

## Ministry and Social Media

by Christine Najarian

Before beginning the conversation about the use of social media in youth ministry, it must be said: personal invitation will always be the optimal method for encouraging participation in parish ministries. You can come up with the cleverest hashtag, create the best graphics, and shoot the funniest videos but what will have the most impact is an adult leader knowing a young person by name and inviting them into the life of the parish. Having said that, proper use of social media can be very beneficial to get the word out to both teens and their parents about upcoming events and to inform and educate on matters of faith.

### *Proceed carefully:*

- It is critical that you are familiar with the guidelines and policies surrounding appropriate ministerial use of social media. Please review the [Diocese of Arlington Social Media Policy](#) and the [USCCB Social Media Guidelines](#) and make sure that your social media use is consistent with the requirements given in both. If you are working with young people you should already have signed the [Code of Conduct for Personnel and Volunteers in the Diocese of Arlington](#); please make sure to review the section on Social Media. In addition, please make sure that you have gone through the proper channels at your parish to obtain any approvals needed to create social media accounts, and work to coordinate with any existing parish digital media efforts.
- Research apps and social networks before you begin using them. It can be tempting to start an account on the latest favorite app among young people, but there are often concerns regarding security and whether or not they are appropriate for use. The [Smart Social App Guide](#) is an excellent resource to aid in your assessment and is also as a helpful tool to share with the parents in your parish. The guide is frequently reviewed and updated, presenting a current, realistic view of the benefits and dangers of each app.
- Look into any hashtags before using them on a parish social media account. A quick search of a proposed hashtag on Twitter or Instagram will let you know if it points to something inappropriate or that is already too frequently used to be effective for your group.

### *Content creation:*

- With so much fighting for the attention of people both young and old, it is important that we take great care to produce beautiful, thoughtful images. How you do this will depend on your resources and skill level. If you're a novice at graphic design, you may want to check out [Canva](#), which provides a simple, effective platform for designing eye-catching content.
- It is helpful to give consideration to which networks you should use for which purposes. For instance, if you find that most of the people following the parish youth ministry Facebook page are parents, then gear most of the content there towards them. Then, if the following on Instagram is largely teens, the majority of the content there should be aimed at them. Being intentional about what you post and where you post it is important.

Putting the same content out on several different platforms at the same time has been found to be less effective.

- Variety in content is important! Keep it fresh by switching things up between reminders of upcoming events, images that incorporate quotes from the saints, and shared content from trusted accounts (such as the Diocese of Arlington youth ministry [Facebook](#) or [Instagram!](#))
- Most social media platforms offer an analytical tool that allows you to see the demographics of your audience, when they are most active on the app, and which posts have the highest levels of engagement. Utilize this data to decide what type of content to put the most effort into creating and learn when would be the best time for it to be posted.
- Another useful tool that many social media platforms offer is a scheduling option. This can be found within the app itself or through a third-party app or website. There are good third-party options, but make sure you research their reliability and security. Create a content calendar and be mindful of when items are going live on your pages.

***"Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ. In the area of communications too, we need a Church capable of bringing warmth and of stirring hearts"*** (Pope Francis' Message for the 48th World Communications Day 2014) Let these words from the Holy Father be a guiding light in your social media efforts!

*Christine Najarian currently serves as the Assistant Director for the Diocesan Office of Youth, Campus, and Young Adult Ministries and one of her roles within the office is coordinating our social media efforts. Before coming to this position in 2011 she was the Director of Youth Ministry at Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Annandale for ten years. Christine is pursuing a Master of Arts in Catechetics and Evangelization from the Franciscan University of Steubenville as part of the diocesan cohort supported by the Rooted in Faith ~ Forward in Hope endowment.*