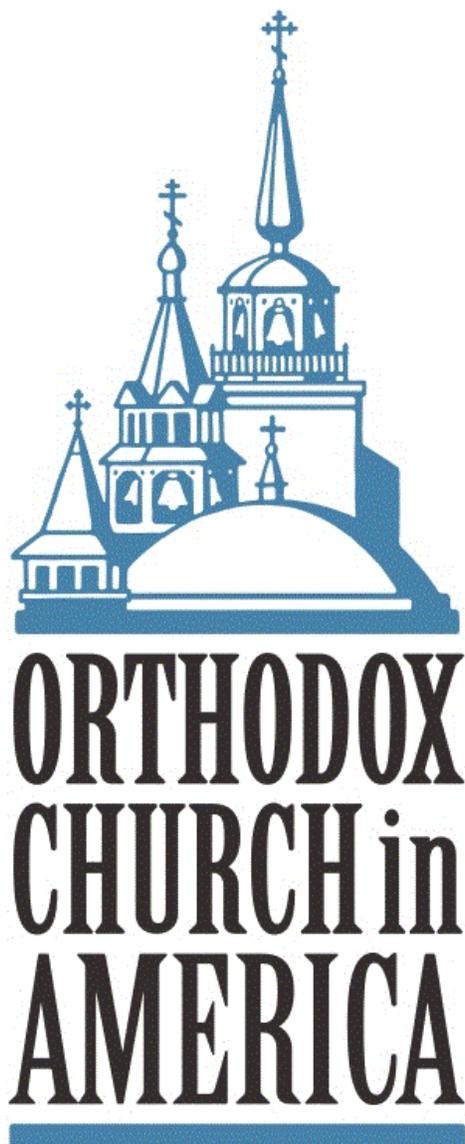


# **Social Media Guidelines for Clergy and Lay Leaders Orthodox Church in America**



**Approved by the Metropolitan Council on September 19, 2018  
Blessed by the Holy Synod of Bishops on October 24, 2018**

## **1. Introduction**

These Guidelines are promulgated by the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America for implementation by the Central Church Administration, ministries, dioceses, parishes, clergy, lay leaders, staff and volunteers who work within the institutional, social, and legal environment of the Church. They should be adapted for use in these various contexts in order to ensure protection for the workers, youth and adults who labor for the Church in these varying circumstances. While no guidelines of this nature can be dispositive of all possible issues which may arise in a rapidly changing legal and insurance context, these guidelines are meant to inform and assist those whose functions within the Church are implicated by various social media platforms. All entities are recommended to adopt these guidelines and abide by them in order to protect the interests of the Orthodox Church in America. These guidelines supersede those issued by the Holy Synod on October 6, 2011 and found here: <https://oca.org/holy-synod/statements/holy-synod/guidelines-for-clergy-use-of-online-social-networking>

Social media is a reality in today's world. There are many innovative means of communicating the message of the Church and to keep connected with others who share in accomplishing the mission of the Church. Clergy, adults and youth who frequently use social media must ensure that it is used responsibly and take measures to protect the Church and those with whom the Church interacts with on a regular basis. The exercise of personal responsibility is therefore of the utmost concern, especially for those in leadership positions within the Church. Disregard of this personal responsibility can place the Church and her many ministries in jeopardy. While these guidelines are not meant to restrict the freedom of expression of social media users, they are meant to raise awareness of the responsibility of the individual in such communications and to enhance the basic understanding of what the Church represents in the world.

Any issues in social media which violate canonical and legal standards will be addressed by appropriate Church authorities.

## **2. Definition of Social Media**

Social media is defined as the various computer, web or mobile based applications which enable individuals and communities to communicate with each other, share information and interact on various platforms and media. Such social media examples include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat as well as emails, video based platforms, blogs and bulletin boards. This list is not exhaustive due to the ever changing technical environment which characterizes social media but the basic rule is that social media includes any electronic platform that is used to communicate with others in a private or public manner.

## **3. General Assumptions**

- A. Clergy have a unique power dynamic with people with whom they have a pastoral relationship, and therefore have a special responsibility to guard how they interact with those people.
- B. All communications sent digitally (email, social networking sites, notes or posts, etc.) are not confidential and may be shared or reposted to others.

