

# EDOMI Social Media Policy

This Social Media Policy applies to all online and mobile platforms for sharing content and information, whether controlled by The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan or hosted by others, on which members of The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan community engage in discussions or activities relating to The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan. The term “social media” refers to social networking services, blogs, short-message services, message boards, wikis, podcasts, image- and video-sharing sites, and other methods for real-time information sharing among users. Because this is a constantly evolving area, this policy applies to all new social media platforms whether or not they are specifically mentioned in this policy.

Social media shapes the lives of young people and has the potential to empower ministry. Behavior in the digital sphere is never private. Posted content may be used out of context and out of the control of the originating individuals and organizations, putting them at risk. In addition, these powerfully connective tools are subject to the same dynamic of unequal power and potential for abuse that present a risk in all ministry relationships. Churches face the challenge of identifying and proactively addressing areas of potential risk in social media use in the midst of rapidly evolving technology.

## General Information about Digital Communications

- All communications sent digitally (email, social networking sites or platforms, notes, texts or posts, etc.) are NOT CONFIDENTIAL and can be shared or reposted to others.
- Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent. That is, occurring in such a way that it is easy for others to see what actions are performed.
- In the virtual world, healthy boundaries and Safe Church practices must be adhered to as they are in the physical world.
- In the virtual world, “friend” can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate through that medium. In the physical world, friend can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self-disclosure, mutuality, and expectations for relationship.

Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children or youth apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world.

**1. Core values.** In areas where this policy does not provide a direct answer for how members of our community should answer social-media questions, members should use their best judgment and take the most thoughtful and prudent action possible, bearing in mind the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan’s need to preserve accountability for the use of its name in all social media and the core values of this policy:

- **Be selective** – there are a variety of digital platforms available. Use the right medium for your message – a blog or social network might not be the right place for messages intended only for a small group, and email or other more targeted media might be best.

- **Be responsible** – social media are individual interactions, not official Diocesan communications. Members of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan community are personally responsible for the content they publish. Official statements of Diocesan policy may only be made by the Bishop or their designee.
- **Be smart** – a blog or community post is often visible to the entire world, and can be shared by others in ways that you cannot control. Remember that what you write is public, and will remain public for a very long time (perhaps permanently). Be respectful to everyone.
- **Be identified** – authenticity and transparency are driving forces behind social media. Use real identities to the greatest extent possible rather than anonymous posts and comments.
- **Respect the privacy of others** – do not publish the personal information of others in the community without their permission or, in the case of children under 13, written permission of their parents.
- **Be respectful** – The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan is a thoughtful and prayerful community that encourages free expression and values civil debate. If you disagree with others, do so with civility. Respect your audience, express your views with appropriate language, and be respectful of the Church and its teachings.
- **Be trustworthy** – respect the confidentiality of matters that are shared with you in confidence, or that are meant to be kept confidential by the nature of your work, ministry or volunteer mission.

**2. Use of Official Name and Logo.** Any use of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan name or logo for branding or titling pages, blogs, or other similar elements of social media must be approved in writing prior to use. Requests for prior consent to use such names or logos should be made to the Director of Communications. Permission to use the name or logo of the Diocese may be revoked at any time in the sole discretion of The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan. This policy, however, should fully preserve free expression. It should not, for example, be interpreted to limit the ability of members of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan community from using the name of The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan to identify themselves in profiles, discuss matters relating to the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan, or other similar uses.

**3. Duties of Owners and Moderators.** Moderators of official Episcopal Diocese of Michigan social media are responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy. All comment and response areas should be moderated, if possible, and consistent with the goal of the forum. Leaders responsible for such areas should review and approve comments prior to posting, and should not post any comments that do not meet our standards for civility, misrepresent the position of the Diocese or the Church, or that include profanity, defamatory language or speech that is otherwise inappropriate or off-topic. In an unmoderated forum, leaders should delete any comments or content that does not meet the standards of this policy as expeditiously as possible. Anonymous comments should be avoided except in circumstances where anonymous or pseudonymous speech is essential to the protection of the identities of the vulnerable. All moderation functions should reserve the right to ban repeat offenders. Moderators who permit users to post materials such as documents or photographs should make clear to users that the

site will not archive those materials or be responsible for preserving them. The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan and its agents do not have a responsibility to review or monitor the Social Media pages or groups that are not sponsored/owned by the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan.

