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Ala. church bans social networking with minors

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MOBILE, Alabama -- The Archdiocese of Mobile has told staff and volunteers who work with children that electronic communication with minors must be limited to ?providing information related to a ministry or event and not for socialization or other personal interaction.?

The policy, implemented on Friday (April 1), applies to faculty and staff at Catholic schools, as well as adults who work with minors and teens in youth ministry or religious education.

The church policy comes on the heels of a social networking policy approved by the Mobile County school board that limits communication with students ?outside of system-owned means and resources.? It also ?prefers that its employees utilize only school-owned resources to communicate and interact with students.?

Gwendolyn Byrd, archdiocese superintendent of schools, said the church policy has been in the works for a year.

The archdiocese defines social media as venues such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube. Electronic communication refers to cell phones, texting, email and landline telephones.

The guidelines state that ?social media may not be used to communicate with minors who have not reached the ninth grade,? and online chatting with minors is prohibited, according to the policy.

Parents must be notified of the ?methods of communication? used and must have access to ?participate in such communications,? according to the archdiocese policy.

[Renee Busby writes for the Press-Register in Mobile, Ala.]

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