- C. Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent, as a window in the door provides transparency in the physical world.
- D. In the virtual world healthy boundaries and practices must be adhered to just as they should be in the physical world.
- E. In the virtual world, “friend” can mean anyone with whom there is communication through that medium. In the physical world, friend can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self-disclosure, mutuality and expectations for relationship. The difference should be recognized and respected.
- F. Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world.

#### **4. Social Media Best Practices**

- A. Remember that all internet postings are permanent and that despite any efforts to delete them, they may still be found online. Any social media postings need to be carefully considered and evaluated before posting and the poster must appreciate and understand their impact and accessibility beyond the directed audience.
- B. If there is a doubt as to whether to post a particular item, consult first with the appropriate hierarchical authority. It is better to be cautious and considerate rather than having to retract a communication after the posting. Use common sense.
- C. For personal protection and the protection of the Orthodox Church in America, it is prohibited from using internal or external social media channels to discuss confidential items, legal matters outside of the context of the attorney-client privilege, litigation, or the organization's financial performance. Confidential information includes anything labeled as such or information not available to the public. When asked by others to discuss any of these matters, the following statement can be issued with the approval of the appropriate parties: "Our social media policy only allows authorized individuals to discuss these types of matters. I can refer you to an authorized individual if you'd like to ask them," and then refer the question to the proper office or individual. In the case of the Orthodox Church in America that would include the Crisis Management Team at the central Church offices. For diocesan and parish matters, refer to the diocesan authorities.
- D. Be open and honest in communications. The Orthodox Church in America expects personal discretion and responsibility in the use of social media which includes respecting the trust of those with whom you are engaged. However, these policies are not meant to interfere with legal rights, expression of free speech or engagement in concerted or protected activities. Anonymity on social media does not absolve one of personal and corporate responsibility
- E. Respect personal privacy, coworkers' privacy, and the privacy of the Church by not providing personal or confidential information by means of social media without permission. Also, employees or volunteers are prohibited from sharing anything via social media channels that could violate the personal privacy or assumption of confidentiality of another employee or volunteer.

- F. Only those officially designated to do so may use social media to speak on behalf of the Church or a Church-related entity in an official capacity, though employees/volunteers may use social media to speak for themselves individually. If and when designated persons use social media to communicate on behalf of the Church, they should clearly identify themselves as a Church employee or volunteer.
- G. Utmost sensitivity and discretion must be exercised when communicating with youth through any digital or social media. Specifically, communication with minors must demonstrate transparency and take place in a group setting (not personal one on one communications). If it is necessary to send an individual message outside of a public area to a minor, copy another adult or a parent. Do not initiate a one-on-one relationship (such as “friending” from a personal profile) with a minor.
- H. Do not violate copyright and fair use laws and do not plagiarize another's work. Obtain permission to use any material created by someone else.
- I. Do not use the Orthodox Church in America’s email address or social media channels for personal use.
- J. Harassment, threats, intimidation, ethnic slurs, personal insults, pornography, obscenity, racial or religious intolerance, abuse, and any other form of behavior prohibited by law or morality are also prohibited via social media channels. Do not engage in any such behavior and do not make or comment on any such behavior, comments, or remarks.
- K. There may be comments on other churches, but made only with respect and without ridiculing, defaming, or libeling them in any way.
- L. If not officially authorized to speak on behalf of the Orthodox Church in America, use a disclaimer stating that what is being communicated is a personal opinion and not that of the Church when engaging in conversation on the Orthodox Church in America’s social media channels. Two sample social media disclaimers include: (1) "I work for the Orthodox Church in America, but this is my personal opinion."; and (2) "I am not an official spokesperson, but my personal opinion is . . . ." This requirement is not meant to interfere with rights to engage in concerted or protected activities but rather to ensure that others can easily distinguish the official position of the Church or the Church's leadership from those of our employees or volunteers.
- M. Users should exercise their best judgment when engaging in social media activities and should be on guard against actions and discussions that could harm the interests of our community, faith, or other persons.
- N. Before posting photographs of any person, obtain his or her permission.
- O. In the event of a violation of this Code of Conduct, report it to the Office of the Metropolitan or the Diocesan authorities. If you have questions about the Code of Conduct, please contact the Office of the Metropolitan.

