessary for the health and well-being of the youth, the clergy, staff or volunteer should take extraordinary care to protect all parties from the appearance of impropriety and from all risk of harm.

3.5.2 Use a team approach to managing emergency situations.

## **4. Sexual Conduct**

*Clergy, staff and volunteers must not, for sexual gain or intimacy, exploit the trust placed in them by the faith community.*

4.1 Clergy, religious, staff and volunteers who are committed to a celibate lifestyle are called to be an example of celibate chastity in all relationships at all times.

4.2 Staff and volunteers who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction services must avoid developing inappropriately intimate relationships with minors, other staff or parishioners. Staff and volunteers must behave in a professional manner at all times.

4.3 No clergy, staff or volunteer may exploit another person for sexual purposes.

4.4 Allegations of sexual misconduct should be taken seriously and reported to the Diocese's Office of Child and Youth Protection 318-445-2401. The Office of Child and Youth Protection will report the allegation to civil authorities. The Policy of the Diocese of Alexandria in Response to Complaints of Sexual Abuse will be followed to protect the rights of all involved.

4.5 Clergy, staff and volunteers should review and know the child abuse reporting requirements under Louisiana statutes and regulations and should follow those mandates.

## **5. Harassment**

*Clergy, staff and volunteers must not engage in physical, psychological, written or verbal harassment of others, and must not tolerate such harassment by clergy, staff or volunteers.*

5.1 Clergy, staff and volunteers shall provide a professional work environment that is free from physical, psychological, written or verbal intimidation or harassment.

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5.2 Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical, written or verbal behavior, including, but not limited to, the following: Physical or mental abuse. Racial insults. Derogatory ethnic slurs. Unwelcome sexual advances or touching. Sexual comments or sexual jokes. Requests for sexual favors used as a condition of employment or to affect other personnel decisions, such as promotion or compensation. Display of offensive materials. Forms of mental or physical harassment can also take place by means of suggestion, innuendo and double entendre.

5.3 Harassment can be a single severe incident or a persistent pattern of behavior where the purpose or the effect is to create a hostile, offensive or intimidating work environment.

5.4 Allegations of harassment should be taken seriously and reported to the pastor, principal or head of the institution. Such reports can also be made to the Chancery.

## **6. Records and Information**

*Confidentiality will be maintained in creating, storing, accessing, transferring and disposing of parish and institutional files.*

6.1 Sacramental records shall be regarded as confidential. When compiling and publishing parish and institutional statistical information from these records, great care must be taken to preserve the anonymity of individuals.

6.2 Decisions concerning requests for access to sacramental records will be left to the discretion of the pastor or the head of the institution.

6.2.1 Only those authorized by the pastor or the head of the institution to access records and supervise their use shall process such requests.

6.2.2 Information regarding adoption and legitimacy remains confidential.

6.3 Parish and institutional financial records are confidential unless review is required by the Diocese.

6.4 Individual contribution records of the parish or institution shall be regarded as private and shall be maintained in the strictest confidence.

## **7. Conflicts of Interest**

*Clergy, staff and volunteers should avoid situations that might present a conflict of interest. Even the appearance of a conflict of interest can call integrity and professional*



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*conduct into question.*

7.1 Clergy, staff and volunteers should disclose all relevant factors that potentially could create a conflict of interest.

7.2 Clergy, staff and volunteers should inform all parties when a real or potential conflict of interest arises. Resolution of the issues must protect the person receiving ministerial services.

7.2.1 No clergy, staff or volunteer should take advantage of anyone to whom they are providing services in order to further their personal, religious, political or business interests.

7.2.2 Pastoral counselors should not provide counseling services to anyone with whom they have a business, professional or social relationship. When this is unavoidable, the client must be protected. The counselor must establish and maintain clear, appropriate boundaries.

