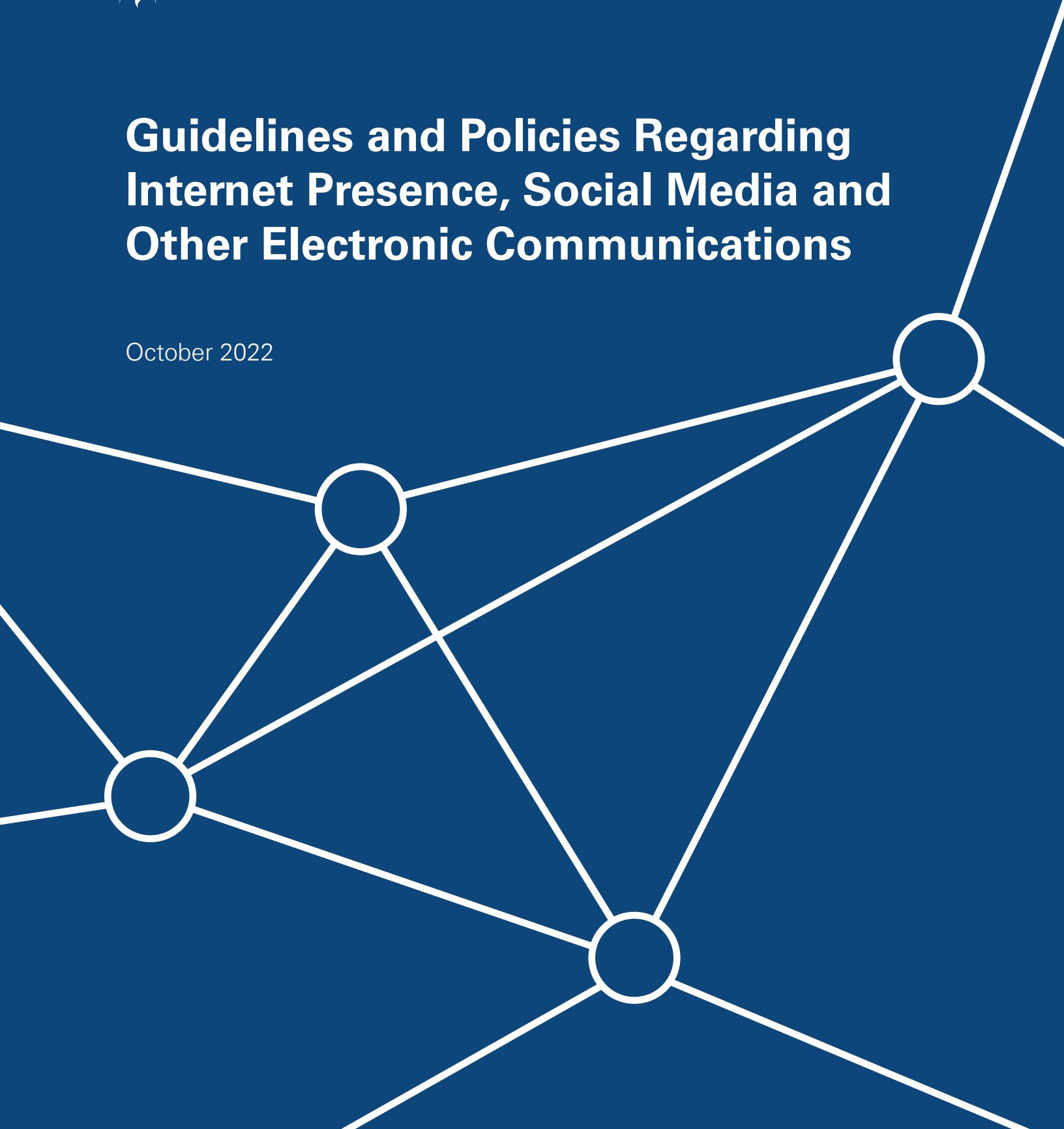


# **Guidelines and Policies Regarding Internet Presence, Social Media and Other Electronic Communications**

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# INTRODUCTION

Digital media provide exceptional opportunities for expanding the outreach of Jesuits in our mission of evangelizing and communicating the faith to our world. The innovative and creative use of multiple types of media can assist people in their encounter with Jesus, the Gospels and our faith tradition. 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. As we have experienced, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, 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 evolving forms of connectivity and communication as a gift from God that can and should be employed for the apostolic purposes of the Society of Jesus. At the same time, we are aware that social media channels are not neutral tools and have led to growth in extremism, incivility and “fake news.” Ongoing discernment related to a Jesuit’s online presence is essential.

