

Healthy Practices for Social Media

Caffeinated Church Workshop
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Hi, I'm Alli

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Social Media basics

Social media is a collection of online platforms in which individuals engage, communicate, collaborate, and share content with other individuals.

It is now integrated into almost every facet of our existence as social beings.

If you exist in the modern world, you are affected by Social Media.

The top social platforms

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- TikTok
- YouTube
- Reddit
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn

The top 1-1 platforms

- SnapChat
- WhatsApp
- Messenger

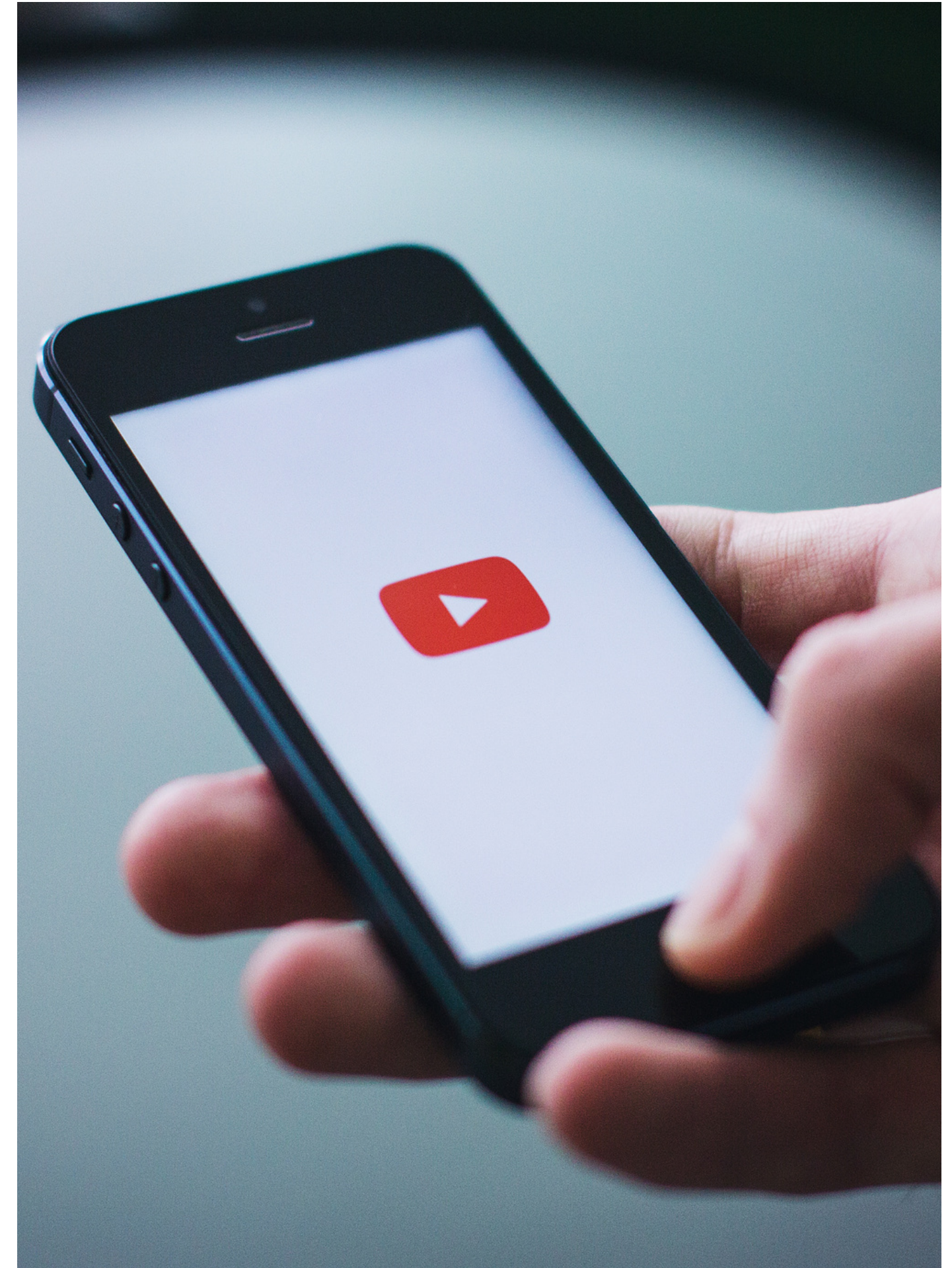
What I am going to talk about...