7.2.3 When pastoral counseling or spiritual direction services are provided to two or more people who have a relationship with each other, the pastoral counselor or spiritual director must:

- Clarify with all parties the nature of each relationship.
- Anticipate any conflict of interest.
- Take appropriate actions to eliminate the conflict. Obtain from all parties written consent to continue services.

7.3 Conflicts of interest may also arise when a pastoral counselor's or spiritual director's independent judgment is impaired by:

- Prior dealings.
- Becoming personally involved.
- Becoming an advocate for one (person) against another. In these circumstances, the pastoral counselor or spiritual director shall advise the parties that he/she can no longer provide services and refer them to another pastoral counselor or spiritual director.

## **8. Reporting Ethical or Professional Misconduct**

*Clergy, staff and volunteers have a duty to report their own ethical or professional misconduct and the misconduct of others.*

8.1 Clergy, staff and volunteers must hold each other accountable for maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards. When there is an indication of illegal actions by clergy, staff or volunteers, you should notify the proper civil authorities

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immediately, as well as the pastor or head of the institution and, if desirable, the Chancery.

8.2 When an uncertainty exists about whether a situation or course of conduct violates the Code of Pastoral Conduct or other religious, moral or ethical principles, consult with:

- Peers.
- Others knowledgeable about ethical issues.
- The Chancery.

8.3 When it appears that a member of the clergy, a staff member or a volunteer has violated the Code of Pastoral Conduct or other religious, moral or ethical principles:

- Report the issue to a supervisor or next higher authority.
- Refer the matter directly to the Chancery.

8.4 The obligation of pastoral counselors and spiritual directors to report client misconduct is subject to the duty of confidentiality. However, any agreement or duty to maintain confidentiality must yield to the need to report misconduct that threatens the safety, health or well-being of any of the persons involved except as provided for in Section 2.6.

## **9. Administration**

*Employers and supervisors shall treat clergy, staff and volunteers justly in the day-to-day administrative operations of their ministries.*

9.1 Personnel and other administrative decisions made by clergy, staff and volunteers shall meet civil and canon law obligations and also reflect Catholic social teaching and the Code of Pastoral Conduct.

9.2 No clergy, staff or volunteer shall use his/her position to exercise unreasonable or inappropriate power and authority.

## **10. Staff or Volunteer Well-being**

*Clergy, staff and volunteers have the duty to be responsible for their own spiritual, physical, mental and emotional health.*

10.1 Clergy, staff and volunteers should be aware of warning signs that indicate potential problems with their own spiritual, physical, mental and/or emotional health.

10.2 Clergy, staff and volunteers should seek help immediately whenever they notice behavioral or emotional warning signs in their own professional and/or personal

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lives.

10.3 Clergy, staff and volunteers must address their own spiritual needs. Support from a spiritual director is highly recommended.

10.4 Inappropriate or illegal use of alcohol and drugs is prohibited.

## **DIOCESE OF ALEXANDRIA**

### **CODE OF CONDUCT FOR WORKING WITH MINORS**

The conduct of those working or volunteering in Diocesan parishes and affiliated agencies and programs must reflect the mission of the Church to teach Christ's truth and extend His love and care to all. In addition, there is a heightened concern that those working with minors recognize the importance of legal, professional, and responsible conduct.

In my work with minors in the Diocese of Alexandria, I solemnly promise to:

- Engage in positive behavior and maintain appropriate physical and emotional boundaries in my relationship with minors. This includes but is not limited to the following behaviors:
- Not engage in any covert or overt sexual behaviors with any minor; avoid any sexual innuendo, sexual or indecent comments; not show any indecent material or images to minors.
- Be attentive to warning signs of the potential violation of sexual boundaries or the abuse of minors.
- Not meet alone with minors in an unsupervised or private setting.
- Not engage in grooming behavior (i.e., conduct intended to build trust with a child and the adults around them to create opportunities to be alone with and sexually abuse the child).
- Not permit any minor in my personal private space, such as sleeping quarters, living areas, and vehicles.
- Not give gifts to a minor that shows undue favoritism or suggests a special relationship.

