

# Social Media Guidelines for Clergy and Lay Leaders



Approved by the Holy Synod of Bishops on April 28, 2026

## Introduction

Social media is a significant part of reality in today's world. It can shape how we speak to one another, how we share ideas, how we see the world around us, and especially how we are seen by the world. It has become evident that the business model behind these platforms often rewards outrage and division — perhaps drawing us toward reactionary behaviors that are momentarily gratifying but are contrary to the spirit of the Gospel.

As Christians, and especially as clergy and lay leaders, we are called to use every tool—including digital ones—in a way that forms Christ within us rather than engendering the spirit of division (diabolos) that tears us apart. The question is not simply what we must avoid online, but how we can be a living witness of Christ's love, patience, and truth in a digital world.

The ramifications of our online conduct are manifold—pastoral, ecclesial, and legal. The exercise of personal responsibility is of the utmost concern, especially for those in leadership positions within the Church. Disregarding the communal nature of the church and one's own personal responsibility can place the Church and her many ministries in jeopardy. While these guidelines are not meant to restrict the personal freedom of expression of social media users, they are meant to provide direction and raise awareness of the responsibility individuals bear in how they represent the Church in the world. It is a compass to help us navigate between the extremes—to use social media in ways that strengthen our witness, protect our communities, and reflect the peace of Christ.

When people encounter the Orthodox Church online, they often decide—within seconds—whether they will ever visit one of our parishes. We often say, “Come and see,” and our online presence often determines whether many will ever take that first step. Our goal is to speak the truth in love, to model repentance and grace, and to invite others to join us in prayer and communion. By abiding by the following practices, we may achieve these goals.

These Guidelines apply to clergy, employees, and lay leaders of the Orthodox Church in America, including those serving in dioceses, parishes, monasteries, and Church institutions. They are to be interpreted and applied in accordance with the Statute of the Orthodox Church in America and the authority of the diocesan bishop.

## OCA Social Media Best Practices

### I. For Personal Use

#### A. Clergy Identity and Pastoral Responsibility

Clergy, by definition, are representatives of a greater ecclesial body and should always conduct themselves with this consideration. There is a unique power dynamic between clergy and the people with whom they have a pastoral relationship, and therefore, clergy have a special responsibility to guard how they interact with those people. Clergy must also be mindful that their public communications should not undermine ecclesial unity or cause confusion among the faithful.

## B. Transparency and Personal Accountability

Be open and honest about who you are when you communicate. The Orthodox Church in America expects personal discretion and responsibility when using social media. Anonymity on social media does not absolve one of personal or corporate responsibility.

## C. Permanence and Scope of Online Communication

All internet postings are permanent, and 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 intended audience.

## D. Standards of Conduct

Do not engage in or comment on any behavior, comments, or remarks that amount to harassment, threats, intimidation, ethnic slurs, personal insults, pornography, or obscenity. Personal attacks against persons based on characteristics of race, gender, appearance, religious affiliation, or any other behavior prohibited by law are also prohibited via social media channels. Clergy and lay leaders must also avoid conduct that may give scandal to the faithful or diminish the credibility of the Church's witness.

## E. Speech Concerning the Orthodox Church in America and Other Churches

Comments on the Orthodox Church in America or on other churches should be made with respect, without gossiping, ridiculing, defaming, or libeling them in any way. Even when expressing disagreement, such communication should reflect restraint, charity, and respect for ecclesial order. In situations involving public controversy related to the Church, clergy and lay leaders should refrain from public commentary and defer to designated Church authorities.

# II. For Representatives of the Orthodox Church in America

## A. Authorization and Official Representation

Only those officially designated may use social media to speak on behalf of the Church or a Church-related entity in an official capacity. If and when designated persons use social media to communicate on behalf of the Church, they should clearly identify themselves as employees or volunteers.

## B. Personal Speech and Required Disclaimers

If not officially authorized to speak on behalf of the Orthodox Church in America, a disclaimer must be used 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.

