

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC  
ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA



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# SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

# Introduction

Social media can be an important tool for evangelization, communication and building community. To ensure digital communication is appropriate, effective and reflective of our Catholic values, and consistent with the rules and values of our workplace, the Archdiocese of Atlanta has established the following social media policy.

Please use this policy as a starting point for all external communications that represent the Archdiocese of Atlanta, its locations and the Catholic Church.

This policy adheres to additional policies from the Archdiocese of Atlanta that address workplace conduct and safe environment compliance. Please contact the Office of Human Resources for more information.

## Definition of Social Media

Social media includes internet-based platforms and applications that enable users to create and share content or participate in social networking. This includes, but is not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, GroupMe and LinkedIn.

## Guiding Principles

All social media activity representing the Archdiocese of Atlanta, its locations and all entities should:

- **Be Faithful** – aligned with Catholic teaching and doctrine
- **Build Community** – foster unity across our diverse archdiocese
- **Reflect Charity** – communicate with respect, kindness and compassion
- **Promote Truth** – be honest about identity and intent
- **Serve Others** – be attentive to the needs and dignity of all people

# Creating Social Media Accounts

1. Approval from the department head, pastor or principal is needed before establishing a new social media account. For Chancery departments, creating a new social media account must be approved by the Office of Communications.
2. A minimum of two adult employees (parish, school, mission staff) should have full administrative access to every social media account. These individuals should receive notifications of page activity.
3. Login credentials should be stored securely and shared only with authorized personnel.
4. Administrators should establish separate accounts and pages for personal and professional use. Personal information and opinions should not be shared on official accounts.
5. We discourage the creation of multiple accounts for a single location. Multiple accounts splinter the audience, lessening your impact. They make oversight and management more difficult and make a site more vulnerable to hacking and abuse. Ministries and offices can feed content to a single account. The algorithm used to direct users to content will serve relevant content to consumers based on their interests.
6. Create and share a written internal social media procedure document for your location which includes the account credentials, an outline of responsibilities and an action plan. Define who posts and moderates as well as what actions are needed to grant and rescind access to the account.

# Managing Social Media Accounts

1. Minors should not be administrators of social media accounts. They can send contributions to adults, but should not run the accounts themselves. If a parish, school or mission utilizes adult volunteers or paid third-party organizations to help post or manage social media accounts, clear expectations about access, content standards and cause for removal of access are needed. The site should have the volunteer or contractor sign an outline of these expectations. We discourage making these users administrators and would prefer them to be contributors or editors.
2. If an employee administrator leaves the parish, school or mission, the parish, school or mission should have a written timeline for removing access to the account and ensuring a second employee administrator is appointed.
3. If the volunteer or third party violates their agreement, the parish, school or mission should have a timeline for removing access to the account.
4. Administrators and editors should have a plan to regularly monitor and respond to comments as needed.

# Content Standards

## Appropriate Content

Archdiocesan social media accounts should regularly share:

- Mass times, liturgies and sacramental opportunities
- Parish, school and ministry events
- \*Catechetical and spiritual resources
- Stories that highlight faith in action across the archdiocese
- Historical information about your location
- Messages from the archbishop, auxiliary bishops, pastor and other location leadership
- Important updates affecting the Catholic community

All archdiocesan locations, entities and individuals are encouraged to use the hashtag **#archatl** on posts that address the greater Catholic community. This allows the Office of Communications to more easily find information to share.

*\*If a parish is benefiting from endorsement of a resource, the parish must acknowledge the benefit in a disclaimer on the post and/or social account.*

**Permission must be obtained when posting photos of minors. See section below for additional detail. Permission should be obtained prior to posting photographs or other identifying information about parish or school members or visitors on websites and social media platforms.** We recommend only using the individual's first name in the caption on social media (this does not apply to The Georgia Bulletin or other news outlets). The permission can be as simple as a verbal or written announcement letting people know photographs are being taken for use online and offering people the opportunity to opt out of having their photos made. The photographer should not ask why, but should respect people's expectation of privacy.

**Do not share confidential, sensitive or personal information** on social media accounts representing the Archdiocese of Atlanta or any of its locations and entities.