Why it matters, how to use it safely, best practices or options for diocesan/congregational accounts, boundary setting for individuals, dealing with creeps/trolls/etc.



What I am not going to talk about...

How to get more followers, how to make a TikTok, algorithms, defending social media, say the church doesn't need to be on social media, or that Christians shouldn't say things about politics.



I am assuming that if you are in this workshop you either

- a) understand the need for the church to be on social media; or
- b) are already on it and hoping to navigate it safely

Social Media and the Church

Be Present

The church's presence on social media is essential because it allows for the church to be integrated into the everyday lives of the congregants, neighbors, those interested. It draws the church out from "Sunday Morning" to being a source of spiritual growth and grounding throughout the week.

Come back to Prayer

One of the main roles the Church must fill in the social media world is being the voice of prayer. This means when tragedy or joy happens, offering prayers. It also means speaking truth to power and returning to the gospel in times of injustice, hatred, greed, and fear.

Have some fun

Try thinking less about getting followers... Jesus had 12, nbd. Bring some life and humor to the church. The church is a living thing that experiences joy and laughter, the church shouldn't take itself too seriously, and neither should your social media presence. Be serious when it matters, and be funny when you can.

All interactions with parishioners/members of your community that occur online using social media platforms **ARE** interactions with parishioners/members of your community.

Because social media is so integrated into our daily life and routine, there is no distinction between the “virtual“ and the “real“ world. Online interactions are interactions. Who you are online is who you are. This is incredibly important with regards to individuals who become ordained and therefore become public figures. It also matters for the institution; saying something is like shouting it into a crowded room.

This is important because power dynamics are important with regards to the church and creating safe boundaries.

But we must
be safe.

Commonly Accepted Principles of Healthy Boundaries

- Adults have more power than children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- Clergy have more power than people with whom they have a pastoral relationship.
- The mutuality of friendship cannot exist when there is a disparity of power.
- Two unrelated adults must be able to maintain visual contact (see posts, chats, etc.) with each other anytime they engage in ministry with children or youth.
- Windows allow transparency of interactions.

Guiding Principles for Digital Communications / Social Media

- **Mandated reporting laws apply online – suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders, and vulnerable adults.**
- **Social media is not confidential. Any post, message, tweet, image, can be screenshotted, shared, forwarded, reported, or passed along.**
- **Safe church applies to social media platforms – particularly within group settings like Facebook Groups or 1-1 chatting, especially with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.**

Being a public figure

As a church or diocese posting on social media, you are performing as a public institution and therefore what you say or don't say or do or don't do matters.

Unfortunately, the default for most interactions on social media or most assumptions made via social media is that whatever is posted is a statement of “who you are“ at face value. This is because of how social media is displayed – on feeds or pages hyper calculated to encourage engagement.

This means that when someone sees a post from you that is snarky, or a rant, the assumption is that you are snarky or always ranting. The wholesomeness of a person is often forgotten in initial reactions to social media posts. This is because of 3 reasons: 1) posts are displayed as isolated occurrences; 2) posting is like yelling randomly; and 3) posts usually are only curated sharings from the poster.

This is important to know...

Because knowing how you (or your parish/diocese/institution) are perceived will help you, as communicators, be better prepared to post or share things that matter and are rooted in your intention as a church.

If your church has a bad reputation in the neighborhood that you are trying to combat... you need to know what that reputation is and why it has formed before you can combat it.

Similarly, we as communicators need to know that the church is not as widely accepted as we think on social media or in our lives generally... and we need to understand why there is a lack in acceptance and respect.

Creating and Respecting Guidelines

If you are in a position to create the guidelines for your social media content, then it is important to establish what you will and will not talk about, post on, share, etc.

