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Guidelines and Policies Regarding Internet Presence, Social Media and Other Electronic Communications

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INTRODUCTION

Social media, blogs and other forms of electronic communications and Internet presence (*see the Appendix for a short overview of these terms*) provide almost limitless potential for expanding the outreach of Jesuits in our mission of evangelization and communicating the faith to our world. The innovative and creative use of multiple types of media (audio, visual, as well as the traditional text) can assist people in their encounter with Jesus, the Gospels and our faith tradition in a manner to which they are accustomed. In these varied ways, the powerful tools of modern technology and modes of communication enable us to connect more closely with women and men of different cultures and nations from around the globe. These networks of relationships provide fertile ground for sharing the faith and even providing spiritual or pastoral care to those in need.

We recognize and appreciate these new and evolving forms of connectivity and communication as a positive gift from God that can and should be employed for the apostolic purposes of the Society of Jesus. In an address to the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pope Francis noted that "it is therefore important to know how to dialogue, and how to enter, with discernment, into the environments created by new technologies, into social networks, in such a way as to reveal a presence that listens, converses, and encourages. Do not be afraid to be this presence, expressing your Christian identity as you become citizens of this environment... In one of (St. Ignatius') rules, he says that anyone accompanying a pilgrim must walk at the same pace as the pilgrim, not ahead and not lagging behind. And this is what I mean: a Church that accompanies the journey, that knows how to walk as people walk today."

Technological advances and new forms of communications allow us to more fruitfully engage in a contemporary way in the Society's ministries of the word of God. Many Jesuits have already invested and continue to expend significant amounts of time and energy in seeking to proclaim the message of faith to our culture and world via media, which are being increasingly used by more people each day. In the midst of the cynicism, bitterness and negativity of content not infrequently found on the Internet and in social media, Jesuits are often strong, positive voices of encouragement, dialogue and hope, which lead people to a more faith-filled perspective on life. This is especially true for Jesuits involved with ministry with and to members of the younger generations of our society who often find social media a primary way of relating and interacting with one another. We applaud these efforts and are grateful to the Jesuits who have engaged in them. We also want to encourage all Jesuits to reflect and pray about ways to creatively utilize the power and reach of the Internet and social media to further the spread of the Gospel to a world in great need of the merciful, compassionate and reconciling message of Jesus Christ.

To carry out effectively the mission of the Society of Jesus through the Internet and the new forms of social media, we should strive to promote charitable dialogue, respect and transparency in the content that is presented. Moreover, we should be especially alert to how our content might impact not only the reputation of people who are mentioned in our material but also the good name of each Jesuit and the Society of Jesus as a corporate body. A few key facts are important to keep in mind in this regard.

- Content that is posted to the Internet is potentially ***always*** available to others, even after it is deleted. There is a permanence to content on the web that can be both a positive benefit but also a source of difficulty or challenge, especially if the content reflects negatively on a Jesuit or another person. Although a person may desire to leave his/her history in the past, the Internet does not always respect that wish.

- Second, a Jesuit should remember that he is ***always*** in a public role as a Jesuit in his social media postings and Internet presence. There is not a "private" persona that can be used online at times, since a Jesuit is always perceived in some way as a public representative of the Society of Jesus. Even with the disclaimer that "proprietor and contributors do not speak for the Society of Jesus or for the Catholic Church," the perception of those who read or view content produced by a Jesuit is that the work represents the Society of Jesus in some manner.

GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

The guidelines and policies found below are intended to assist Jesuits as they seek to carry on in a robust but prudent fashion the Society's ministry of the word in the continually changing context captured by the terms "new media," "social networking" and "digital world," among others.

These guideline and policies are a companion to the Jesuit Conference document *Protocols for Publishing and Interacting with Media* (December 2006), which sought to apply the norms for publishing in Appendix I of the *Manual for Juridical Practice of the Society of Jesus* (1997) to the types of publishing made possible by innovations in communications technologies. The guidelines are more general statements that will need to be updated regularly, whereas the policies are more specific to Jesuit governance and particular technologies and will need to be reviewed annually.

