St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church & School

Social Media Policy
(Rev 8/2024)

I. PURPOSE

Pope Francis, in his message for the 48th World Communications Day said, "Let us boldly become citizens of the digital world. The Church needs to be concerned for, and present in, the world of communication, in order to dialogue with people today and to help them encounter Christ." The policies and recommendations below are written to help us utilize the power of electronic media to evangelize in today's world, in ways that are safe, responsible, and reflective of Catholic values.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish and Seton Catholic Schools recognize that in today's environment, ministry personnel use social media and other networking technologies to conduct ministry. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish and Seton Catholic Schools (referred to as SEASP/SCS in the remainder of this document) encourages administrators, pastor and principals to support the use of social media by ministry personnel as needed to accomplish ministry in today's world. SEASP/SCS also recognizes its obligation to teach and ensure responsible and safe use of these technologies. The following policies are designed to help ensure use of these technologies that are safe, responsible and reflective of the philosophy and teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. This policy addresses the use of publicly available social media networks. In addition, employees and volunteers must avoid posting any information or engaging in communications that violate state, federal or SEASP/SCS laws and policies.

Every year commencing with the effective date of this document, SEASP/SCS will evaluate the document and its implementation and offer to the pastor recommendations for improving this document and its implementation.

II. DEFINITIONS

- **Adult:** An individual who is eighteen years of age or older.
- **Parish/School Personnel:** Any volunteer, employee, religious, or cleric of the parish and school personnel, and those whose work may not be considered as ministry.
    - **Ministry Personnel:** Any volunteer, employee, religious, or cleric who conducts ministry within SEASP/SCS.
- **Child:** An individual who has *not* yet reached the age of 18, or who is 18 or 19 years of age and enrolled in high school.
- **Ministry website account/application:** An internet website account/application, blog or social media profile

created by employees, clerics, and volunteers for the purpose of conducting parish/school business.

- **Private Ministry website account:** A ministry website account that can only be viewed by members specifically accepted by the website account administrator/moderators.
- **Public Ministry website account:** A ministry website account that is accessible to the public without any direct permission from website account administrator/moderators.

- **Personal website accounts/applications:** An internet website account/application, blog, or social media profile created by employees, clerics, and volunteers primarily to share personal communication with friends and associates.
- **Website account administrator/moderator:** One of at least two adults with full administrative access to a ministry website account/application.
- MINISTRY WEBSITES

1. Establishing a Social Media Presence

a. **Approval: Policy—** Approval must be obtained from the corresponding department head, pastor or school president before creating a ministry website account. Parish/School Personnel may not establish a website account which implies official representation of any SEASP/SCS without such permission.

b. **Use of Logos: Policy—**No website account may include the official SEASP/SCS logo(s) in a way that implies official ownership/sponsorship, without being an approved ministry website account. Once granted, the new ministry website account must contain the official SEASP/SCS logo(s).

c. **Website Account Administrator/Moderators: Policy—** At least two adults who are also ministry personnel should have full administrative access to ministry website accounts, known as website account administrator/moderators. Website account administrator/moderators must be approved to work with children in accordance with SEASP/SCS policy.

d. **Terms of Use: Policy—** Website account administrator/moderators and ministry personnel should be familiar with the terms of use, age restrictions, privacy settings and controls of any site being used for ministry purposes.

2. Separation of Personal and Ministry Websites

a. **Personal and Ministry Profiles: Policy—** Whenever possible, ministry personnel should separate their personal social media profiles from any profiles they use for ministry. (In Facebook, for example, you can use pages or groups for professional use, which are connected to, but separate from your personal profile).

b. **Communicating on Ministry Websites: Policy—** Ministry personnel should not use an official SEASP/SCS email address or profile to communicate on public or ministry website accounts unless they are approved to officially speak in the position they represent.

c. **Work-related Email Addresses: Recommendation—** If website account administrator/moderators are employees of the Archdiocese, they should be registered to these website accounts primarily through their work-related email addresses.

3. Content on Ministry Websites

a. **Content Reflecting Church Teaching: Policy—** Content on ministry website accounts should consistently represent the views and teachings of the Catholic Church. Any postings that would reflect poorly upon the Church or ministry personnel and/or could cause scandal should be avoided. This activity includes not only the advocacy of opinions contrary to Church teaching and doctrine, but also things such as: inappropriate images or dress; advocacy of inappropriate music, movies or entertainment; obscene, profane or vulgar language; communication or conduct that is harassing, threatening, bullying, gossiping and/or insulting; encouragement of illegal or immoral activity; advocacy of inappropriate use of alcohol or drugs.

b. **Posting Photos: Policy—** Written consent must be obtained prior to posting personally identifying

photos, videos or other information on a ministry website account. If the subject is a child, permission must be obtained from the parent or legal guardian. Such permission is included in the Acceptance Use Policy form used in activities with children. See also section IV: Specific Guidelines with Children.

c. **Confidential and Proprietary Information: Policy—** Employees, clerics and volunteers are prohibited from disclosing via the internet information that is understood to be held in confidence by SEASP/SCS. Employees, clerics and volunteers are prohibited from disclosing via the internet any information that is proprietary to SEASP/SCS, except by explicit permission of the appropriate authority.

d. **Crisis and Emergency Situations: Policy—** Ministry personnel should treat any crisis or emergency situation (e.g., signs of suicidal thoughts or other intent to harm oneself or others, chemical abuse, criminal behavior, etc.) as they would with any other mode of communication. There is a duty to report such communications and website account administrators/moderators should be advised of this responsibility for both adults and minors.

e. **Rules of Conduct Posting: Recommendation—** On any ministry website account that accepts comments from users, the following rules of conduct should be posted in a place deemed reasonably visible for the kind of technology being used: "All posts and comments should be marked by Christian charity and respect for truth. They should presume the good will of other posters. Inappropriate comments may be deleted."

III. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES WITH CHILDREN

1. Transparency

a. **Two Website Account Administrators/Moderators: Policy—** It is important that technology be used in a responsible and ethical way and that parish/school personnel, volunteers and parents be transparent in all forms of communication, particularly when ministering to children. Two adults, approved to work with children according to the policies of SEASP/SCS, must have full administrative access to any ministry website accounts.

b. **Group Texting: Policy—** Similarly, when using group messaging services, group texting services or similar programs with children, at least one other adult approved to work with children should be included in messages.

c. **Individual Texting: Policy—** Parish/School personnel should limit texting/messaging to informational purposes related to ministry. When responding to an individual text/message from a child that is personal or conversational, parish/school personnel must use prudence in steering that conversation away from continued electronic communication and towards any necessary in-person follow-up. (All policies of *Safe & Sacred training-"Protecting Children in the 21st Century"* involving contact with children apply.)

d. **Saving/Archiving of texts/messages** Parish/school personnel must use prudence in determining how long texts, emails or other electronic communication should be saved. Texting that is purely informational (i.e., "The meeting starts at 7PM") may have no need of being saved or archived. Texting that responds to a personal request (i.e., "Let's meet during office hours at 3:30 to discuss that") should remain accessible until prudence dictates that the issue has been resolved and the time for any likely questions about the appropriateness of the communication has passed.

3. Appropriate Relationships

a. **Online Behavior of Youth: Policy—** Ministry personnel have responsibility for maintaining appropriate adult to children relationships at all times. Ministry personnel should continue to take responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior or activity on social media, in the same way they would be expected to do with in-person interaction.

b. **Initial Online Contact: Policy—** Ministry personnel and website account administrators/moderators should not initiate first contact with a potential follower online. Online "friend", "follower" or other similar requests for inclusion with social media networks should be made by the child and then approved by the website administrator/moderator.

c. **Other Documents: Policy—** Ministry personnel who interact with children should be aware of and comply with all aspects of the *Safe & Sacred training-"Protecting Children in the 21st Century"* for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. The Archdiocese of Indianapolis will review alleged violations of the *Protecting Children in the 21st Century* of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, on a case-by-case basis. In the event that a provision of this Social Media Policy cannot be reconciled with the *Protecting Children in the 21st Century* of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, the provisions of the *Protecting Children in the 21st Century* of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis will be in force.

IV.PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

1. Online Behavior

a. **Online Behavior of Adults: Policy—** Because social media is a public medium, ministry personnel using social media should be aware that they represent the Catholic Church on both ministry and personal websites/applications. Ministry personnel should not engage in online activity that would cause scandal or express a disregard for trying to faithfully live as a disciple of Christ. This activity includes not only the advocacy of opinions contrary to Church teaching and doctrine, but also things such as: inappropriate images or dress; advocacy of inappropriate music, movies or entertainment; obscene, profane or vulgar language; communication or conduct that is harassing, threatening, bullying, gossiping and/or insulting; encouragement of illegal or immoral activity; advocacy of inappropriate use of alcohol or drugs.

b. **Online Behavior with Youth: Policy—** The line between professional and personal relationships is blurred within a social media context. When ministry personnel choose to utilize social media outside those approved by SEASP/SCS to engage with youth who are associated with them primarily through a ministry context, they are to maintain their professionalism as ministry personnel.

   Ministry personnel have the responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior or activity online as they would be expected to with in-person interaction, including requirements for mandated reporting.

2. **Discipline: Policy—** Be mindful that any information posted on your personal social networking site could potentially be grounds for discipline or even termination of employment.

3. Miscellaneous

a. **Disclaimers: Recommendation—** If ministry personnel identify themselves (i.e., in the biography section or profile information) as an employee or volunteer for the SEASP/SCS on a personal website account/application, the site should include the following disclaimer: “The views expressed on this website are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish and/or Seton Catholic Schools.”

   This disclaimer should be reasonably visible in accordance with the type of media platform it is. For example, on a Facebook profile, this statement can be posted in the “About” section.

b. **Copyright: Policy—** Ministry personnel using social media, personally or professionally, must abide by all copyright and intellectual property rights laws. Ministry personnel are prohibited from disclosing information that is understood to be held in confidence by or proprietary to SEASP/SCS, except by explicit permission of the appropriate authority.

V. CONCLUSION

Let us continue then to “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20).