

## *Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church*

### *Social Media Policy*

**Purpose:** This Policy provides guidance on procedures for Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church of Austin, Texas. It is intended to ensure parishioners understand and abide by the rules for the protection of all adults and youth that engage in our social media platforms.

**Audience:** The audience for this policy is intended for our clergy, council members, committee leaders, and parishioners who use our social media platforms.

**Definition of Social Media:** The Social Media policy defines social media as means of electronic correspondence such as emails, church websites, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Realm or any other social media platform that can be used to electronically communicate with church parishioners. Communication can happen in either a private or public manner.

**General Assumptions:** Our clergy have a very powerful ability to communicate with our parishioners and general public based on their position within our church. They have a special responsibility to protect and understand how they interact with these people when it comes to social media interactions.

All communications sent digitally are not confidential. Any digital communication could be shared or reposted in a positive/negative manner. Church members need to understand that we need to interact in transparent means. In the digital environment, we need to have healthy boundaries that we feel safe and communicate effectively with each other.

Laws regarding mandatory reporting of abuse, neglect or exploitation of children, youth, elders or vulnerable adults must be followed on our digital platforms.

**Social Media Guidelines for Parishioners:** We ask each parishioner to follow the guidelines to ensure we stay safe and have a productive Social Media experience.

1. All internet postings are permanent even though you may try to delete them, they could still be retrieved. Understanding this, we ask that any social media posting be carefully considered before posting to social media. What and how you post something could easily be misinterpreted and be harmful to someone. If you have questions or concerns about posting something to our platforms, please contact the site owner before posting content.
2. To protect parishioners, it is prohibited to use social media channels to discuss confidential items, legal matters or financial performance. If asked by others to discuss these items, the following statement could be used: "Our social media policy only allows authorized individuals to discuss these types of matters. I can refer to the authorized person."
3. We expect everyone to have open and honest communications when utilizing social media platforms. Use personal discretion in the use of social media. These policies are not meant to interfere with our governments rights when it comes to freedom of speech.
4. We ask that you respect the privacy of parishioners and our Church by not providing personal or confidential information by means of social media without permission of the

individual. Employees of the church or volunteers are prohibited from sharing anything via social media platforms that could violate personal privacy.

5. If you are not officially authorized to speak on behalf of the Church, use a disclaimer saying that what you communicate is your personal opinion and not that of the organization when you are engaging in conversation on the Church's social media channels. Two sample social media disclaimers include: (1) "I work for the Church, and this is my personal opinion."; and (2) "I am not an official spokesperson, but my personal opinion is . . . ." This requirement is not meant to interfere with your rights to bargain collectively or engage in concerted or protected activities but rather to ensure that others can easily distinguish the official position of the organization or the organization's leadership from those of our employees/volunteers.
6. Only parishioners designated to do so may use social media to speak on behalf of the Church in an official capacity. When designated persons use social media to communicate on behalf of the Church, they need to identify themselves as a church employee or volunteer.
7. You may comment on other churches, but you agree to do so respectfully without ridiculing, defaming, or libeling them in any way.
8. When dealing with youth (minors), parishioners must exercise sound judgment and transparency. Communication with them must take place in a group setting or you must include the youth's parent/guardian on the message. Do not communicate one-on-one with a minor.
9. Do not violate copyright laws and plagiarize someone else's work. You must obtain permission to use any material created by someone else.
10. We will not tolerate harassment, threats, intimidation, ethnic slurs, personal insults, pornography, obscenity, racial or religious intolerance, abuse of any kind.
11. Before posting a photo of another parishioner, you must get their permission.
12. Do not use the Church's email address or social media channels for personal use.
13. Bottom line, please use your best judgment when dealing with our social media platforms and communicate in a faith based way. If you have any questions or concerns, consult with Church leadership before posting.
14. Use your common sense. If you wonder whether or not to communicate or post, don't do it until you consult with the Church leadership.

**Guidelines for our clergy:** Our Clergy should follow these guidelines when using social media platforms.

1. Our permanent clergy should set very restrictive privacy settings on any social media platforms to protect someone from viewing their content that may seem inappropriate.
2. Communications should be factual in nature. Never should any information be posted that may be viewed as emotionally charged, any legal matters or anything that may require an in depth explanation.
3. Clergy who work directly with youth are encouraged to establish church sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with youth members.
4. Clergy should refrain from publicly joining political groups or posting which political party they support.

5. Clergy should manage their own social media profiles.
6. Do not use the Church's email address or social media channels for personal use.

**Youth Practice Guidelines For Clergy and Leaders:** The following guidelines should be used when dealing with the youth in our parish. A youth is defined as someone that is younger than 17 years old or an 18 year old that is still in high school.

1. Adults should not submit "friend" requests to minors or youth. Youth may be unable to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between youth and adults. Youth may ask to be "friends", and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests.
2. Social networking groups for youth should be open to parents of current members.
3. Employees and volunteers of the Church are forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information including pictures of any child under the age of eighteen without verifiable consent of a parent or guardian. Personal identifiable information includes full name, photos, home address, email address, telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a child. Verifiable consent can take the form of a release/permission form that includes use of photographs, an email from a parent or guardian, or oral permission by a parent or guardian in the presence of another adult.

**Guidelines of Posting Pictures and Videos:** the following guidelines will be used for social media.

1. Employees and volunteers of the Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church are forbidden to post or distribute personal identifiable information including pictures of any child under the age of eighteen without verifiable consent of a parent or guardian. Personal identifiable information includes full name, photos, home address, email address, telephone number or any information that would allow someone to identify or contact a child. Verifiable consent can take the form of a release/permission form that includes use of photographs, an email from a parent or guardian, or oral permission by a parent or guardian in the presence of another adult.
2. For major events where it may be impossible to get permission from an individual parent or guardian of a child, a general announcement must be made well in advance of the event with instructions as to whom to contact in order to ensure photographs of their minors will not impermissibly be used. In addition, it is recommended that a signage be placed in an easily accessible location at the event with instructions that photographs of the event will be used on social media and that, if a parent/guardian desires to opt out of the use of images, instructions as to whom to contact in order to take advantage of the "opt out" option.
3. For parishes, monasteries and other Church institutions, a general sign in the vestibule should be placed where it can be seen by all who enter the Church informing them that images will be used unless the person specifically informs the leadership to opt out of the use of images of their children/minors. Instructions on whom to contact should be prominently displayed.
4. Parish representatives must inform parishioners when they are being videotaped because Church buildings are not considered public space. Any parish or community that

distributes video of its worship services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media should post signs that indicate the service will be broadcast.

**Conclusion:** The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure we have a healthy and protected parish when dealing with our social media platforms. Social media can play an important part of our church message and improve our ability to communicate with each other in a loving way. These guidelines are only as good if everyone is able to follow and adhere to them.