



OFFICE OF SAFE ENVIRONMENT DIGITAL COMMUNICATION POLICY FOR THE DIOCESE OF GREEN BAY

Digital communication offer individuals, groups and the Catholic Church an opportunity to connect in positive ways. We are able to encourage one another, strengthen community ties and boldly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

While communication has advanced technically, it is at its core a human interaction. This *Office of Safe Environment Digital Communication Policy* creates clear standards and expectations for digital communication to protect children, and youth in digital communications. A Diocesan location, parish or school, may adopt a stricter standard than this policy but may not adopt a practice that fails to meet the standards and expectations of this policy.

Adherence to Diocesan Codes of Conduct

Clergy, employees of the Diocese of Green Bay, and employees of parishes and schools within the Diocese of Green Bay, digitally communicating with non-related minors must conform to the “*Our Promise to Protect*” - *Safe Environment Policy, Diocese of Green Bay* (“[Our Promise to Protect...](#)” ([gbdioec.org](#)))

Volunteers who minister to children, digitally communicating with non-related minors must conform to the “*Diocesan Code of Pastoral Conduct for Volunteers*” (“[Diocesan Code of Pastoral Conduct for Volunteers](#)” ([gbdioec.org](#)))

Clergy, employees, and volunteers must always remember that they are representatives of their parish, school or Catholic organization, and must conduct themselves accordingly, sharing a positive, joyful witness to the Gospel with others at all times.

Mandatory reporting

Clergy, employees, and volunteers must immediately report any form of digital communication they receive which indicates existing or imminent harm or danger of sexual abuse of a minor to civil authorities. The content of the communication must also be reported to parish and/or school leadership, and the Diocesan Assistance Coordinator (920-272-8174) in collaboration for the safety of the individual.

Parents as primary catechists and decision makers

Parents are the primary catechists and role models of discipleship to their children. All clergy, employees, and volunteers have a responsibility to respect the wishes and stated desire of parents with regard to their child's level of participation in the use of digital communication and the parent's right to be aware of the content of digital communication between clergy, employees, and volunteers with their children.

A parent or guardian must complete the ***Parental/Guardian Statement of Intent*** before any clergy, employee, or volunteer may engage in digital communication with any unrelated minor with whom the clergy, employee, or volunteer interacts with because of their role or position. The signed ***Parental/Guardian Statement of Intent*** is kept on file at the parish or school location, and it must be reviewed and signed annually. No clergy, employee, or volunteer may engage in digital communication with a minor to which a parent or guardian does not have direct and immediate access to the communication. A parent or guardian must grant permission to communicate via digital communication with their child by selecting “Yes, I authorize” to do so in the ***Parental/Guardian Statement of Intent***.

Expectations of the use of written words, photos, videos and audio recordings involving minors

It is the policy of the Diocese of Green Bay which states that clergy, employees, and volunteers must obtain parental or guardian permission to photograph, videotape or otherwise record, copy or distribute any personally identifiable information - including, but not limited to, a minor's full name, photograph, video recording, audio recording, home address, email, telephone number, creative work or any other form of content that would allow someone to identify or contact that minor. The consent form for permission to use media listed in this paragraph is different than the consent

form found in this policy. A sample Media Release Form, able to be customized for individual parishes or schools can be found at www.gbdioc.org/MediaRelease

A standard of transparency

Clergy, employees, and volunteers are always witnesses and disciples of Jesus Christ. Therefore, complete transparency is imperative and necessary regarding the use of digital communication with unrelated minors.

All clergy, employees, and volunteers must agree all digital communication between themselves and any unrelated minor is open to review, and each parish, school or organization must retain consent for this digital communication on their premises. This consent is included as part of the Consent and Release form for this Policy. Clergy, employees, and volunteers must refrain from using any digital communication where a record or archive of the digital communication cannot be obtained.

When using digital communication, clergy, employees, and volunteers must be identified by their common name or photo. Aliases are not to be used. It is expected of clergy, employees, and volunteers that an email account connected to the parish, school, or diocese must be used for all email communication with unrelated minors.

When using digital communication clergy, employees, and volunteers must respect boundaries and must communicate using appropriate language. The TWO PLUS ONE rule must be applied whereby there is always two background checked and safe environment trained adults included in digital communication with an unrelated minor.

Parents or guardians have the right to be made aware of and to request to review digital communication between their child and clergy, employees and volunteers. In exceptional situations when a parent or guardian is not made aware of the content of digital communication, clergy, employees and volunteers must share that digital communication with their Supervisor or another safe environment compliant adult if the Supervisor is unavailable. It is up to the individual parish, school or organization to determine the form and standards in which requested digital communication is made available to individuals and how it is retained.

Accountability

For the protection of all individuals, clergy, employees, and volunteers must follow a *TWO PLUS ONE* rule for digital communication when communicating with unrelated minors. The *TWO PLUS ONE* rule states that whenever clergy, an employee, or a volunteer engages in digital communication with an unrelated minor, clergy, employees, and volunteers must include another safe environment trained and background-checked adult into the digital communication. This rule fosters safe environments by providing transparency, accountability and a second, safe environment compliant adult presence when digital communication takes place.

Any parish, school or organization that creates a parish or school page, social media or other digital presence is required to designate at least one *paid staff member* to maintain administrator-level privileges to each digital communications outlet. The staff member should be able to access and retrieve a record of digital communication between staff/volunteers and minor individuals at will if requested by parents, law enforcement or other legitimate authorities.

Questions

Any questions about this policy may be directed to the Office of Safe Environment at 920-272-8174.