

Social Media, Healthy Boundaries, Covenants, and Permission Forms

Social Media—General

Here are a few general pointers for Social Media when used in the church. These pointers are helpful to remember that we are always representing the church, even online.

Our Tone

We are friendly and warm. We are always gracious and kind. We ask questions and engage. We're optimistic and hopeful. We share God's Truth.

Ownership of Posts

Even though you as an individual are the author, all messages publicly posted are posted in the voice of the church, organization, or institution. We do not attach names or initials to posts or comments.

Social Media—Best Practices for Promoting Your Group

Be Consistent

Consistency is key if you are promoting your group. Do you have a hard time posting consistently? Create a schedule to remind yourself or your team to regularly post or comment on the platforms you use.

Be Relational

Social media is about relationships! Engage and connect with others actively. Also, be responsive. Answer people who reach out to you. It's *ministry*!

Be Kind

The rules of the playground apply to social media. If you want to have a friend, be a friend. If you want people to be kind to you, be kind to them. There will be people who reach out to your church or institution who are looking to debate, leave a complaint or a grievance, or to simply be unkind in a hurting world. We do not engage those who wish to debate theology online; we direct them to a designated person who can personally engage with them one-on-one about issues of theology and faith. If someone leaves a complaint or grievance, do not rush to delete a post. Answer their concern publicly if possible, or ask them publicly to reach out to you or a designated pastoral person with contact information so that you or someone from your church or organization can help bring resolution and peace to an issue.

Social Media—Healthy Boundaries

Just as you would with your face to face interactions with youth, it is important to set healthy boundaries for digital networking and communication. Here are a few gentle ideas for how to set that up within your own group.

- Use best judgement in the time you send text messages to your youth. Don't text, chat, or email back-and-forth at a time your youth may be at school or in bed. Look into scheduled texts for your phone either through the system itself or through an app.
- Consider creating a group on Facebook where you communicate with your youth. If it is a closed group, make sure you have other adult administrators/your rector/priest-in-charge in the group. Think of a closed group as a closed door. You never want to meet alone.
- Parents should be aware of how your ministry uses social media platforms to communicate and if you accept your youth/parents as "friends" or not. If you do accept students as friends, set up a meeting with parents where you discuss this- no private messaging, permission granted, knowledge that your "adult world" may leak over...
- If social networking is used in your ministry your rector or priest-in-charge should have access to your profiles and correspondences.
- Have a plan set with your rector or priest-in-charge so they understand how you will use texting, individual communication, and documentation on communication with youth. Make sure parents understand this system as well.
- Have the same rules for everyone in your ministry when it comes to social media and online communication. No exceptions.
- Let your kids know when you are no longer available at night. (Emergencies only past _____ time)

Covenants for Online and In-Person Groups with Youth

- Set up a covenant with your youth. This should include how you treat each other in the group and how you will uphold the covenant (make this part together). This covenant should also include social media: what is appropriate vs inappropriate language/images, who, how, and when can a photo be posted and tagged, consequences for breaking the covenant.
- Know your boundaries. Confidentiality is important for trust, but there MUST be exceptions and you youth MUST be aware of this (I usually tell my youth if you are breaking the law, hurting yourself, or hurting others, legally I have to tell someone). Usually, they will still tell you; it may be that they want their parents to know, they just don't want to be the one to say it.

- Know why you do what you do personally within your ministry. This way if your actions are questioned you have an answer.

Permission from Parents

- Write up a photo permission form for parents to sign at the beginning of the year. Detail how you will use photos and when you will be taking them.
- Write up a driving permission form for parents to sign at the beginning of the year. Outline who can and cannot be considered as drivers for “off campus” events. Outline your own boundaries for driving youth.
- Write up a social medial permission form- posting, photos, ability to tag photos, closed groups, friends on media, confidentiality vs when to show parents...
- Make sure parents have your contact information and know they can contact you with concerns.