Sample disclaimers include:

- (1) "I work for the Orthodox Church in America, but this is my personal opinion."
- (2) "I am not an official spokesperson, but my personal opinion is ..."

This requirement ensures that others can easily distinguish the official position of the Church or its leadership from that of its employees or volunteers.

#### C. Confidentiality and Sensitive Matters

For personal protection and the protection of the Orthodox Church in America, it is prohibited to use internal or external social media channels to discuss confidential items, legal matters outside of the context of the attorney-client privilege, litigation, or financial matters not publicly disclosed. Confidential information includes anything labeled as such or information not available to the public.

#### D. Privacy and Respect for Persons

Respect personal privacy, coworkers' privacy, and the organization's privacy by not providing personal or confidential information by means of social media without permission. 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.

#### E. Intellectual Property and Proper Use of Content

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.

#### F. Proper Use of Church Systems and Assets

Do not use the Orthodox Church in America's email addresses or official social media channels for personal use.

#### G. Use of Logos and Proprietary Symbols

The use of the Orthodox Church in America's logos and other proprietary symbols is prohibited without the specific permission of the Office of the Metropolitan.

#### H. Reporting and Consequences

Any violations of this Code of Conduct of the Orthodox Church in America should be reported to the Office of the Metropolitan or the Diocesan authorities. Violations may result in discipline and/or termination of employment, volunteer affiliation, or opportunities. Determinations regarding violations are made in accordance with applicable ecclesiastical authority and established procedures of the Orthodox Church in America.

#### I. Local Application

Dioceses, parishes, monasteries, and other institutions of the Church should adopt social media policies analogous to those stated here.

## Conclusion

The purpose of these Guidelines is not to inhibit the free usage of social media. Rather, they are to encourage the highest standards of behavior among clergy and lay leaders, and to protect the Church

and end users from the abuse of these platforms. If the basic rules of decency, civility, and propriety are observed, social media can greatly enhance the Church's interconnectivity. These policies can only be effective to the extent that they are followed and respected by all in the Church who use social media. At the same time, clergy and lay leaders, if they so choose, are encouraged to use social media positively—to bear witness to the Gospel, to share the life of the Church, and to invite others into the liturgical and sacramental life in Christ.

## Social Media Best Practices - Youth Protection Guidelines

All 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 carry 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.

Our parishes are public spaces. Still, our parishioners have a reasonable expectation of privacy. It is recommended that signage be placed in an easily accessible location with instructions that photographs will be used on social media. If a parent/guardian wishes to opt out of the use of images, instructions should be provided on whom to contact to exercise the “opt out” option (see form below).

In addition, no adult should be part of a youth-initiated social media group. No counseling of youth shall be provided via social media. If there is to be use of social media to communicate between youth and adults, at least two adults who are not related must be on site, and the parents/guardians of the youth must have full access to monitor the site. There must be no anonymous or private postings or communications between adults and minor children.

Utmost sensitivity and discretion must be exercised when communicating with youth through any digital or social media. Specifically, communication with minors must be conducted transparently and in a group setting (not personal one-on-one communication). If it is necessary to send an individual message to a minor outside a public area, copy another adult or a parent. Do not initiate a one-on-one relationship (such as “friending” from a personal profile) with a minor.



## Opt-Out Photograph and Video Release Form

Participation in events implies permission for the use of images taken at those events for the purpose of promoting \_\_\_\_\_ (the organization). You have the right to opt out of inclusion in photographs or media used for online or printed publications. The term “images” as used herein encompasses both still photographs and video footage. This form allows participants/guardians to opt out of having images of them/their minor children used for the purpose of promoting \_\_\_\_\_ (the organization). Failure to exercise this option, releases, and discharges \_\_\_\_\_ (the organization) from any and all claims arising out of the use of images, or any right that the parent or minor may have.

To exercise this option, check the box below and provide the information to staff.

I do not give permission to use images of me/the minor named below or images in which I/the minor may be involved with others for the purpose of promoting \_\_\_\_\_ (the organization).

Minor(s) \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read the above statement and fully understand its contents.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_