The Archdiocese of Milwaukee recognizes that in today’s environment the use of the Internet, social networking and digital communication are important and wishes to take advantage of these ways of communication as a means to enhance our ministry and educational needs.

In June 2010, Archbishop Jerome E. Listecki issued the Social Networking Policy for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. The following information outlines practices and guidelines to be used with the Social Networking Policy in order to maintain healthy boundaries and safe environments in a virtual world.

Social Networking in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Visibility and Accountability

It must be understood that, at all times, activities on behalf of the Church in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee on a social networking site must mirror God’s love and the teachings of the Church.

Using the Internet on behalf of the Church or in the Church’s name should be seen as an educational and evangelizing tool to invite the people of God into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ through the promotion of school and ministerial programs.

Online or offline there must always be respect for human dignity.

Transparency and Boundaries

Transparency means anything the administrator of a social networking site posts or communicates is visible to anyone who has access to that site. It must remain true and verifiable. All interactions on the Internet need to remain transparent. To ensure transparency, the administrator of a site must not use a pseudonym; real names must be used.

Social media is a powerful tool for communication. However, these tools must not be used for: 1) selling of goods or services 2) defaming the character of any individual or institution 3) divulging any personal information about children that would jeopardize their safety or well-being in any way 4) personal attacks of any kind.
Audiences can be students, parents, co-workers, supervisors, just to name a few. Posts should only be what a person would want the world to see. Once something is posted on a social networking site, it becomes available to all. Once something becomes a part of the World Wide Web, it is impossible to remove it from the Internet completely.

Exercise caution with regard to exaggeration, colorful language, copyrighted materials and derogatory remarks or characterizations.

Establishing a Social Networking Site

Every parish/school should be aware of and abide by the Acceptable Use Policy of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

All appropriate individuals at the parish and/or school (e.g., pastor, principal) must be aware of, and give approval for using a social networking site for parish and/or school programs.

The adult supervisor of the site should always remain in control of the conversations and comments.

Pay close attention to the site’s security and allow only those who are approved participants access to the site.

Making parents or guardians aware of a parish’s and/or school’s anticipated use of a social networking site can take the form of a written letter or an email stating the intended purpose of the site as well as how the parent or guardian can access the site.

“Friending” on Social Networking Sites

In a virtual world, a “friend” can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate through that particular medium. People you classify as “friends” have the capability of downloading, copying and sharing your information with others.

Adults who wish to use a social networking Web site in order to connect with the youth to whom they minister are strongly encouraged to use a closed group account that youth may join. Youth may then be invited to join a group rather than requesting to “friend” an adult on his/her personal account. The purpose of the separate accounts/profiles is to create a line of privacy and maintain
A minor should always be the one who is requesting to be a “friend” on a social networking site. Due to the disparity of power between youth and adults, a minor may not feel he/she has the ability to decline requests from adults.

Individual personal profiles on social networking sites should not be used for ministry or work related projects. Any adult using a social networking site ministering to children or youth should set very strict privacy settings.

There are risks with social networking, especially with blurring boundaries of personal and professional relationships.

Know your friends/fans/followers before you accept them on your social network site.

When using social media you should weigh whether an email or post will put your effectiveness as a role model at risk.

Be aware of the Children’s Online Privacy Act. This is federal legislation that oversees how Websites interact with children under the age of 13. You can find out more at http://www.ftc.gov/privacy/privacyinitiatives/childrens.html.

**Mandatory Reporting Responsibilities and Inappropriate Content**

Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation or youth apply in the virtual world as much as they do in the physical.

Mandatory reporting laws apply not only if there is an occurrence between an adult and a minor but also applies when there is unlawful or suspicious behavior between two or more minors (e.g., harassment, cyberbullying, sending and/or receiving pornographic images).

If an action or behavior occurs off-campus or off-site, and it is the opinion that it has done or has the potential to do harm or adversely affect or jeopardize the safety of others, action must be taken.

Any inappropriate material raising suspicion that a minor is being abused/neglected/exploited should immediately be reported to the proper authorities. The material on the site should be
Inappropriate material or content that details inappropriate behavior should be addressed and removed from the site.

**Use of Pictures**

Do not post personal identifiable information or pictures of minors *without verifiable consent* from their parents or guardians. This includes full names, home addresses, email addresses, telephone numbers or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a minor.

Pictures should only be posted with parent/guardian permission. Pictures of minors should only be posted in groups of five (5) or more. Minor should not be identified by name; only by group (e.g., soccer team, 4th grade class).

Do not “tag” a picture with a minor’s information. Tagging is defined as a keyword or term added to a photo, video or blog post to help users find related topics or media either through browsing on the site or as a term to make your entry more relevant to search engines.