However, those guidelines do need to be a bit flexible, as our world is very interconnected and the intersectionality of topics requires fluidity because we are fluid beings.

For example: the concept of what is or is not “political“ has completely shifted, and will continue to shift. All topics are political because we are people.

However it is important to have guidelines...

- Posting images of people – requiring permissions, do you post images of children? What is the protocol you have with regards to including or excluding images with recognizable faces?
- Posting limit to the day or week? Do you want to post something every day or more sporadically? Why? What are the reasons behind that – are they purely to “attract engagement,” if so, are you being authentic?
- Responding to immediate or local issues. Develop a geographical map for yourself to understand what is a local issue and what is not. This isn't insensitive... it is quite literally creating a boundary for yourself.
- Work with your Bishop, priest, lay leaders, to develop a spectrum of topics or issues you want to be vocal about. Usually those in leadership have opinions – hear them out and assess if they make sense as the institution.

- What about humor? I think it is necessary. What sort of persona do you want to create with your social media presence?
 - Each platform has a different “vibe“ or culture to it. What may be funny on Facebook would fall flat on TikTok, or vice versa.
- Developing and understanding the “persona“ of your account. Your diocesan or church’s account will develop a personality over time.
 - Do you only post informational materials?
 - Do you only post/share upcoming events?
 - Do you share “behind the scenes“ of the daily life of the communicator?
 - Do you have a reoccurring post each week or month?
- What about serious matters?
 - Do you have a standard image or format for delivering serious content (highly recommend)?
 - Do you have a particular platform that you use to share this information? (recommend always linking to a post on your website...)

Creating and Respecting Boundaries

I love boundaries... both for the institution but also for yourself. As communicators who oversee social media, we can never really be “off.”

Something happens in the world and we need to decide if we need to say something, and if we do... then we need to decide what to say.

“Turning off“ isn’t really an option for those who oversee social media. I see you and I feel you. And this is why boundaries matter.

Some very basic boundaries first...

- There should always be more than one person on your administration for your social media platforms. More than one person should always have or have access to the passwords and log-in credentials for your platform. That doesn't mean they need to use it, but it is good to let one other person know.
 - This avoids the awkward but common “Dave ran off with our FB group and now has started a cult with it...” or when you leave your position it is good practice to hand over ALL passwords. It clears it from your hands and generally it is just good practice.
- On the other hand... do not have a lot of administrators. If you are the head of your department or the communications in general, you need to have trustworthy people on your account and they need to fully understand their roles.
 - Are they there purely for security reasons or are they allowed to post? What are they allowed to post?
 - Some platforms on the backend let you see who posted what to the page/account (mainly thinking of Facebook).

- Use a work email or better yet, a generic work email to create social media accounts, and keep track. Do you have an Admin@ email or an info@ email that you have access to? Use that!
 - One thing that causes issues is the two-step authentication. If you need to use your cell phone number for it, you need to make that known and be responsible if you leave the position for handing over/cooperating with a new person with that.
- There needs to be trust among the administrators.
- There need to be **more than one active** group leader in any Facebook group – especially one with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. This is a safe church matter.
- When a person who is an administrator of a social media account is fired or removed, all passwords should be changed. Hence why it is good to have a generic email for the user login and not your personal email. It should also be tied with someone who is legally hired, not a volunteer, unless there is a clear contract made.

Ok boundaries for yourself so you don't lose it...

- Have set times that you check social media. Unless there is something explicitly targeted at your institution, no one is really looking for you to respond to something immediately. Unless you are the “head head“ of an institution... and they are well compensated for that need.
- You do not necessarily have to have a say on everything. And if you feel you do... first start with prayer. The church prays, it is what we do. So can you offer prayer?
 - This isn't to say church's get a pass at being silent on important and topical issues in our world. The church is responsible for responding to the needs and cries of the community – we need to honor that.
- Facebook:: If it helps you, have a faux account for managing your Facebook page or group, but be sure there are other admins as well. This may be helpful for people who are against using Facebook personally and do not have a personal account.