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- Avoid any inappropriate physical contact with a minor, particularly any touch of a sexual nature.
  - Avoid all forms of corporal punishment or physical discipline: all interactions must uphold the child's dignity and safe environment standards.
  - Not have private or inappropriate contact with a minor through electronic communication or social media.
  - Not use or be under the influence of alcohol or drugs (including cannabis) when working with minors.
  - Not to possess or distribute any indecent images of minors (including simulated or computer-generated images), particularly child sexual abuse images (so-called "child pornography").
  - Ensure that I always interact with minors according to my position and not as their peer.
  - Abide by all applicable Diocesan policies regarding child protection and sexual misconduct.
  - Report all suspected cases of abuse or neglect of minors according to civil law and Diocesan policy.
  - Notify my supervisor of any violations of this code or of any Diocesan policy, any violations of appropriate boundaries, and any information necessary to prevent a minor being harmed.
  - Cooperate fully with any investigation into any allegation of suspected abuse or neglect of a minor.
  - Participate in training sessions required by the Diocese to foster a safe environment and to prevent the sexual abuse of children and young people.
  - Submit to a background check, according to Diocesan policy.
  - Work within the limits of my position, professional competence, and, if applicable, licenses, certifications, etc.; abide by the codes of conduct of these positions and professions; seek appropriate referrals and consultations when issues arise that need the assistance of other professionals; and readily seek the advice of supervisors when appropriate.
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I understand that any violation of this Code may result in disciplinary action up to and including removal from my position. Such disciplinary action will be taken in accord with the personnel policies of the Diocese or the parish or agency where I work or serve, and any applicable collective bargaining agreements.

I understand that it is the express policy of the Diocese to alert appropriate civil authorities of any suspected inappropriate or criminal behavior towards minors and to cooperate fully with any investigations of such suspected behavior by any competent authority.

I understand that under Diocesan policy, the term “minor” means a person who has not yet attained eighteen years of age; an adult who habitually lacks the use of reason; a person of any age who lacks the capacity to give consent due to a mental or developmental condition or disability; or a person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist an offense.

## **DIOCESE OF ALEXANDRIA**

### **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

#### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The use of technology is rapidly growing to form, inform, and, with God’s grace, transform the adults, teens and children of our diocese.

Every day, countless conversations take place online about the Catholic faith on social media, and the Diocese of Alexandria encourages Church and School personnel to join these conversations to proclaim the Gospel. The Diocese of Alexandria also respects the rights of Church and School personnel to use social media as a form of self-expression.

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.

These guidelines apply to all Church and School personnel (employees, clergy and all volunteers), and to their use of social networking sites, blogs, or any other kind of social media. Other websites are usually not considered social media, but this policy also applies to the creation, content and use of parish, school, and ministry websites, as well as to online discussion by any Church and School personnel of matters pertaining to ministry.

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## ENGAGING ONLINE WITH THE LOVE OF CHRIST

*Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.  
1 Corinthians 10:31*

Any online post, comment, photo, song, video, blog, or podcast by Church and School personnel on an official ministry site, or which connects the employee or volunteer to a Diocesan entity, must reflect the values of our Catholic faith.

*Faith comes by what is heard.  
Romans 10:17*

Church and School personnel should be sensitive to being clear about the intended audiences for social media conversations on personal social media accounts. Conversations containing personal views intended for a specific limited audience should not be misinterpreted as a representative viewpoint of a larger institution.

To prevent this type of confusion, it is important to cultivate relationships online so that professional and personal boundaries are clear. Church and School personnel who use social media in a personal capacity should not present themselves in a way that could be misinterpreted as having the same authority as a social media account used by church or school leadership in a professional capacity (e.g., a Facebook public figure page for the Pastor of a parish, the Twitter account for a school principal).

*Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.  
Galatians 4:5*

When participating on social media, be sure to use sound judgment and common sense. Don't forget that anything published on a personal website is no different from making such information available in any public forum. Use discretion when posting about sensitive topics and events.

Care should always be taken in accepting or adding 'friends' on personal social media accounts. Be sensitive to activity and engagement on social media, as many social media networks share your "Likes", comments and other actions with your friends and followers.

*The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones.  
Luke 16:10*

Make sure you are always honest and accurate when posting information or news, and if you make a mistake, correct it quickly. Be open about any previous posts you have

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altered. Remember that the Internet archives almost everything; therefore, even deleted postings can be searched. Never post any information or rumors that you know to be false, especially regarding parishioners, students, other Church and School personnel, or the Diocese or a Diocesan entity.

*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*  
*Matthew 22:39*

Do not post obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory, defamatory, trolling, cyberbullying, or otherwise potentially scandalous comments, links, and/or images, or materials which could discredit or cause embarrassment to the Catholic Diocese of Alexandria or its affiliates, employees, vendors, partners, agencies, schools, or others.

## **ESTABLISHING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR A PARISH, MINISTRY OR SCHOOL**

When creating a social media site for your parish, ministry or school:

- **Establish and utilize official social media accounts for parish, ministry or school communication** – Official Church and School social media accounts and other official communications channels should be the first and primary source for official parish and school news (e.g., event invitations, parish announcements, etc...) and not the personal account of a Church or School employee or volunteer.

- **Get to know the social media network** - Be aware of the terms of use, age restrictions, and privacy options and controls for each site prior to establishing a ministry presence. Keep in mind that, in certain circumstances, the Diocese or a Diocesan entity may be bound to terms of use which apply to an official social media account.

- **Choose at least two administrators** - Two Safe Environment cleared adults should be granted access and trained to act as administrators for each official website/social media account. One of the administrators must be a parish or diocesan employee. Administrators must have full access to all account or site settings and must have complete access to all communications to and from the official site or account.

- **Get approval** – Make sure to get approval from a Supervisor before creating a new social media site for a ministry, parish, school, or other Diocesan entity.

- **Monitor and review sites on a regular basis** - Administrators should monitor all engagement and comments on social media posts, and respond promptly to issues and questions. Keep Supervisors in the loop when issues arise that may need action

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by parish, school, or Diocesan staff. Supervisors are ultimately responsible for the administration and content of official social media sites, and should maintain a list of all social media accounts within their particular ministry, parish, school, or other Diocesan entity. Supervisors are also responsible for regularly monitoring social media sites for their organization.

• **Obtain permission before posting content** - 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.

***Certain content is not allowed on official social media sites:***

• **Confidential and Proprietary Information** – Church and School personnel are prohibited from disclosing any information that is understood to be held in confidence by the Diocese of Alexandria or its entities, except by explicit permission of the appropriate authority. This specifically includes personal information regarding parishioners, students, or others involved in a Diocesan or Diocesan entity ministry which you learn in the course of your ministry work but have not received specific permission from the subject of the information to disclose using a specific online forum.

For example, it is a violation of this policy to post to a parish Facebook page information regarding a homebound parishioner's medical condition disclosed to a visiting minister unless the parishioner has specifically authorized sharing of the information on the parish Facebook page.

• **Unauthorized Use of Trademarks and Logos** - Do not use Diocese or Diocesan entity trademarks or logos in any way that could reasonably suggest official Diocesan or Diocesan entity sponsorship or endorsement unless you are specifically authorized to do so. Do not use trademarks or logos of any other person or organization without the permission of the owner.

• **Outside Businesses** – Official social media sites may not be used for conducting or promoting outside business.

Church and School personnel should avoid conducting outside businesses through personal social media accounts or websites in a way that implies sponsorship or endorsement of the business by the Diocese or a Diocesan entity.

