

## *Holy Cross/St. James/Sts. Peter & Paul Religious Education Program - Diocese of Evansville*

### **"Use of electronic communication" statement:**

- *Use of electronic communication:* I give my permission for Holy Cross/St. James/Sts. Peter & Paul Religious Education Program CRE, CRE Assistant, Catechists and their Volunteers to communicate with my child through the following electronic means: Email, text messaging, Facebook, Google+, and Twitter. This permission is granted with the understanding that communication will take place at reasonable times and in limited durations. Parents/guardians who do not wish to grant this permission should notify Holy Cross/St. James/Sts. Peter & Paul Religious Education Office in writing.

With this statement, we also provided the following description of why keeping these modes of communication open with our teens is important to us:

- Texting, Facebook, email, and other “social media” are a growing part of the world teens live in. Holy Cross/St. James/Sts. Peter & Paul Religious Education Program employs these means as a part of our effort to reach students "where they are," yet recognizes the need for total transparency with parents in this area.

We would like to provide you here with the guidelines that Holy Cross/St. James/Sts. Peter & Paul Religious Education Program CRE, CRE Assistant, Catechists and Volunteers are required to follow in making use of social media, followed by some FAQ on the subject.

- 1. CRE, CRE Asst., Catechists, Youth Ministers/Volunteers are to use prudent judgment in the times they contact students through social media. The "home phone rule" is a basic rule of thumb to use - do not text, chat, or email back-and-forth with students at a time you would not normally call their home phone line (e.g., after about 10:00 PM).
  2. If situations arise where the youth worker considers it more urgent to hold an e-conversation outside of these times, he/she is to let the parent know that the conversation took place. For example, a youth worker may send a quick email to the parent stating, "Billy/Susie texted me really upset last night around 11:00 pm. Since that was kind of late, I just wanted to let you know that we texted back and forth for about 20 minutes. He/She seemed to be doing better when our conversation ended."
  3. When youth workers become "Facebook Friends" with a youth, they are to extend a Friend invitation to that child's parents as well (when possible).
  4. Youth workers are to save substantial text conversations they have with students through any means. Parents may request to view the content of these conversations at any time.
  5. Middle School: E-Communications are used significantly less with Middle School students than with High School students. There are certain additional restrictions that youth workers are bound to in this area. For instance, Facebook requires account-holders to be at least 13 years of age. As such, youth workers may not "Friend" students they know to be under the required age.

These guidelines are intended to establish an environment of total transparency and integrity with parents in the use of electronic communications. Since youth ministry requires building relationships with the youth served, and trust is an important component of that, an appropriate level of confidence between youth workers and youth is necessary to building relationships, and parents and youth can expect us to honor that. Confidentiality does not extend, however, to high-risk situations - suicidal tendencies, drug use, abuse, and anything that presents a serious risk to the health and safety of the teens. All youth workers are required to notify parents as soon as possible when their children disclose high-risk situations.

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