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.”

In today’s world, digital media allow us to fruitfully engage 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. Amid the cynicism, bitterness and negativity of content frequently found on the internet and in social media, Jesuits are often strong, positive voices of encouragement, dialogue and hope, who lead people to a more faith-filled perspective on life. 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 use the power and reach of digital 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 effectively carry out the mission of the Society of Jesus through digital 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.

1. Internet ministry is a ministry. It requires training, skills and development. It is not necessarily for every Jesuit. However, Jesuits who discern not to participate in online ministry might want to reflect on how they can best support their brothers who do engage others online.
2. Content that is posted to the internet is **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.
3. 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.

- a. A related point: Especially on social media platforms, assume the audience understands no distinction between, say, a Jesuit in first studies and one who has professed final vows years ago. Many Jesuits early in formation are called “Father” online every day. Even the most honest, vulnerable, thinking-out-loud reflections can be interpreted as authoritative statements with magisterial weight. To avoid confusion, a Jesuit should discern which topics he is best equipped to address in public online forums, consonant with the extent of his formation and subject-area expertise.

## GUIDELINES AND POLICIES

The guidelines and policies found below are intended to assist Jesuits as they seek to carry on in a robust and prudent fashion the Society’s ministry of the word in the continually changing digital media landscape.

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 guidelines 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 is a positive and desirable means for engaging in the Society’s ministry of the word. Jesuits who engage in such content creation are expected to perform high-quality 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. At the same time, social media platforms are not neutral tools. These networks run on algorithms designed to keep users scrolling and often reward incendiary, unbalanced and mean-spirited content. Discernment around starting, maintaining and/or growing social media participation must be ongoing and could include questions like:
  - a. Do we need to be on these channels? Are we actually accomplishing the work of the Gospel, or are we just going along because culture says we need to be there?
  - b. How much of our social engagement serves our own ego as opposed to truly promoting the Gospel and building up God’s vision for humanity?
  - c. What are our goals in social media engagement, and can we realistically accomplish those goals? Are we ready to make the

- significant commitment social media engagement requires?
3. Every Jesuit engaged in digital media should see their outreach as part of building up what Father General calls a “culture of vocation promotion” within the Society.
  4. A Jesuit’s superior should be able to view content posted to one’s social media accounts as a “friend” or follower.
  5. Criteria for internet content:
    - a. The internet content should be useful, according to the apostolic goal and mission proper to the Society of Jesus.
    - b. The content should strive for excellence in its category.
    - c. Opinions expressed within internet content should support and not contradict doctrines of faith and morals as proposed by the magisterium of the Church.
    - d. The internet content, especially when it consists of “re-sharing” material originally posted online by another person or entity, should be verifiably true and not a source of disinformation.
    - e. 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.”
  6. In judging whether content is in keeping with the criteria described in #5, such content should be judged in context and in its entirety.
  7. 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. Out of respect to the privacy of others, Jesuits should honor any request they receive to refrain from sharing the subject’s photo online or to remove one that has already been shared.
    - 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.
  8. 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. Any exception to this policy should be discerned with one’s superiors.

- 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 and leaders of apostolic works to improve the internet presence of the Society of Jesus.
- 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 brother Jesuits that does not comply with these Guidelines 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 media 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 #5.
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 #5. 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
  - a. to make comments that are, or could be construed by an observer to be, harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating.
  - b. to engage in sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities unless these are part of a pastoral situation.
  - c. to post sexually oriented or morally inappropriate pictures, photos or comments.
  - d. 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.
  - e. to engage in one-on-one video chatting or have a one-on-one interaction in a chat room.
  - f. 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.
  - g. 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
  - a. to make comments that are, or could be construed by an observer to be, harsh, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning or humiliating.
  - b. to engage in sexually oriented conversations or discussions about sexual activities unless these are part of a pastoral situation.
  - c. 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. *Rich content* services allow users to easily publish pictures, audio and video content on the internet. Many of these services also include elements of social networking. TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and Vimeo are popular examples of rich content services.
3. *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, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, among others.