All Jesuits applied to, ascribed to or living in a province of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States are, at a minimum, to follow the guideline and policies in this document regarding their personal Internet and social media presence. Certain communities within the Conference, e.g., a novitiate, may have more specific or more restrictive policies. Jesuits who maintain an Internet presence as a dimension of their mission or assignment should follow the policies of their apostolate in their ministerial or professional Internet activity.

Guidelines of Internet Presence

1. Internet presence — the creation of audio, video and written content for publication on the Internet — is a positive and desired means for engaging in the Society's ministry of the word. Jesuits who engage in such content creation are expected to perform their work according to the same standards of accountability within the Society's governance as Jesuits who engage in more traditional expressions of this ministry.

2. Criteria for Internet content

    - The Internet content should be useful, according to the apostolic goal and mission proper to the Society of Jesus.

    - The content — audio, video and written—should strive for excellence in its category and thus meet the legitimate expectations of those for whom it is intended.

    - Opinions expressed within Internet content should support and not contradict doctrines of faith and morals as proposed by the magisterium of the Church.

    - Content should contain nothing that could justifiably be perceived as giving unnecessary offense to other persons, groups, nations or institutions. At the same time, we recognize that even the proclamation of the Gospel may "offend."

3. In judging whether content is in keeping with the criteria described in #2, such content should be judged in context and in its entirety.

4. A Jesuit's Internet presence should be consistent with the following ethical guidelines:

    a. A Jesuit should be aware of and comply with any protocols or guidelines established by the place or institution where he works and any professional organizations to which he belongs.

b. A Jesuit should be aware of and respect copyright and fair use laws; he should get permission from the copyright holder (e.g., the Jesuit Conference) before using logos or other copyrighted symbols of the Society.

c. Jesuits with professional licenses should be aware of and respect privacy and disclosure restrictions with respect to client or patient information.

d. Jesuits should respect the privacy of their fellow Jesuits, as well as their colleagues at the institution where they work; students and staff at schools where they are employed; and parishioners and staff at parishes where they are assigned. Unless they have the permission of the person or persons being referred to, they should not use their names or photographs (or other likenesses) or refer to them in ways that make their identity readily apparent to a knowledgeable person if the subject matter is controversial even if a name is not used.

e. Jesuits should not provide confidential or proprietary information that belongs to the Society, or to any institution or place of work where they are employed or affiliated.

f. Any policies that one's province or ministry or workplace has adopted with respect to ethical conduct in ministry with minors and ethical pastoral conduct with adults apply to Internet presence as well.

5. In addition, a Jesuit's Internet presence should always be transparent in the following areas:

a. The Jesuit creator must identify himself and his current work affiliation; he should not as a general rule use screen names or pseudonyms.

b. All Internet content must state plainly, or it should be evident, either on the home page or in the content itself, that the proprietor and contributors do not speak for the Society of Jesus or for the Catholic Church.

c. Content that comments on the activities and opinions of those in leadership positions within the Catholic Church and the Society of Jesus must be respectful of those persons and the offices they hold and must avoid placing them in embarrassing situations or conflictive positions relative to each other.

d. Jesuit content creators have a responsibility to collaborate with other Jesuits to improve the Internet presence of the Society of Jesus through linking, "friending," following and otherwise working with other Jesuit content creators.

e. In addressing issues that are or may be considered controversial or sensitive, a Jesuit should seek out the counsel of others with knowledge and experience of these issues and have the content reviewed by them prior to its posting. However, either with or without such a prior review, a Jesuit must always remove any content immediately at the request of his local superior or the superior's delegate for Internet content.

f. Jesuits should be alert to any Internet presence by Jesuit colleagues that does not comply with these Guideline and Policies, and respond appropriately. In certain situations, the response may involve notifying the Jesuit's superior.

Policies of Internet Presence

Policies related to Jesuit Governance:

1. The ***primary*** responsibility for assuring the quality, apostolic utility and appropriateness of posted Internet content lies with the individual Jesuit who creates it. The Jesuit should reflect upon and carefully discern whether the content will promote the apostolic mission of the Society of Jesus in a respectful and positive manner. In some cases, a Jesuit should seek the opinions of others (and possibly permission from his superior) before making the decision to post content on the Internet.

