600.1.4   Digital and Electronic Media Use (Laity)

Statement of Purpose

To provide clarification and guidelines for the use of electronic and digital media technologies by lay employees and volunteers in the Diocese of San Bernardino.

Background

The emergence of Internet-based technologies has substantially changed the media landscape, greatly expanding the avenues for mass communication in the diocese, nation and world. No longer is media defined simply as what is broadcast on radio and television or printed in newspapers, magazines and periodicals. Individuals can empower themselves as media sources through web sites, blogs, pod casts, video posts, mobile communication devices and through social networking.

The great potential of new media for effective evangelization was seen during the Second Vatican Council, resulting in the Decree on the Means of Social Communication (Vatican II – Document 26). Today, digital media is used to proclaim the word at virtually all levels of the Catholic Church, from Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the United States to the Diocese of San Bernardino.

Yet the decentralized and individualized nature of digital media makes it more difficult to ensure that what is offered in communication is rooted in the Gospel and accurately reflects the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

General Guidelines for Use

Lay employees and volunteers are encouraged to use digital media for ministry to the Catholic faithful and for evangelization in general. If done under the auspices of a parish, school or diocesan ministry, use of electronic or digital media must be first approved by the parish pastor, priest administrator or pastoral coordinator, school principal or Diocesan Pastoral Center ministry director.

Some appropriate applications for the use of this media include but are not limited to:

- Pastoral messages from parish, school or ministry leaders
- Stating or clarifying Church teaching on issues of the day
- Raising awareness/generating participation in stewardship efforts
- Initiating dialogue on daily or weekly Mass readings
- Inviting and welcoming the unchurched to the Catholic faith
- Providing a forum for dialogue and faith sharing in church communities
- Communicating with youth
- Giving important instructions in the event of a disaster or emergency
- Broadcasting liturgies and events to those who could not attend

The use of digital media must occur in accordance with the conduct policies of related ministries, including Child and Youth Protection, Catholic schools, parish youth ministries and catechetical programs.

Those who participate in these forms of communication, even in the name of the Church, must always be mindful that this technology can be used for sinful purposes. The following must be avoided in any church communication made through electronic or digital media:

- Conveying teachings about Jesus that are not faithful to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- Exposing images of others, especially children and those vulnerable to predators
- Violating the privacy of others / disclosing the personal information of others without their consent
- Lying and gossip
- Causing and exposing scandal
- Bullying
- Stalking
- Using inappropriate or profane language
- Showing images that don't respect the sacredness of the body and our gift of sexuality.
- Stealing by copying files and music
- Hacking into another's information to alter or steal
- Extorting money
- Misrepresenting others especially those in authority
- Creating viruses that destroy others' computer information

Social Networks for parishes, schools and ministries

The nature of on-line blogging and social networking is to link individuals together through the sharing of information and participation in group dialogue or commentary. In the case of sites such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube participants create individual profiles that include personal information, images and commentary. When they consent to share their profile with another participant that person becomes part of their network of "friends." In creating a diocesan, parish, ministry or school presence in a digital network, a careful review of the profiles of individuals wishing to become a "friend" on the network should be done. If content containing the prohibitions above is found in the individual's on-line profile, this individual must be denied entry into the network. Further, the administrators of the network should conduct monthly reviews of group members' individual profiles to assure that questionable content has not been added.

It is important to note that in those social network interactions that involve minors the diocesan Safe Environment Policy for the Protection of Children and Code of Pastoral Conduct must be followed. This relates especially to the disclosure of private information on a social network and the posting of images of a minor on a social network without parental consent.

Blogging

Blogs provide an effective means for parish, school and ministry leaders and members to share their experience of faith or communicate important news and events. They can also be used to initiate a dialogue on a particular issue through a comment section that allows viewers to respond to what has been stated in the blog. The comment function can be used to make inappropriate or even attacking statements that are not rooted in the purpose of using media for evangelization. It is recommended, therefore, that the administrator(s) of the blog configure it so that he or she can review comments made to the blog before they are posted on-line. Though the comment function is helpful in fostering dialogue and clarifying information, a blog can also be configured so that there is not a comment section.

