



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF  
**ARLINGTON**

Office of Communications

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# **Website and Social Media Policy for the Catholic Diocese of Arlington**

For All Personnel and Volunteers

Released June 25, 2018  
(Takes effect in all diocesan entities September 3, 2018)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I. PURPOSE AND APPLICATION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. OFFICIAL DIOCESAN WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. Establishing a Diocesan Entity Website or Social Media Account .....	1
B. Diocesan Entity Account Management.....	1
C. Standards for Diocesan Websites and Social Media Accounts.....	2
D. Commenting Policy and Disclaimer for Diocesan Websites and Social Media Accounts .....	3
E. Transparency of Diocesan Websites and Social Media Accounts .....	3
<b>III. GUIDELINES FOR PERSONAL WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>IV. OTHER POLICIES OF THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ARLINGTON .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>V. DEFINITIONS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>VI. ADDENDUM FOR ADDITIONAL POLICIES .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>VII. OFFICIAL RECEIPT .....</b>	<b>8</b>

**NOTE: Some words and phrases used throughout the Guidelines correlate with definitions listed on the last page.**

## **I. Purpose and Application**

This policy is designed to aid all Diocesan Entities in implementing specific standards and ensuring that personnel adhere to appropriate usage, boundaries, and best practices related to websites and social media.

All employees and volunteers of the Diocese must 1) review this policy 2) return the “Official Receipt” to his or her respective pastor/administrator, school principal, or the Diocesan HR Director.

## **II. Official Diocesan Websites and Social Media Accounts**

### **A. Establishing a Diocesan Entity Website or Social Media Account**

A website or social media account officially associated with any Diocesan Entity, or that will be published on behalf of any Diocesan Entity, shall not be established without the written approval of the entity’s pastor/administrator or director.

An account’s location (i.e. URL), name or handle may not be changed without the express approval of the pastor or director.

Personal email addresses must not be used in the creation of any Diocesan Entity website or social media account. Any email address used as a login credential to obtain administrative access to a Diocesan Entity website or social media account should be generated through a corporately-owned domain that is controlled by the Diocese or the respective Diocesan Entity. All accounts must be created and maintained with diocesan email addresses, preferably the office or ministry’s main email address. This protects the sensitive information that may be received and affords the Diocesan Entity transparent access to the account.

### **B. Diocesan Entity Account Management**

A Diocesan Entity must ensure that it establishes and maintains control over any website or social media account it creates or manages. The Diocese of Arlington or an appropriate entity controlled by the Diocese of Arlington must, whenever possible, be the registered owner of the domain. *Note:* In some cases, it may not be possible to obtain ownership over a website, such as a Diocesan Entity’s Facebook page, because some social media organizations will insist on retaining ownership rights.

Only Diocesan Entity pastors/administrators and directors, appropriate information technology personnel, and account managers may have administrative access to a Diocesan Entity website or social media account or access to administrative login credentials. Diocesan Entity pastors/administrators and directors must retain administrative access to their respective Diocesan Entity’s website(s) and social media account(s). In the event that a Diocesan Entity does not have adequate staff to meet its social media needs, a volunteer cleared through the Safe Environment Program may operate under the same conditions and responsibilities within this Policy as those of an employee.

Diocesan Entity pastors/administrators and directors must ensure that, acting alone or through information technology personnel, they can terminate the administrative access of any designated account manager. Diocesan Entity heads, information technology personnel, and account managers must ensure that login credentials are secured against unauthorized access, such as by storing them in an encrypted file. In the event that an account administrator ends employment with the Diocese, administrative access must be ensured by the respective Diocesan Entity and account passwords should change.

Any email address used as a login credential to obtain Administrative Access to a Diocesan Entity website or social media account should be generated through a corporately-owned domain that is controlled by the Diocese or the applicable Diocesan Entity. For instance, the email address should not be a Gmail or Yahoo email address—rather, it should be through @arlingtondiocese.org or @[parishname].org. Exceptions can be made for social media platforms that require a non-diocesan email address. For instance, YouTube requires a Gmail email address for the primary login to a YouTube account. However, the verification email address used in the creation of the account should be a Diocesan Entity email address.

Social media activity conducted on behalf of a Diocesan Entity in an official capacity should emanate from accounts issued and branded by the Diocese or a Diocesan Entity. For example, if Amy Smith works in the Diocesan Office of Youth, Campus, and Young Adult Ministries, she should use a Twitter handle similar to “@YouthDirectorCDA.” This affords the Diocese ownership over the account and its content, and the account can be passed on to successive employees who serve in the role.