- P. All of the other policies of the Orthodox Church in America apply to the use of digital and social media. All communication by employees or volunteers of the Church should take into account the OCA's values, reputation, and workplace policies.
- Q. There are to be no usage of anonymous name listings for any employee on the official social media accounts of the Orthodox Church in America. For example, the use of screenname that does not identify yourself and the position in the Church.
- R. The use of the Orthodox Church in America's logos and other proprietary symbols is prohibited without the specific permission from the Office of the Metropolitan.
- S. Any violations of the Code of Conduct of the Orthodox Church in America may result in discipline and/or termination of employment or volunteer affiliation or opportunities. All employees and volunteers in high profile positions of the central Church are required to sign the Code of Conduct form. It is recommended that diocese and parishes use the same standards.
- T. Dioceses, parishes, monasteries and other institutions of the Church should adopt social media policies analogous to those stated here.

## **5. Guidelines for Clergy**

- A. Clergy are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile to shield both adult and youth members from viewing content that may be inappropriate.
- B. Digital communications are appropriate for communicating basic factual information such as the time of an event, agenda for a meeting, text of a document, etc. but are not appropriate for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or require extensive conversation and explanation.
- C. Individual personal profiles of clergy are to be used to interact with real friends, family and peers. Clergy should not submit "friend" requests to parishioners and others to whom they minister. The disparity of power respecting clergy may not give the other person the ability to decline such request.
- D. Clergy are strongly advised not to accept "friend" requests from people with whom they have no prior relationship. "Friends" on social networking sites should be limited to people you have met before in person.
- E. Clergy who want to connect via a social networking website with parishioners are strongly encouraged to set up a group account that all parishioners may join. The purpose of having a personal profile and parish group is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with parishioners and real family, friends and colleagues.
- F. Clergy should consider the impact of declining a "friend" request from parishioners. These encounters may create a tension in "real world" relationships. Clergy can direct "friend" requests from parishioners to the parish's group page.

- G. Clergy who work directly with youth are encouraged to establish church sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with youth members.
- H. Clergy should manage their own profiles, and in the case that they do delegate that work, closely monitor their profiles for potential problematic content.
- I. Clergy should refrain from making political statements, joining political groups, or “becoming fans” of particular political candidates or political causes on social network sites.
- J. Clergy, especially new ones, should examine the pictures/videos that are posted of themselves to make sure they are appropriate to share with the general public
- K. All transcripts of on-line text chats, video chats, blogs or video blogs should be saved when possible.

## **6. Youth Protection Guidelines**

All of the relevant Policies, Standards and Procedures (PSPs) adopted by the Orthodox Church in America for the protection of youth are in force when utilizing social media. All violations of the PSPs through social media carries the same force as if done individually and in person. For further information see the PSPs which can be found at <https://oca.org/about/sexual-misconduct> on the Orthodox Church in America website.

- A. Adults who minister to children and youth are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy standards on any social networking profile.
- B. Adults should not submit “friend” requests to minors or youth. Youth may be unable to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between youth and adults. Youth may ask to be “friends”, and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests.
- C. Adults who want to connect via a social networking website with youth to whom they minister are strongly encouraged to set up a closed group account that youth may join. Youth requesting to “friend” an adult can then be invited to join this group rather than be accepted as a friend on an adult’s personal profile account. The purpose of the adult’s personal profile is to connect only with his or her real friends/relatives/peers. The purpose of these two separate accounts/profiles is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with youth and real family, friends and colleagues.
- D. Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the Church or not) which raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the local Child Protective Services (commonly referred to as CPS though different states may have different names). If the material is on a Church-affiliated site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with DCF and/or police.