- Have off days. If something major happens in the world, I am sure you will find out about it. Have a day where you do not need to check anything – but to be safe, try not to post anything that could be controversial the day before you take an off day. And it is ok to let another person know you won't be on social media that day.
- Realize that 99% of the time if someone says something hateful to your account... they do not know it is you and they do not intend for YOU to be hurt. It is often them expressing some anger or resentment they have with the institution of Christianity... not necessarily your particular church/diocese. I will talk more about this.
- If you use social media personally, develop a comfortable routine for yourself with regard to engagement with the community you serve. For example, if you do not worship where you work, maybe you maintain the distance via social media as well.

Trolls, Creeps, Annoying accounts.

Trolls and creeps are on social media, and they aren't going anywhere. A troll is someone on social media who posts outrageous comments in order to get a reaction of a rise out of the initial poster or fellow commenters.

Creeps are... well creepy. They post inappropriate or mildly inappropriate content or comments to your page to also get a reaction.

Then there are annoying comments... some that may be very valid but are tricky to handle. Someone who challenges the whole church's existence on your Sunday morning live-stream or tries a "gotcha" on a prayer post. Sure... but annoying.

It is ok to be very annoyed by all of these encounters.

- You are a person with irritations and feelings, it is ok to initially feel pissed or infuriated, or simply annoyed. Let yourself feel that then make your next move strategically.

Is this person just a troll

Screenshot the comment or post, record it somewhere, then report it, then delete it. You do not need to keep every comment on your post. You can just delete their post and move on with your day.

Is this person a creep?

Do they have a habit of this, have you recorded their posts before? Report them, ask others if they know of this person – maybe there is a serious pastoral issue someone *other than you* can address? Hello, clergy?

Are they just being annoying?

Ok, what is their comment? Is it legitimate and it just makes you a bit uncomfortable? Can it stay? Will it cause an eruption or just sit alone (most of the time it will be a stand-alone). Does this need a pastoral response?

What is important to do...

Tell someone

Establish from the beginning an understanding with your clergy/bishop that when something “happens” on your social media, you will tell them. Then tell them. I screenshot anything suspicious and immediately send it to the bishop with an “FYI what is happening on Twitter... I am on it...” message.

Make a record of it

If you don't have a WTF folder in your email or a “ClusterFolder” make one. Keep all records of emails, screenshots, etc. somewhere.

Report it

Social media platforms allow you to report abusive or harmful content. DO IT. I do it all the time, it helps the platforms recognize hateful comments and maybe, just maybe, social media will filter them.

Abuse/threats

Unfortunately, you will probably at one time or another face threats or abuse as a social media manager/account owner. Hopefully, I pray, you won't. But, it is good to be prepared.

- If a threat is made to you via your institutional account, first breathe then you need to CALL your supervisor, clergy person, bishop, immediately and tell them. Read them the full threat, don't gloss over inappropriate terms. You had to read it, they should hear it too.
- Do not delete the message. Screenshot it and send it to your clergy person/bishop.
- Then you need to make a plan with your clergy person or bishop. Does this threat to you feel legitimate, do you personally feel threatened for your safety? If so, do not hesitate to bring in the authorities or ask your clergy person/bishop to bring in a chancellor or another individual.

- Make a plan for your safety.
 - If you feel like you are personally in danger, work with the authorities to find the best solution for your physical space. I am not a trained professional so I cannot give you recommendations.
 - Talk to someone – your friends, family, partner, and particularly a therapist or professional if you feel you need it.
- Do not feel like you need to brush this off.
- Decide if you want to be a part of the follow-up or not. Regardless, it does need to be documented somewhere as well.

Create guidelines and boundaries that work for you and your congregation/diocese/institution.

Safe church applies to social media. Because there is no distinction between a “virtual“ world and a “real world“ any more.

Come back to prayer.

Record everything – your passwords, bad comments, GOOD comments (yay praise), reoccurring annoying people, etc.

Do not go at it alone. Bring others in and do not feel like you have to be the sole person responsible.

in the end...



thanks for joining me.