## **C. Standards for Diocesan Websites and Social Media Accounts**

The *Code of Conduct for Church Personnel of the Diocese of Arlington* applies to activity on social media and Diocesan Entity websites. All content published on behalf of a Diocesan Entity must be consistent with the teachings and tenets of the Roman Catholic Church, for which the Bishop of the Diocese of Arlington has responsibility and authority, and must not otherwise be inappropriate, create a risk of reputational harm to the Diocese or any Diocesan Entity, or compromise the Diocese or any Diocesan Entity legally or morally. Examples of Diocesan Entity-published content this standard prohibits include, but are not limited to, content that would reasonably be considered dishonest, derogatory, sexually suggestive, sexually explicit, defamatory, fraudulent, degrading, malicious, disrespectful, or threatening. Personnel must maintain an appropriate, professional demeanor when communicating on or through a Diocesan Entity website or social media account.

Social media content should be monitored frequently. The Diocesan Office of Communications recommends monitoring website and social media accounts periodically over weekends and holidays to ensure immediate response to any inappropriate content. When the primary administrator of the social media account is absent, either a supervisor or another administrator of the account must monitor the account. Individual site administrators are responsible for adequate monitoring and responding to content on their sites. Conflicts over posted content that are not resolved at the local ministry site are to be referred to the Diocesan Office of Communications for resolution.

## **D. Commenting Policy and Disclaimer for Diocesan Websites and Social Media Accounts**

Every Diocesan Entity website or social media account that offers the ability to “comment” should be frequently checked to ensure that all comments are appropriate and in keeping with the standards for Diocesan websites and social media accounts set forth in this policy. Comments may be subject to deletion at the discretion of the Diocese or its entities.

Additionally, whenever commenting is available, a clearly visible “Commenting Policy” should be displayed if possible.

Note: Displaying the policy, or the full policy, may not always be possible. In cases where it is possible to post a Commenting Policy, here is a sample text that could be used:

Readers and patrons of this site are welcome to comment. Discussion is encouraged, but proper etiquette must be followed. Obscenities, spam, bashing, bullying, verbal abuse, insults, link solicitations, repetitive or fraudulent comments, and off-topic comments will be removed. It may be decided that comments will require approval prior to publication. We reserve the right to block a user at any time.

Diocesan Entity websites should clearly display a disclaimer that communicates, “Users of this website should have no expectation of privacy.”

Diocesan Entity publications, social media sites, and similar websites or platforms that promote interactive dialogue should clarify that the conversation is not *intended* to represent the views of the Diocese or any Diocesan Entity. An example of such a disclaim could be, “The opinions expressed are those of the author/commenter and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Catholic Diocese of Arlington or its entities.”

It is the responsibility of the administrator of the Diocesan Entity account and his or her supervisor to block and remove obscene, indecent or off-topic/irrelevant content as soon as possible. Content is considered indecent if it attacks a specific person or group of persons, uses expletives, or could be interpreted as insulting or inappropriate. When disputed, final determination of whether content should be removed is up to the Diocesan Entity supervisor or the Diocesan Chief Communications Officer.

## **E. Transparency of Diocesan Websites and Social Media Accounts**

Websites and social media accounts should clearly display the contact information of the account manager and declare that they are an “Official” website or account of the Diocesan Entity whenever reasonable.

Any website or social media account operating under the guise of the Diocese of Arlington or of one of its entities, without proper approval and refusing to remove the page/account, should be reported to the Diocesan Chief Communications Officer immediately.

### **III. Guidelines for Personal Websites and Social Media Accounts**

These guidelines (Section III) apply to personal websites, social media accounts, and online content (i.e., websites, social media accounts, and content owned, managed, and/or created by Diocesan Entity personnel and volunteers other than on behalf of a Diocesan Entity). Personnel and volunteers are solely responsible for content they make available online, including, but not limited to, posts, comments, tweets, and “likes” (which may suggest approval of a post or other related content). Before creating online content, Diocesan Entity personnel and volunteers should consider the risks and rewards that are involved. They should keep in mind that any conduct, including failure to adhere to these guidelines, that adversely affects their job performance, the job performance of other personnel or volunteers, or that otherwise adversely affects other persons, the legitimate interests of the Diocese of Arlington or any Diocesan Entity, or that is inconsistent with the moral and ethical teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment and/or his or her ability to serve as a volunteer.