- E. Closed, but not “hidden” groups should be used for youth groups (Teen group, OCF, Jr. FOCA, Project Mexico Trip) These groups should have at least two unrelated adult administrators as well as at least two youth administrators.
- F. Invitations to youth to join the group should be made by youth administrators unless a youth previously asked an adult administrator to invite him/her to join the group.
- G. Behavioral expectations should be formulated and clearly posted on the group page.
- H. Inappropriate material that does not raise suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should immediately be removed from the site.
- I. At least one youth and one adult administrator of any group should be charged with regularly policing the group page for inappropriate posts or comments.
- J. Social networking groups for youth should be open to parents of current members.
- K. Parents should be informed that the content of youth pages or groups that are not sponsored by the Church are NOT within the purview of adult youth leaders.
- L. Adult leaders of youth groups and youth who are no longer associated with the group, due to departure, removal from position, or lack of eligibility because they “aged-out” of a program should be immediately removed from digital communication with youth groups via social networking sites, list serves, etc.
- M. No adult should be part of a youth initiated social media group. If the group is initiated and managed solely by youth then it is for youth only.
- N. No counseling of youth shall be provided via social media.
- O. There must be no anonymous or private postings or communications between adults and minor children.

## **7. Guidelines for Posting Pictures and Videos**

Employees and volunteers of the Orthodox Church in America are forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information including pictures of any child under the age of eighteen without verifiable consent of a parent or guardian. Personal identifiable information includes full name, photos, home address, email address, telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a child. Verifiable consent can take the form of a release/permission form that includes use of photographs, an email from a parent or guardian, or oral permission by a parent or guardian in the presence of another adult.

For major events where it may be impossible to get permission from an individual parent or guardian of a child, a general announcement must be made well in advance of the event with instructions as to whom to

contact in order to ensure photographs of their minors will not impermissibly be used. In addition, it is recommended that a signage be placed in an easily accessible location at the event with instructions that photographs of the event will be used on social media and that, if a parent/guardian desires to opt out of the use of images, instructions as to whom to contact in order to take advantage of the “opt out” option.

For parishes, monasteries and other Church institutions, a general sign in the vestibule should be placed where it can be seen by all who enter the Church informing them that images will be used unless the person specifically informs the leadership to opt out of the use of images of their children/minors. Instructions on whom to contact should be prominently displayed.

Parish representatives must inform parishioners when they are being videotaped because Church buildings are not considered public space. Any parish or community that distributes video of its worship services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media should post signs that indicate the service will be broadcast.

## **8. Conclusion**

The purpose of these Guidelines and forms are not to inhibit the free usage and convenience of the use of social media. Rather they are to protect the Church and the end users from the abuse of these platforms. If the basic rules for decency, civility and prosperity are exercised, social media can greatly enhance the interconnectivity of the Church. However, the users of the social media have a right to transparent, honest, civil interaction. These policies can only be effective to the extent that they are followed and respected by all in the Church who use social media.



# Social and Digital Media Code of Conduct

Social media has been defined in many ways. It includes electronic communications and online activities, such as text messages; email; wikis; and social networking like Facebook, Twitter, and the like; and posting comments, such as on blogs. Because of the blur between personal and professional communications, this Code of Conduct helps explain what is recommended and expected.