**4. Individual Judgment.** Even when engaging in social media for personal use, the comments of a member of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan community may be viewed as a reflection on The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan. Users should use their best judgment when engaging in social media activities and should be on guard against actions and discussions that could harm the interests of our community.

**5. Transparency.** Users' social media communications are made in their personal capacity and not on behalf of The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan. Statements made by members of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan community should not be taken as expressing the formal position of The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan unless the speaker is specifically authorized to do so by the Bishop or the Bishop's designee.

**6. Copyright Laws.** Users must comply fully with copyright law when posting and uploading materials. Any posting of materials to official Episcopal Diocese of Michigan social media must be limited to materials in which the copyright is owned by the party seeking to post the information, or in which the owner has consented to the sharing of the materials. Images and other materials from the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan websites shall not be copied and uploaded to other forums without the prior written consent of the Director of Communications. This policy should not be construed to limit discussion of matters using the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan name, and it should not be interpreted to limit users' ability to link to The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan sites.

**7. Privacy.** Users of social media must comply with the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan Privacy Policy. All users of social media within the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan community should take care to safeguard the privacy interests of other community members. In particular, personal information (that is, information that can reasonably identify a particular person, including name, phone number, address or email address) should not be disclosed without the prior written consent of the person identified. In cases where a user has consented to the publication of such information, appropriate privacy settings and levels should be utilized.

**8. Children.** Any site operated by The Episcopal Diocese of Michigan that is directed toward youth under the age of 18 shall have the following guidelines:

- Prudent judgement should be used in the time of day a child or youth is contacted through social media. Refrain from contact or exchanging texts, chats, or emails before 8:00 am or after 10:00 pm, unless it's an emergency.
- Privacy settings and personal boundaries should be implemented.
  - Do not submit connection requests (such as friend requests on Facebook or "Add Me" on Snapchat) to children or youth for personal interactions. Youth may not be able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between youth

and adults. Youth may ask to be “friends,” and adults should discern the nature of contact appropriate for healthy ministry.

- Apply privacy settings that are consistent with all children and youth across all social networking sites and platforms. Avoid playing favorites or the appearance of playing favorites.
- Establish a regular ongoing and consistent system of review that focuses on settings, accessible content, photos, and videos to ensure compliance with professional and institutional standards.
- Inform parents of children and youth of social networking sites and platforms used within the ministry.
- When possible, send communication to entire groups, on an individual’s “page,” or in public areas, rather than in private messages. This includes photos, images, and videos.
- When sending emails to a child or youth that contain personal or private information regarding that child or youth, a copy should be sent to the parents or guardians as well. Examples of these types of emails include payment-due information, specific medical requests or questions, etc. Mass emails sent to an entire group are not required to be copied to parents or guardians.
- Disclose ongoing digital pastoral communications (ie: emails, Facebook messages, texting, etc) with children and youth to a parent and/or a supervisor to determine when a referral to a professional provider or resource is needed.
- A covenant to govern digital groups, which include the following:
  - Appropriate and inappropriate behavior of members (bullying, pictures that depict abuse, violence, illegal activities, sexual acts, etc.) and the consequence for inappropriate behavior.
  - Who may join and/or view group activity, when participants should leave the group and when/if the group will be disbanded.
  - Description of content that can be posted or published on the site or page.
  - A prohibition of “tagging” photos and videos of children and youth. However, the captioning of photos and videos is permissible with written permission from a parent or guardian.
  - Notification that mandatory reporting laws will be followed.
  - Consequences for breaking the covenant.
- Comply with the following best practices regarding “groups” on Social Networking sites:
  - Have at least two unrelated adult administrators as well as at least two youth administrators for groups.
  - Use closed groups, but not “hidden” or “secret” groups.
  - Youth-aged group administrators should be the ones to invite other youth to join the online group.
  - Remove any content that shows or describes inappropriate behavior outside the bounds of the established behavioral covenant.
  - Allow access to social networking groups for parents/guardians of current members.

- Remove from social networking groups adult leaders of youth groups and youth who are no longer members due to departure, removal from position, or ineligibility because they “aged out” of a program.
- Users of such a site may not post images of children under 18 without the prior consent of a parent or legal guardian of any minor depicted.

**9. If You See It, Say It.** Any use of social media that does not comply with this policy should be brought to the attention of the Director of Communications immediately at [dboyd@edomi.org](mailto:dboyd@edomi.org).