Members of the clergy and/or consecrated men and women serving in any Diocesan Entity must consider that their social media and website activity is often viewed as representing the Diocese and the Office of the Bishop in an official and direct manner. As such, the utmost caution should be taken to avoid even the appearance of scandal, disunity, immorality, partisanship, imprudence, or the taking of a position contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. This protects one’s sacred ministry and credibility as a representative of a Diocesan Entity, as well as the reputation of all Diocesan Entities.

Despite privacy setting options, all content posted or communicated via any website or social media account will be treated as though it is universally or publicly available. At no time should Diocesan Entity personnel or volunteers publicly stand in opposition to the teachings of the Catholic Church, over which the Bishop of Arlington has responsibility and authority. Such a public stance could impact the ability of that person to continue in their role.

All personnel represent the Diocese, even in personal use of social media. Personal online postings should be in line with Catholic values, should not offend or contradict the faith, morals, and teachings of the Catholic Church, and should not be otherwise inappropriate. Efforts to adhere to this standard should include the following:

- Personnel and volunteers should not post discriminatory remarks, harassment, or threats of violence or similar inappropriate or unlawful conduct.
- Personnel and volunteers should always be fair and courteous to others, whether or not they are personally Catholic.
- Personnel should keep in mind that work-related complaints are best resolved by speaking directly with their co-workers or through their supervisor, rather than by posting complaints online.
- If personnel decide to post online content, they should avoid posting anything that reasonably could be viewed as malicious, obscene, threatening, or intimidating, or

that disparages clergy, personnel, volunteers, parishioners, or other persons associated with the Catholic Church.

- Personnel and volunteers should not post sensitive or confidential information obtained in connection with their employment or volunteer status.
- Personnel and volunteers should be honest and accurate when posting content online.
- Personnel and volunteers should never represent themselves as spokespeople for the Diocese or a Diocesan Entity. If they post content related to their position with a Diocesan Entity, they should make clear that their views do not represent those of the Diocese or any Diocesan Entity, such as by including a disclaimer such as “Posts are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Diocese of Arlington or [the relevant Diocese Entity, such as a school, if appropriate].” Such a disclaimer does not exempt personnel and volunteers from accountability and responsibility for what they communicate.

Personal websites should not be used to conduct business for any Diocesan Entity, nor should it appear as though diocesan business is conducted through that website. All materials, resources, and electronic media created on behalf of a Diocesan Entity that are intended for public consumption should be made available on diocesan websites and not solely on a personal website. If the domain of a website is owned by the Diocesan Entity, it is a diocesan website and should be consistent with the rest of this policy. If the domain of a website is owned by the personnel, it is a personal website. For example, if [www.mylocalparish.com](http://www.mylocalparish.com) is registered to “St. Ignatius Catholic Church,” it is a Diocesan Entity website and should be consistent with the rest of this policy. If the website is registered in the name of the Director of Religious Education, regardless of who manages it and how it is used, it is a personal website.

There should be no linking from Diocesan Entity content or websites to personal social media accounts or websites. This would create confusion for some as to which account is the official account of the Diocesan Entity. Personnel are welcome to post or repost diocesan content on their personal social media accounts.

## **IV. Other Policies of the Catholic Diocese of Arlington**

All Diocesan Entity websites and social media, as well as personal websites, must be in accord with all Diocese of Arlington policies. This document in no way contradicts what is stated in other CDA Policies, including, but not limited to, those listed below. *Please note: some policies require being logged in to the Diocesan Intranet for access.*

The *Code of Conduct for Clergy in the Diocese of Arlington* is published here:  
[arlingtondiocese.org/Child-Protection/bgc-code-of-conduct-clergy.pdf](http://arlingtondiocese.org/Child-Protection/bgc-code-of-conduct-clergy.pdf)

The *Code of Conduct for Volunteers in the Diocese of Arlington* is published here:  
[arlingtondiocese.org/Child-Protection/bgc-code-of-conduct-laity.pdf](http://arlingtondiocese.org/Child-Protection/bgc-code-of-conduct-laity.pdf)

The Office of Child Protection’s *Policy on the Protection of Children/Young People and Prevention of Sexual Misconduct and/or Child Abuse* is published here:  
[arlingtondiocese.org/Child-Protection/policy-child-protection-smca.pdf](http://arlingtondiocese.org/Child-Protection/policy-child-protection-smca.pdf)

The Office of Human Resources' *Employee Policy Manual* is published here:  
[arlingtondiocese.org/employeepolicy/](http://arlingtondiocese.org/employeepolicy/)

## V. Definitions

The term “**administrative access**” shall mean access to website management tools or a social media account/profile that allows a person to modify, create, delete, or publish content.