2. A Jesuit should inform his local superior and provincial of his Internet presence(s) (that is, whether he is on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or posts to YouTube, etc.) and discuss his activities in this regard during his annual conversations with them. This would include providing the superior with a sense of the general tone and style of his content (e.g., edgy, upbeat, pastoral, cynical).

3. Moreover, the Jesuit should provide the superior with instructions on how to connect with his Internet presence. A Jesuit who uses social networking services must allow his local superior to join his social network.

4. Provinces must ensure that local superiors or their delegates have the resources and ability to carry out their oversight role with respect to the Internet presence of community members.

Policies related to specific Internet presence technologies:

5. Internet presence that allows for synchronous communication (comments, bulletin boards, forums, etc.) must include a code of conduct for participants. A Jesuit responsible for such Internet presence must ensure all content on the site meets the code of conduct.

6. The content of Jesuits who post to comments, bulletin boards, forums, etc., must comply with the criteria noted in the Guidelines #2.

7. Jesuits who use location-aware social networking services (services that reveal one's current or recent physical location) must ensure that such activity does not result in a safety risk for other Jesuits, Jesuit communities or ministries.

Policies related to Social Media and Other Electronic Communications:

8. Any policies that one's province, ministry or workplace has adopted with respect to ethical conduct in ministry with minors and ethical pastoral conduct with adults apply to social media and electronic communications as well.

9. The content of Jesuits who use social media must comply with the criteria noted in the Guidelines #2. Special attention should be given to how the content, in specific instances, or as an aggregate of individual postings, reflects the way of proceeding of a Jesuit who has taken vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Policies related to Communications with Minors:

10. Jesuits should not communicate with minors (other than relatives) using electronic media — including email, instant messaging, texting or social networking sites — except as a part of their professional/ministerial responsibilities. If a minor contacts the Jesuit, a polite response is permitted, but future communications should be avoided.

11. Jesuits who have a "public presence" or maintain "public pages" on social media, such as Facebook, where anyone can "like" or "join," are permitted to have minors "liking" or "following," as long as they are not in contact with the minors.

12. During any usage of social media or other electronic communications with minors, Jesuits are not

    - to make comments that are, or could be construed by an observer to be, harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating.

- to engage in sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities unless these are part of a pastoral situation.

- to post sexually oriented or morally inappropriate pictures, photos or comments.

- to post photos of minors or details of ministry/program activities involving minors on any electronic media without the explicit, written permission of a parent or legal guardian.

- to engage in one-on-one video chatting or have a one-on-one interaction in a chat room.

- to engage in instant messaging unless this is a very brief and infrequent exchange and has a readily and clearly apparent professional or ministerial purpose.

- to initiate or accept a "friend" request (or similar social media "connection") using a personal account.

Policies related to Communications with Adults:

13. During any usage of social media or other electronic communications with adults, Jesuits are not

    - to make comments that are, or could be construed by an observer to be, harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating.

    - to engage in sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities unless these are part of a pastoral situation.

    - to post sexually oriented or morally inappropriate pictures, photos or comments.

Appendix: Short overview of Internet presences and social media

Internet presence refers to the combination of pictures, text and videos that form the online reputation of an individual or organization. The channels of creating an Internet presence, also known as "Internet publishing" or "content creation," can be divided into several categories:

1. A *Blog* is a website maintained by an individual or group of individuals with regular commentary, articles, description of events or audio/photo/video content. Blogs are for the most part interactive, allowing readers to leave comments. For the purpose of this document, any site presenting such content, interactive or not, is considered a blog.

2. *Micro blogging* is a simplified form of blogging consisting of much shorter entries than what is typical for a blog. Micro blogging platforms include Twitter among others.

3. *Rich Content* services allow users to easily publish pictures, music and video on the Internet. Though many of these services share characteristics of social networking, blogging and micro blogging platforms, their primary focus is the hosting and organization of such content. Flickr, YouTube, Instagram and Vimeo are popular examples of rich content services.

4. *Social networking/social media* is an online service, platform or site focused on connecting individual users based on any number of interests, activities or involvements. A social network typically allows users to share text, messages, video, pictures and other personal data with a selected community of friends and acquaintances. Examples of social networking services include Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, among others.

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