1. Remember all internet postings are permanent — able to be duplicated and may go viral.
2. Use your common sense. If you wonder whether or not to communicate or post, don't do it until you consult with the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA leadership.
3. For your protection and the protection of the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA, you are prohibited from using internal or external social media channels to discuss confidential items, legal matters, litigation, or the organization's financial performance. Confidential information includes anything labeled as such or information not available to the public. When asked by others to discuss any of these matters, you should relay that "Our social media policy only allows authorized individuals to discuss these types of matters. I can refer you to an authorized individual if you'd like to ask them," and then refer the question to the APPROPRIATE TEAM OR INDIVIDUAL.
4. Be open and honest about who you are when you communicate. The ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA trusts and expects you to exercise personal responsibility whenever you use social media, which includes respecting the trust of those with whom you are engaging. However, these policies are not meant to interfere with your legal rights to bargain collectively or engage in concerted or protected activities.
5. Respect your privacy, your coworkers' privacy, and the organization's privacy by not providing personal or confidential information without permission. Also, employees/volunteers are prohibited from sharing anything via social media channels that could violate another employee/volunteer's right to personal privacy.
6. Only those officially designated may use social media to speak on behalf of the organization in an official capacity, though employees/volunteers may use social media to speak for themselves individually. If and when designated persons use social media to communicate on behalf of the organization, they should clearly identify themselves as an employee/volunteer.
7. If you are communicating with youth through any digital or social media, act as you would if you were communicating in person. Specifically, communicate with minors using transparency and in a group, or do not communicate at all. If it is necessary to send an individual message outside of a public area to a minor, copy another adult or a parent. Do not initiate a one-on-one relationship (such as friending from a personal profile) with a minor.
8. Do not violate copyright and fair use laws and do not plagiarize another's work. Obtain permission if you wish to use material created by someone else.
9. Do not use the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA's email address or social media channels for personal use.
10. Harassment, threats, intimidation, ethnic slurs, personal insults, pornography, obscenity, racial or religious intolerance, abuse, and any other form of behavior prohibited by law is also prohibited via social media

channels. Do not engage in any such behavior and do not make or comment on any such behavior, comments, or remarks.

11. You may comment on other churches, but you agree to do so respectfully without ridiculing, defaming, or libeling them in any way.
12. If you are not officially authorized to speak on behalf of the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA, use a disclaimer saying that what you communicate is your personal opinion and not that of the organization when you are engaging in conversation on the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA's social media channels. Two sample social media disclaimers include: (1) "I work for the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA, and this is my personal opinion."; and (2) "I am not an official spokesperson, but my personal opinion is . . . ." This requirement is not meant to interfere with your rights to bargain collectively or engage in concerted or protected activities but rather to ensure that others can easily distinguish the official position of the organization or the organization's leadership from those of our employees/volunteers.
13. Users should use their best judgment when engaging in social media activities and should be on guard against actions and discussions that could harm the interests of our community, faith, or other persons.
14. Before posting photographs of any person, obtain his/her permission.
15. If you see a violation of this Code of Conduct, report it to Central Administration of the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA. If you have questions about the Code of Conduct, please contact DESIGNATED PERSON.
16. All of the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA's other policies apply to the use of digital and social media. All communication by employees or volunteers should take into account the organization's values, reputation, and workplace policies.
17. You agree to provide the church with your identity and website url if you choose to write about the church. You also agree to make anyone designated by the church as your "friend" so that the church may monitor your postings.
18. Any violations of the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA's Code of Conduct may result in discipline and/or termination of employment or volunteer opportunities.

I have received a copy of ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA's Social and Digital Media Code of Conduct. I understand it is my responsibility to become familiar with and adhere to the information contained herein. I understand that these policies are the property of the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

---

Print Name

---

Signature

---

Date

# Orthodox Church in America Image Release Form



I hereby grant \_\_\_\_\_ (NAME OF CHURCH) \_\_\_\_\_ (the organization) permission to use my likeness in photographs, video recordings or electronic images in any and all of its publications, including website entries, without payment or any other consideration. I understand and agree that these materials will become the property of the organization and will not be returned. I hereby irrevocably authorize the organization to edit, alter, copy, exhibit, publish or distribute these images for purposes of publicizing the organization's programs or for any other lawful purpose. In addition, I waive the right to inspect or approve the finished product, including written or electronic copy, wherein my likeness appears. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising or related to the use of my image. I hereby hold harmless and release and forever discharge the organization from all claims, demands, and causes of action which I, my heirs, representatives, executors, administrators, or any other persons acting on my behalf or on behalf of my estate have or may have by reason of this authorization.

I am 18 years of age and am competent to contract in my own name, or if I am under age 18, a parent or guardian has signed below. I have read this release before signing below and I fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed Name)

If the person signing is under age 18 we would ask that that person sign but there must also be the signed consent by a parent or guardian, below:

I hereby certify that I am the parent or guardian of \_\_\_\_\_, named above, and do hereby give my consent without reservation to the foregoing release on behalf of this person.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian's Signature) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian's Printed Name)