The term “**content**” shall mean any digital information that communicates a message, including, but not limited to, text, photos, audio files, and video files.

The term “**diocesan entity**” or “**Diocese**” shall mean any organization, department, office, ministry, outreach, parish, school, agency, committee, task force, advisory board, or institution by, or with the supervision of, the Diocese of Arlington. This shall include Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington and the Arlington Catholic Herald and their respective entities as well.

The terms “**Diocese Entity Website**,” “**Diocese Entity Social Media Account**,” and “**Diocese Entity Website [and/or] Social Media Account**” shall mean a website and/or social media account that is owned or managed by or on behalf of the Diocese or a Diocese Entity. This term does not include personal websites or social media accounts.

The term “**personnel**” or “**employee**” shall mean the bishop, priests, deacons, seminarians, non-ordained consecrated men and women, lay employees, and lay volunteers who are involved in work for the Diocese of Arlington, its parishes and agencies and who represent the Church by virtue of office, designated position, employment or contract.

The term “**personal**” shall refer to any website, social media account, or online content, the website, social media account, or content of an individual or external group that is not owned, managed, or published by or on behalf of the Diocese of Arlington or a Diocese Entity. This term does not include Diocese Entity websites or social media accounts.

The term “**social media**” shall mean an account associated with a social media service including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Google +, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Reddit, etc.

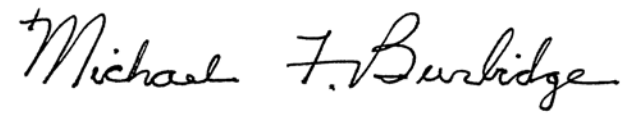
The term “**website**” shall mean any web presence, including any website that displays social media content or features

## VI. Addendum for Additional Policies

Parish pastors/administrators, school principals, regional directors, and similar management personnel may develop written directives particular to their Diocesan Entity’s mission and operation that provide additional guidance to personnel in the use and management of websites and social media. No such directive should contradict the contents of this policy. If such an addendum is created, it should be included with this policy when presented to the personnel so that they understand their full responsibilities and accountability when they sign the “Official Receipt” below.

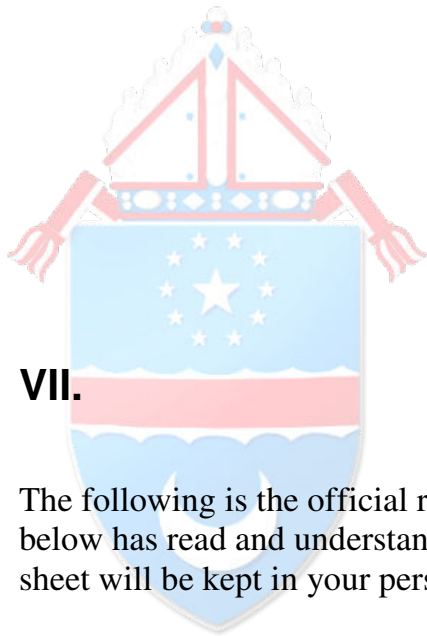


*Approved by the Office of the Bishop of the Diocese of Arlington on June 22, 2018*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael F. Burbidge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small crossbar on the "M" and a long, sweeping tail on the "B".

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge

Bishop of the Diocese of Arlington



**Catholic Diocese of Arlington**  
**Office of Communications**  
**Social Media Policy**  
**Released FY 2018-2019**

**VII.**

**OFFICIAL RECEIPT**

The following is the official receipt denoting that the individual whose signature appears below has read and understands the guidelines contained in the attached document. This sheet will be kept in your personnel file.

While updated versions of this policy will be shared with personnel and Diocesan Entities, it is the responsibility of the personnel to ensure they are aware of the most recent version and adhere to it.

Please complete and return this sheet to your parish/school/office location.

***I have read and understand the guidelines contained in the Policy for the Diocese of Arlington as well as any Addendums provided by my respective Diocesan Entity. I promise to follow these guidelines in my service to the Church.***

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Full Legal Name (Please Print)

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Signature

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Date

---

Position/Title

---

Parish/School/Ministry/Organization

---

Email

---

Phone Number