

## **Virtual Ministry, Social Media, and other Digital Communications**

**All digital communications must comply with Safeguarding policies.** Ministry use of virtual platforms (such as Zoom) and social media is evolving, and protocols should be revisited as technology and platforms change. When questions arise about applying Safeguarding policies to a particular technology or platform, consult with the Safeguarding Minister.

- 1. Implement consistent privacy settings** that respect personal boundaries with all participants across all platforms.
  - a. Remember that privacy settings do not ensure confidentiality.
  - b. Each organization should develop and publish agreed upon privacy settings that staff and volunteers will use and make that information available to members of the community.
  - c. For virtual meetings or classroom forums, utilize passwords and/or waiting rooms that require the facilitator to admit each participant.
  
- 2. Be accountable.**
  - a. Ministry presence on social media platforms should have more than one adult administrator.
  - b. The Head of Organization and Program Supervisor should know how social media and virtual platforms are used in ministry. If the ministry involves children or youth, parents must also be informed of the way that social media and virtual platforms are used in the ministry.
  - c. All virtual meetings or classes involving children, youth, or Vulnerable Adults should be scheduled in advance on a calendar that is shared, together with log-in information and passwords, with the Program Supervisor and, when applicable, with parents or caregivers.
  - d. Consider recording all events that are held on virtual platforms. Before recording children or minors, obtain parental approval (*See Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth, Section IV.A.2*)
  - e. Any digital communications or posted material on online groups that raise pastoral concerns or are of a potentially harmful nature (such as bullying, abuse, etc.) must be removed but should be saved and disclosed to the Program Supervisor and Head of Organization and, as appropriate, with parents or caregivers.
  - f. Obtain parental approval before posting images or recordings of children or youth on social media or websites. (*See Policies for the Protection of Children and Youth, Section IV.A.2*)
  - g. Any inappropriate material posted in online groups must be removed but should

be saved by the administrator and reported to the Program Supervisor to be addressed.

- h. Frequently review the content and photos posted on social media platforms and websites.
- 3. Social media is rarely appropriate for a sensitive matter** that requires pastoral care and attention. In those instances, a face-to-face meeting or phone call is preferable as it allows for an assessment of tone and demeanor to help evaluate the situation and determine both urgency and appropriateness of a response.
- 4. In group communication and on virtual meeting platforms, create covenants** that address:
  - Appropriate and inappropriate language and behavior (sexual, profane, or derogatory language, and any sort of bullying are forbidden)
  - Who may join and/or view a group activity
  - Content that may be posted/published on the site or page
  - How images will be taken and shared
  - Consequences for breaking the covenant, which may include removal from group
  - Mandatory rules for reporting misconduct
- 5. Consider disabling private chat features** on virtual platforms when private conversations are not necessary to the purpose of the gathering.
- 6. When video chatting or meeting on virtual platforms involving video:**
  - Be mindful of appropriate attire and surroundings that are visible to the viewer.
  - One-on-one video chatting or meetings should follow the same Safeguarding guidelines as when meeting in person.
- 7. Use prudent judgment in the timing of digital communications** to maintain appropriate boundaries and avoid the appearance of impropriety.
- 8. Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse, exploitation, or neglect** of children, youth, elders, and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world just as they do in the physical world. Report suspected abuse to the [Texas Department of Family and Protective Services](#): 800-252-5400. The rules of reporting found in Section VIII of these policies also apply.