Administration of digital media sites and networks

Some church or school personnel may find themselves tasked with overseeing a web site or social network despite having limited experience with this kind of technology. Site administrators are to follow these guidelines;

- Create social media accounts in the name of the parish, school or ministry rather than using private accounts to establish a digital presence
- Site administrators should be adults
- There should be at least two site administrators for each site, to allow rapid response and continuous monitoring of the site
- Passwords and names of sites should be registered in a central location, and more than one adult should have access to this information
- Copyright, fair use and IRS financial disclosure regulations must be followed
- Clearly state rules of engagement on social networking sites in a manner easily recognizable to site visitors. The Discussion Board Policy for the diocesan Facebook group, for example, states:

  Profanity will not be tolerated in the discussion board. Hostile or offensive posts will be censored by the group administrator/moderator. Non-Catholics are welcome in this group and we encourage dialogue in the spirit of Christian fellowship and ecumenism. However, anti-Catholic language is never appropriate and will not be tolerated.

  The practice of intentionally posting controversial or hostile messages in an online discussion forum with the intention of baiting users into an argumentative response is prohibited and will not be tolerated. Members of the forum are asked to refrain from responding and to ignore offensive posts. The unsolicited posting of commercial advertising material is prohibited and will not be tolerated.

Personal use of digital media

We acknowledge that many church and school employees, and volunteers enjoy personal use of digital media in the form of web sites, blogs and social network profiles.

Because of the highly public nature of digital media, however, it is noted that the posting of certain comments, information or images in a private context can have a harmful effect on the reputation of the parish/school and the diocese and its employees. Therefore, the diocese reserves the right to consider information presented through this media in the ministry status of an employee or volunteer.

Television and radio programs

While no longer the only sources of electronic media, television and radio still provide a valuable avenue for evangelization. Further, the advent of reality-based television makes greater the potential that a Catholic parish, school or minister could appear on television or radio.

The diocesan policy for the participation of a layperson in an existing television or radio program (600.1.1) is to be followed.

New programs or stations

If a layperson wishes to establish a radio or television program, or even an entire radio or television station, in the name of the Church, it must be done in consultation with the diocesan bishop of the area where the program originates. In accordance with policy 600.1.1, laypersons who would regularly appear in broadcast media must be "specifically qualified by his or her knowledge of the subject, by manifest adherence to the teaching of the Magisterium and by the witness of his or her life as a Catholic."

Before new programming is aired the following process is to be followed:

1. Layperson (s) contacts diocesan Director of Communications to state intent to establish a television or radio program/station.
2. If the proposal involves a new diocesan group that will identify itself in the programming as Roman Catholic, this group must also undergo a separate process to receive recognition from the diocesan bishop (Diocesan Policy 1200.1.4)
3. Layperson(s) submit formal written proposal for program/station that outlines the following information.
   a. Statement of purpose
   b. Nature of program or programming to be featured
   c. Personnel: background and Roman Catholic experience
   d. Funding
   e. Advertising criteria (if applicable)
   f. Any pilot or draft version of programming (if available)

4. The Department of Communications will review the submitted information and make a recommendation to the Bishop.
5. Layperson(s) will receive written notification from the Department of Communications indicating whether or not the Bishop has approved the proposed program/station (reasons will be stated in latter case).

Once approved and on the air, new programs or stations will be periodically reviewed to determine if the mission and programming represented in the written proposal are being followed.

<u>Related Policies and Guidelines</u>

- Code of Canon Law - Canon 772, §1, §2
- Social Media Guidelines – United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Diocesan Policy 600.1.1 (Broadcasting Permission – Laity)
- Diocesan Electronic Communication Policy
- Diocesan Code of Pastoral Conduct (Section VI, 5.1)
- Diocesan Education and Welfare Policy 5156.61 (Bullying)
- Diocesan Education and Welfare Policy 5156.7 (Electronic Equipment)
- Diocesan Education and Welfare Policy 5157 (Unauthorized Student Internet Websites)
- Virtus Training Manual (Lesson 7 – Internet Safety)