

**Diocese of Cork and Ross  
Safeguarding Children**

***Social Media Policy***

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The Diocese of Cork and Ross recognises the impact, involvement and influence that social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have on the lives of young people (under 18 years). We also acknowledge their role in the way which young people interact with each other. There is great potential in the utilisation of these platforms to aid Parishes / Youth Ministry in deepening relationships with young people, encouraging them in their faith, and promoting opportunities and events for the Diocese of Cork and Ross. Our utilisation of these social media platforms will also aid in promoting positively the work that is actively being done by the Diocese of Cork and Ross and Youth Ministry.

However, we acknowledge the dangers and potential risks these platforms can pose to both our young people and to our Parish / Youth Ministry personnel. Therefore we recognise that the safeguarding of young people, parish personnel must be at the heart of our social media usage.

## **2.0 Guidelines for Parishes / Youth Ministry within the Diocese of Cork and Ross Using Social Media Platforms with Young People (Under 18's).**

### **2.1 Facebook / Messenger**

Any Parish / Youth Ministry Facebook account must be used for Parish / Youth Ministry purposes only and not as a Parish / Youth Ministry personnel personal account. All messages must be saved and kept, (both incoming and outgoing) and 'instant messenger' must not be used for one on one communication with young people. All contact with young people using Facebook must be kept appropriate. What is deemed as appropriate communication will be set out below. The Facebook account must not be utilised after 11pm.

All one to one communication with young people must be kept in the public eye in order to safeguard both the young person and the worker. Communications

must be done through the ‘wall’ function without encryption and it is advised that this is utilised to reply to any private messages which young people may have sent to the page. Messenger must not be used for individual or group chats. In all communications Emoji’s must not be used e.g. LOL, BRB as these may be misinterpreted by parents, guardians or other young people. In the event that a public wall post is inappropriate for responding to a young person then the Parish / Youth Ministry employee should respond in the following ways;

- a) Contact the parent/guardian.
- b) Contact the Director of Safeguarding.
- c) In an emergency contact the appropriate authorities.

Parish / Youth Ministry personnel are not permitted to direct message or accept/send friend requests to young people from their own personal Facebook account unless the young people are known to them personally outside of their role with the Diocese of Cork and Ross.

## **2.2 Twitter**

Twitter accounts must only be used by the Parish / Youth Ministry only. Tweets sent from these accounts must be in line with the ethos and guiding principles of the Diocese of Cork and Ross. It is not to be utilised to endorse or promote the Parish / Youth Ministry personnel own interests. All ‘tweets’ must be saved and not deleted. All communication must be kept appropriate. The Twitter account must not be utilised after 11pm. Young people are free to ‘follow’ Parish / Youth Ministry Twitter account however Parishes or Youth Ministry cannot ‘follow’ any young person back. The accounts the Parish / Youth Ministry are allowed to ‘follow’ must be organisations or official twitter accounts e.g. @Pope Francis, @Alpha.

All communication with young people via Twitter must be done publicly and on the ‘twitter feed’. Twitter direct messaging must never be utilised. In all tweets Emoji’s must not be used e.g. LOL, YOLO, ☺ as these may be misinterpreted by parents, guardians or other young people. However the use of appropriate ‘hash-tags’ is allowed, e.g. #EasterSunday, #theLordisrisen.

Parish / Youth Ministry personnel are not permitted to direct message or accept/send friend requests to young people from their own personal Facebook account unless the young people are known to them personally outside of their role with the Diocese of Cork and Ross.

### **2.3 Instagram**

Any Instagram account must only be used by the Parish / Youth Ministry. Photos uploaded onto the Instagram must be in line with the ethos and guiding principles of the Diocese of Cork and Ross. It is not to be utilised to showcase the Parish / Youth Ministry personnel's own interests. All photos uploaded to Instagram must be saved in a folder on the computer hard drive. All uploads must be appropriate. The Instagram account is not to be utilised after 11pm.

Young people are free to 'follow' any Parishes / Youth Ministry on Instagram however Parishes / Youth Ministry cannot 'follow' any young person back. The accounts the Diocese of Cork and Ross Youth Ministry are allowed to 'follow' must be organisations or official Instagram accounts e.g. Net Ministries.

Replying to comments on Instagram should be restricted. Parish / Youth Ministry personnel may reply to a comment on the relevant Instagram post only if it is a query about an event. Replying to general comments is not allowed. Any replies in the comments section must not contain Emoji's as these may be misinterpreted by parents, guardians or other young people. Appropriate 'hash tags' are allowed, e.g. #Christmas.

Employees are not permitted to 'follow' young people from their own personal Instagram account unless they are known personally to the employee outside of the Diocese of Cork and Ross / Youth Ministry, or before they began their term of employment with the Diocese of Cork and Ross.

## 2.4 Snapchat

The use of Snapchat by any Diocesan Group/Parish/Youth Ministry Group is prohibited. Snapchat is a picture and video sharing app with an ephemeral nature. This means that the pictures/videos taken and shared are only viewable for up to 10 seconds before they disappear from the recipient's phone – images and messages cannot be saved on the app. Because of its nature it is impossible to safeguard the use of Snapchat, hence the decision to implement a no use policy in relation to this social media app.

## 2.5 WhatsApp

WhatsApp can be a great tool for creating group messages between young people however when doing this make sure you have sought written parental permission first. If the youth group is made up of both over and under 18's – a separate WhatsApp chat group should be set up for both age groups.

At least 2 adults (who have been Garda vetted) must be part of a WhatsApp group chat. Only vetted leaders can be part of a group with u18's.

As a young person leaves the youth group, they should immediately be deleted off the group WhatsApp chat.

When using WhatsApp group chats you should be aware that adding people to the group discloses their mobile number to the rest of the group.

WhatsApp allows you to back up your chats, as a leader we stress that you do this.

\* Age Requirement. To use WhatsApp, you must be [at least 16 years old](#)

## 3.0 General Guidelines

- Be responsible. When in doubt about the content or tone of a post, leave it out. Although the style of social media text is informal, text should avoid sounding immature or unprofessional.
- Be aware of privacy settings. Monitor postings regularly by a named agreed administrator or webmasters who will remove posts that do not abide by site

policy or Diocesan standards. Do not allow any obscene, harassing, offensive, derogatory or defamatory comments and images which reflect/discredit or cause embarrassment to the Diocese, its employees/volunteers, affiliates, schools and others on any site.

- There must be at least two site administrators / webmasters for each site/social media app to allow for rapid response and continuous monitoring and updating.
- Always comply with copyright laws and requirements when posting anything on Diocesan social media accounts.
- It is requested that the "no tagging" option be set on any and all social media (or identified by name in a photograph). Visitor's options should be limited to commenting only and not posting of pictures or videos.
- While anyone is free to create and maintain personal websites and social media content, employees of the Diocese of Cork and Ross should be mindful that even personal sites must reflect Catholic and Diocesan values.