For this same reason, clergy should avoid conducting outside businesses through



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social media accounts or websites which identify them as clergy of the Diocese of Alexandria.

## **COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN**

The primary purpose of communications between Church and School personnel and children engaged in ministry on social media is to provide information related to a ministry, school or event and to encourage online engagement and evangelization, and not for personal or private interaction between adults and children.

Church and School personnel should always be considerate of boundaries and ensure they are observed, particularly in communications with young people and with use of social media in a youth ministry or school setting.

- Private channels and private communication create an environment that puts both children and adults at risk. To help ensure that all communication on social media channels remains positive and safe, channels used by Church and School personnel to communicate with children regarding ministry activities must be public and all communication on or through them must be public. This enables administrators to monitor all communication and helps ensure there is no inappropriate communication between adults and children or between children themselves. Therefore, no private channels (e.g., private Facebook groups or invite-only YouTube channels) are acceptable as channels for communication between Church and School personnel and children who are connected in any way to ministry or school related activities.

- Official ministry, school and personal social media accounts should not be used to contact children privately (e.g., Facebook Messenger, Twitter Direct Message). Online “chatting” with children is not permitted (Google Hangouts, etc.).

- Use of Smartphone and tablet messaging apps (Snapchat, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, etc.) and “anonymous” apps (YikYak, Whisper, etc.) are forbidden for use as communication tools for parishes, schools and ministries due to the lack of accountability and ability to retain records of communications on these apps. This policy also prohibits the use of any such apps for communications between any Church or School personnel and any child connected to any ministry or school related activity.

- Church and School personnel must not initiate or accept “friend” requests with children connected to ministry or school related activities using their personal profiles on Facebook or other social media platforms or apps. Children should instead be encouraged to “Like” and participate in public discussions on ministry and school Facebook pages and other public social media for parishes, schools or ministries.

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- If a child directly contacts Church or School personnel engaged in ministry through a personal social media account, the ministry or school account should be used to reply. In unusual cases where a personal account is used to respond, such as an emergency situation which requires urgent communication, Church and School personnel should maintain copies of all such messages and must promptly provide copies of the communication to a Supervisor.

- Parents must have access to everything provided to their children and be made aware of how social media is being used to communicate with their children as well as how to access the sites.

- Church personnel are forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information of any child under the age of eighteen. Personal identifiable information includes but is not limited to: full name, home address, email address, telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a child or that would jeopardize their safety or well-being in any way.

- As an exception to this policy, a child whose parent or other legally responsible adult has signed a current Video/Image Release form may be identified by name in photographs or videos posted to an official social media account unless the child or his/her parent has requested otherwise.

- When sharing photographs or videos of children, verifiable consent should always be obtained from the parent or guardian before images are shared online. Verifiable consent can take the form of: a Video/Image Release form, an email from a parent or guardian, or spoken permission by a parent or guardian in the presence of another adult, preferably an employee of the Diocese, School or Diocesan entity.

- When children form their own social media groups, adults should not join these groups.

- Counseling of children through social media is not permitted.

- Electronic communication is not intended to be the primary means of communicating with minors. In extraordinary circumstances when using email, text messages or other electronic communication with a minor, a second safe environment cleared adult must be included. Except in emergency situations, this communication can only take place between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m.

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## **PROTECTING CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS ONLINE**

Church and School personnel of the Diocese of Alexandria and Diocesan entities are expected to comply with this policy, the Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of Alexandria, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, and all other applicable law.

Consistent with the Diocese of Alexandria Safe Environment Program, communications with vulnerable adults should follow the same guidelines as communications with children.

Please visit these websites for more information about the protection of children online:

- Catholic Diocese of Alexandria Safe Environment Program <https://www.diocesealex.org/our-faith/safe-environment/>
- The USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/charter.cfm>
- The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors <https://www.tutelaminorum.org/>

## **AUTHORIZATION TO SPEAK FOR DIOCESE OR A DIOCESAN ENTITY**

All matters of the employing entity that require news releases or public statements must be reviewed and coordinated with the Director of Public Relations.