## Tone and Voice

- Use a welcoming, pastoral and mission-focused tone.
- Reflect the diversity and unity of the archdiocese.
- Avoid political partisanship, divisive rhetoric or negative commentary.
- Communicate in ways that are clear and inviting.

## Accuracy and Responsibility

- Verify all information before posting on social media.
- If artificial intelligence (AI) is used for social media posts, please acknowledge this in the caption and follow the archdiocesan AI policy.
- Correct errors promptly and transparently.
- Credit original sources and respect copyright laws. Failure to do so could result in significant usage fees.
- Properly use parish, archdiocesan and ministry logos and names.

## Engagement and Community Interaction

### Responding to the Public

- Consider using “codes of conduct” for visitors to your social profile account. These should be brief and immediately apparent to visitors.
  - An example from the USCCB: “All posts and comments should be marked by Christian charity and respect for truth. They should be on topic and presume the good will of other posters. Discussion should take place primarily from a faith perspective. No ads please.” You could add a warning such as: Comments that violate these rules can be removed and users can be blocked.
- Engage respectfully with commenters in a timely manner.
- Encourage meaningful and charitable dialogue.
- When appropriate, guide individuals to pastoral support or other relevant resources.

### Moderation

Archdiocesan entities may hide and/or block users and content from social profile accounts that are:

- Profane, abusive or discriminatory
- Misleading or intentionally false
- Disruptive or unrelated to the post
- Promotional or spam content

# Personal Social Media

Clergy, religious, employees and ministry leaders within the Archdiocese of Atlanta are encouraged to be responsible on all digital platforms. This includes practicing the following when posting on personal social media accounts:

- Clearly distinguish personal views from official church teaching.
- Use disclaimers when appropriate. (example: “Opinions are my own.”)
- Avoid posting content that could cause scandal or harm the church’s mission or reputation. This includes disparaging comments about colleagues or workplaces.
- Use caution when engaging in public or controversial discussions.
- Employees and volunteers should not be friends, followers or otherwise personally connected to minors on social media. They should not engage in private messaging with minors and should follow all safe environment guidelines on their personal accounts.

Be mindful that the information posted on your personal social media account could potentially be grounds for discipline or possible termination of employment.

# Crisis Communication

- In times of crisis or sensitive situations, there should be one person designated to take the lead on social media posts and moderation.
- Please rely on official archdiocesan communications. However, do not post internal communications on social media accounts. A better practice is to share information directly from official archdiocesan accounts.
- If your social media account has been hacked, contact the respective social media platform to receive the next necessary steps. You should also notify the Office of Communications of any account compromises for the Office’s awareness. In all cases, it is a good idea to change all administrative credentials and passwords immediately. Inform your community that the page has been hacked and that steps are being implemented to restore the account.

# Use of Social Media with Minors

Archdiocesan staff and volunteers must be transparent with parents in all forms of communication, particularly when ministering to young people.

The following guidelines help to create a safe environment for both youth and adults at archdiocesan locations and events sponsored by its entities.

## Guidelines

1. Written permission must be obtained prior to sharing photographs or other identifying information of minors/young people on websites and all social media accounts. Please caption the photographs using only the individual's first name.
2. All social media administrators, editors and contributors must be safe environment compliant, meeting all requirements as outlined by the Archdiocese of Atlanta.
3. Parents and guardians should be informed of all social media accounts where photos of their child(ren) may be used.
4. Do not tag minors in social media accounts representing archdiocesan locations and entities.
5. Friend requests and follow invites should not be sent to minors for private or public social media accounts.
6. All archdiocesan employees must maintain separate personal and ministry-based social media accounts to ensure that any information posted on a personal account is not available to minors.
7. Parish, school and mission accounts should not use private or direct message functions on social media to communicate with minors. A best practice is to post an automatic reply directing people to an official parish, school or mission email account or phone number.
8. Parents must have access to all social platforms where youth are engaging with adult staff and volunteers at archdiocesan locations.

**Created by the Office of Communications for the Archdiocese of Atlanta while using the policies and guidelines of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).**



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