

Archdiocese of Mobile
Policy for Electronic Communication with Minors
Effective April 1, 2011 (Revised March 2016)

All who serve the mission of the Catholic Church within the ministries of the Archdiocese of Mobile must comply with this “Policy for Electronic Communication with Minors” and with the “Child Protection Policy” issued by the Archdiocese. In case of conflict between the two policies, the “Child Protection Policy” shall govern. As dictated in the Child Protection Policy, a minor is an individual who is 18 years of age or younger.

This policy covers all forms of electronic communication, including but not limited to: social media platforms, blogs, websites, phones and related devices, e-mail, texting, video conferencing and/or streaming, etc.

When communicating electronically with minors:

- The pastor, principal or supervisor (in non-parish or school entities) must approve of all methods of communication utilized for communication with minors. The primary purpose of any approved platform is for providing information and communication related to a ministry or event and not for socialization or other personal interaction.
- Parents must be notified of all methods of communication that are used in each particular ministry and must be granted access to participate in such communications.
- When communicating in mass, another adult within the ministry must be included in the recipient list. The originator and the other adult cannot be related.
- No one-on-one communication between an adult and a minor can take place. In the case where a minor contacts an adult and a response is necessary, the adult must include another unrelated adult within the ministry on the response.
- Acceptable delivery time span for all forms of electronic communication is 6:30am to 9pm. Communication outside of these acceptable delivery hours may be used only in emergency situations *or* to communicate time-sensitive information related to the ministry or event.
- Avoid any communication which might be construed as having sexual overtones. Do not reply to any such communication received from minors; notify your pastor/principal/supervisor immediately, make and keep a copy of the inappropriate communication, and share the copy of the inappropriate communication with your supervisor within 24 hours.
- Communication from minors which conveys the potential of harm to themselves or others can be attended to immediately, regardless of the hour. Notify your pastor/principal/supervisor immediately. Counseling is not appropriate for electronic communication.

Policies specific to platform types:

Via Social Media and other web-based platforms:

- All interactions must be through ministry accounts, never personal accounts.
- Accounts must be monitored by at least two adults of the organization, one of which must be an employee of the parish, school, ministry or archdiocese. Names of sites used, usernames and passwords/codes for access to the site must be given to the pastor, principal or supervisor and/or their designate.
- Identifying information and/or photo or video depiction of minors web-based platforms may only be used with parental permission.
- Age guidelines established by the web-based platform must be followed.
- Platforms which allow content to “disappear” are not permitted.
- Care must be exercised when utilizing platforms which allow for streaming video in real time, with respect to privacy issues and possible conflicts with Catholic belief and values.

Via phones and related devices:

- Parents of students 8th grade and younger must give prior written permission for their children to be included in group ministry communication.

In regards to *personal* social media accounts:

- If an employee, cleric or volunteer identifies himself/herself with a ministry of the Archdiocese, the following must be reasonably prominent:
 - “The views expressed on this website are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Archdiocese of Mobile and all its entities.”
- Any information that causes embarrassment to the Archdiocese and all its entities must be avoided.
- Archdiocesan, parish and school trademarks or logos may not be used as personally identifying features.
- Employees or volunteers of the Archdiocese and its entities may not initiate or respond to personal social media requests involving minors where no relationship outside of the ministry had been previously established.