### ***Communication in Crisis Situations***

In the event where media inquiries are urgent or in a crisis situation, the Director of Public Relations will serve as spokesperson for the Diocese. The Vicar General acts as spokesperson when the Director of Public Relations is not available. No statement may be made on behalf of the diocese or any employing entity unless it has been approved by the Director of Public Relations of the Diocese.

## **POLICY ENFORCEMENT**

Ultimately, although Church and School personnel are solely responsible for materials they post online, social media activity by Church and School personnel

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can have adverse consequences for the Diocese and its entities. Church and School personnel must refrain from any actions, through public or private social media or other online communications, that could be an embarrassment, cause scandal, or bring discredit to the Diocese or a ministry, parish, school, or other Diocesan entity. Inappropriate postings, which may include discriminatory remarks, harassment, threats of violence, or similar unacceptable or unlawful conduct, will not be tolerated, whether such postings are made using official or personal social media accounts.

Before creating online content, Church and School personnel should consider some of the risks and rewards that are involved, bearing in mind that any online conduct that adversely affects job performance or otherwise adversely affects other Church or School personnel, the Diocese or a Diocesan entity, parishioners, students, or others involved in a Diocese or Diocesan entity ministry may result in disciplinary action.

Violations of this policy, the Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of Alexandria, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, or other applicable law may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination, for an employee or cleric, or removal from position, if a volunteer.

By acknowledging receipt of this policy and accepting employment or a volunteer position with the Diocese of Alexandria or any of its entities, each employee and volunteer agrees that he or she will, upon request, provide the Diocese of Alexandria access to any social media account which the Diocese of Alexandria reasonably believes has been involved in a violation of this policy, the Safe Environment Program of the Diocese of Alexandria, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, or other applicable law, policy, or standard.

The Diocese of Alexandria 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.

## APPENDIX I: DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

### *Social Media Glossary*

- **Blog:** A blog (a contraction of the term “web log”) is a type of website with chronologically posted articles of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. “Blog” can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.

- **Cyberbullying:** The use of social networks to repeatedly harm or harass other

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people in a deliberate manner. Cyberbullying could be limited to posting rumors or gossips about a person in the internet bringing about hatred in other's minds; or it may go to the extent of personally identifying victims and publishing materials severely defaming and humiliating them.

- **Mobile App:** A computer program downloaded to a device that is designed to run only on smartphones, tablet computers and other mobile devices. Examples: Snapchat, WhatsApp

- **Social Media:** Mobile and web-based technologies, through which individuals and communities distribute, co-create, share, and modify user-generated content. Examples but not limited to: Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Telegram, Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), LinkedIn, YouTube, Google+, etc....

- **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 but not limited to: Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Yelp, Telegram

- **Trolling:** Sowing discord in an online community by starting arguments or upsetting people, by posting inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response.

- **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.

### *Definitions of Positions and People*

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

- **Child/Minor:** Any person who has not reached his or her 18th birthday or any individual over the age of eighteen who habitually lacks the use of reason.

- **Church and School personnel:** Bishops, priests, deacons, religious, seminarians, pastoral ministers, administrators, lay employees, officers, directors, trustees, governors, members and volunteers in the Diocese of Alexandria or a Diocesan entity, including a

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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.

• **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.

• **Volunteer:** An adult who works without financial or material gain on behalf of the Diocese of Alexandria 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).

• **Vulnerable Adult:** any adult that is physically, mentally, or emotionally impaired, whether temporary or long-term, or that is disabled, or that is otherwise unable to function in one or more ways that result in an impaired ability to respond as a typical adult is expected to function. A vulnerable adult may also be someone who comes for Spiritual Direction and confession depending on the person’s mental, emotional or psychological frame of mind at the time, as well as upon his/her physical condition.

*(revised January 2026)*

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