



Oblate Youth Australia

SOCIAL NETWORKING AND ONLINE POLICY

(October, 2016)

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1. CONTEXT

In the vast world of new technology, a myriad of possibilities for communication has been opened up to building bridges for our community. Oblate Youth Australia, and the Catholic Church as a whole, recognises the potential which these new technologies bring. Social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat etc. in a phenomenon which allows groups to share information, build friendships and promote activities. In our desire to use this technology to our advantage, we understand that it should be pursued only to the point to which it allows growth in faith and in communion with others. The overarching principle in this communion should be that of human dignity, and at each step in the social networking endeavour, care should be taken by members of Oblate Youth Australia to ensure that the innate dignity of each person is upheld.¹

2. OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this policy are:

- 1) To provide a set of protocols as a guide for those working at various levels within Oblate Youth Australia on Social Networking Sites

¹ This policy has been derived from the Social-Networking Protocol for the Catholic Church in Australia - <http://www.cam.org.au/Portals/60/documents/ACBC-SocialNetworkingProtocols.pdf>

- 2) To ensure the safety of each individual, especially children connecting with Oblate Youth Australia across various social media platforms

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1) Members of Oblate Youth Australia should carefully consider their contributions to Social Media, as the instantaneous and reactive environment can lead to impulsive statements that may be interpreted as hurtful or offensive.
- 2) Members of Oblate Youth Australia should be mindful of the permanence of electronic communication before engaging on social media platforms.
- 3) The use of social media by the Project Officer, National Coordinators and those representing Oblate Youth Australia should always be in line with the values of the gospel and demonstrate a welcoming, respectful and supportive community.
- 4) Oblate Youth Australia and those representing the community should always be conscious of boundaries and ensure they are maintained, particularly when communicating online. Oblate Youth Australia will use social media as means to build appropriate relationships that encourage and foster growth in faith.
- 5) The core values of the community, and the teachings of the wider church should be consistently upheld in the use of social media, and should not move beyond appropriate communication with those Oblate Youth Australia is engaging with.

4. INTERACTIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

- 1) The sharing of information and content on social media platforms should be of appropriate materials for faith formation. Social media is an ideal way to promote community events and activities and for sharing resources in a wide range of formats.²
- 2) The teachings of the Catholic Church should be consistently upheld in the use of social media, and should not move beyond appropriate communication with those being ministered to. Clear distinctions should be maintained between personal and professional communication in the social networking environment.

² This policy has been derived from the Social-Networking Protocol for the Catholic Church in Australia - <http://www.cam.org.au/Portals/60/documents/ACBC-SocialNetworkingProtocols.pdf>

- 3) When contributing to social media on behalf of Oblate Youth Australia, it is not appropriate to make a public comment that is, or could be perceived to be:
- a) made on behalf of the Church;*
 - b) embarrassing to Oblate Youth Australia, The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate or the Church as a whole;*
 - c) inconsistent with the Church's doctrines, beliefs or principles;*
 - d) a gratuitous or personal attack on Oblate Youth Australia, the Church leaders and clergy, staff members, parishioners or affiliated institutions;*
 - e) compromising public confidence or trust in the Church's moral or theological leadership in the community.*
- 4) Members of Oblate Youth Australia should not, beyond reasonable doubt, make any unlawful or inappropriate contributions when posting on behalf of the community, including, but not limited to:
- a) material that is illegal, defamatory or incites racial or religious hatred;*
 - b) material that is sexually explicit or violent or would otherwise cause offence to a member of the public or community;*
 - c) material that amounts to bullying, harassment or discrimination;*
 - d) material that is in contravention of intellectual property laws.*
- 5) When posting photographs or videos, permission must always be obtained from those who appear in them, before they are posted or tagged. It may not always be clear to people in the circumstances that they are being photographed for material to be placed on social media. Such materials must always be appropriate and members of the community should avoid sharing embarrassing or offensive videos or photographs.³
- 6) Protection of privacy should be a priority. Care should be taken to protect people, particularly young people, from having their personal information such as phone numbers and email addresses, displayed on a social networking site.
- 7) Oblate Youth Australia reserves the right to direct a member of the community to remove content shared across the Oblate Youth social media platforms at

³ This policy has been derived from the Social-Networking Protocol for the Catholic Church in Australia - <http://www.cam.org.au/Portals/60/documents/ACBC-SocialNetworkingProtocols.pdf>

any time.

- 8) When interacting with young people on social media, members of Oblate Youth Australia should be aware of Oblate Youth Australia's Child Protection Policy. The purpose of interactions should be to build appropriate relationships that can encourage and foster growth in faith and should not be done in a way that can be interpreted as having the intention of fostering an inappropriate emotional connection with a minor.

5. THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

While the gifts of social networking are vast, it is important to remember in our engagement that the digital world is not exclusive. Social networking should never replace real relationships with people, and particularly in a ministry context, efforts should be made to avoid simply digital relationships.

It is important for us to remember that not everyone is able to access the internet and social media sites. The majority of the world is still unable to afford a computer, or perhaps they live in remote areas with limited access to technology. Talking about our social networking experiences may in fact make these members or our community feel even more isolated, rather than connected.

We as a community must be conscious of the potential of perceived exclusion when hosting events, activities and discussions via digital means, and make a concerted effort to avoid becoming a digitally exclusive community.

Whilst there are many strengths and opportunities to be gained from social media, we should be reminded that even though social media is becoming an increasingly popular way to connect and evangelise, it is only one way and not the only way of doing so.

6. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: [OYA Child Protection Policy](#)

Appendix 2: [ACBC Social Networking Protocol for the Catholic Church in Australia](#)

Appendix 3: [Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne Social Media Policy](#)