

Youth group social media fact sheet

Recommended tips!

Social media is an important part of youth ministry and can be invaluable when used to evangelise and build appropriate relationships that encourage and foster growth in faith and a relationship with Christ. It can also be a great platform for sharing faith formation, catechesis, events, activities and resources. While social media can provide a great space to share and discuss a wealth of material, it can be a tricky environment to negotiate at times, so here are a few tips for getting socially active online.

Setting up social media accounts

First things, first: before launching into an online presence for your ministry, you should seek permission from your parish /organisation leadership – particularly if this involves “friending” people to whom you minister.

Facebook is one of the key communication tools for youth groups. It can be utilised both as a promotional tool to reach a wider audience and as a communications tool within a community or group. Before setting up your account you should consider the primary purpose of having a presence on Facebook.

If you want to set up a group for internal communications, then establishing a “closed group” is usually your best option. A “closed group” will allow everyone in the group to see, discuss and post relevant content or set up events for the group. With a closed group, an administrator/s must grant permission to people wishing to access and interact on the group page. Ensure you include key parish stakeholders like your parish priest or pastoral associate in the group and have multiple administrators for the group. If a minor is given access to a closed or private group, the same access must be given to the minor’s parent or guardian on request.

If you want a more public profile to promote the youth group to the wider world, then a Facebook “page” or “organisation” might be the way to go. There is a specific category on Facebook for “Religious Organisations” which allows you to have multiple administrators. A page is a great way to have a public presence on social media but remember anything posted to the page can be seen by everyone so particular attention needs to be paid to it. Ensuring that what you post is appropriate and monitored very regularly is important and again it is important to have multiple administrators and include parish stakeholders. A public page also leaves you open to comments from anyone so how you will respond to comments (both positive and negative) is something that needs to be considered in advance.



It is recommended that you keep your personal Facebook interactions separate from your ministry Facebook presence. Consider having two profiles – one that you use with your friends and family, and one that is specific to the ministry. This helps remove any ambiguity about friendship relationships or ministry relationships. Consider setting up a profile that you share with your fellow ministry leaders; for example “YouthTeam Stltas”. This allows the profile to be “owned” and monitored by the team of leaders rather than an individual person and provides consistency online when leadership changes over time. Share log in access to this profile with other leaders and parish stakeholders.

Platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr have only more public profile options. You may find them very helpful for personal use, but less helpful in a youth group environment. Just remember that these platforms can be seen easily by many – you can make them a little more private using settings (e.g. when setting up Twitter and Instagram, you can choose who you allow to follow you). However these platforms cannot guarantee privacy. Your posts or images can be “re-tweeted” or “shared” or “pinned” or “re-blogged” etc and then become accessible to others. For example, even if you delete a tweet, it may and can already have been re-tweeted – which you can’t delete. Or possibly someone can “screen shot” your tweet and it is forever stored by someone else. Something might be re-shared so many times that it loses its context and can be misinterpreted.

Also be aware that many social media platforms are able to be searched through online engines like Google. If you were to google “cats tumblr” you will have visual access to thousands of people’s tumblr accounts, even if their settings are “private”. Privacy policies for all these platforms are readily available so if you’re not sure, read them – though not before bed as they might send you to sleep!

Always remember that some people choose not to engage in social media – if a member of your group makes this choice, it’s important that they do not miss out so don’t forget to keep them in the loop!

Posting content

The instantaneous and reactive environment of social media should always be considered when posting material – social media is forever and retractions are rarely an option. When engaging with young people over social media, you should be particularly aware of child protection protocols and policies, both of the Archdiocese and of civil authorities. Clear distinctions should be maintained between personal and ministry-related communication. The teachings of the Catholic Church should be consistently upheld when posting content and engaging in online communication. Ensure that material you are posting is appropriate and is not likely to be misconstrued. Be particularly careful when reposting or posting humour as it is often a personal judgement on what might be considered funny/ or offensive.

When posting photos or videos make sure you have consent to share these images publicly. Avoid sharing any embarrassing or offensive videos or photos. Do not tag or identify individuals by name and only approve tags where individuals have tagged themselves.

Care should always be taken to protect the privacy of people, particularly those under 18, and no personal information such as phone numbers and email addresses for anyone should ever be displayed on any social networking site.

The safest way to engage on social media is in a very open way – avoid private chats or messages. This is a forum that should be comfortable for young people, leaders, parish priests and parents to participate in. If a fellow leader or participant posts inappropriate content talk to other leaders and your parish priest about how to best deal with the situation. Inappropriate behaviour online by leaders should be dealt with in the same manner as inappropriate behaviour in person. If an outside source posts hateful or inappropriate messages (trolling), it is often best not to engage but to remove the post. If it is threatening behaviour there are laws (The Commonwealth Criminal Code Act Part 10.6) against trolling and you can look into reporting them.

If it's your first foray into the world of social media, don't be scared, embrace it – it's can be a very rewarding experience! Social media can enhance a group, making communications fun and easy and opening up a world of possibilities for interacting and engaging. Plus there are always plenty of cat videos when you need a laugh.

For more information you can view the Archdiocese of Melbourne's social media policy at www.cam.org.au/Professional-Standards/Documents.aspx and the social networking protocol of the Catholic Church in Australia at <http://mediablog.catholic.org.au/?p=335>.

All memes sourced from *catholic memes* via Facebook.

