

# Church Communicators Manual

*Resources & Guidelines for Churches & Organizations  
of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia*

Revised March 2021

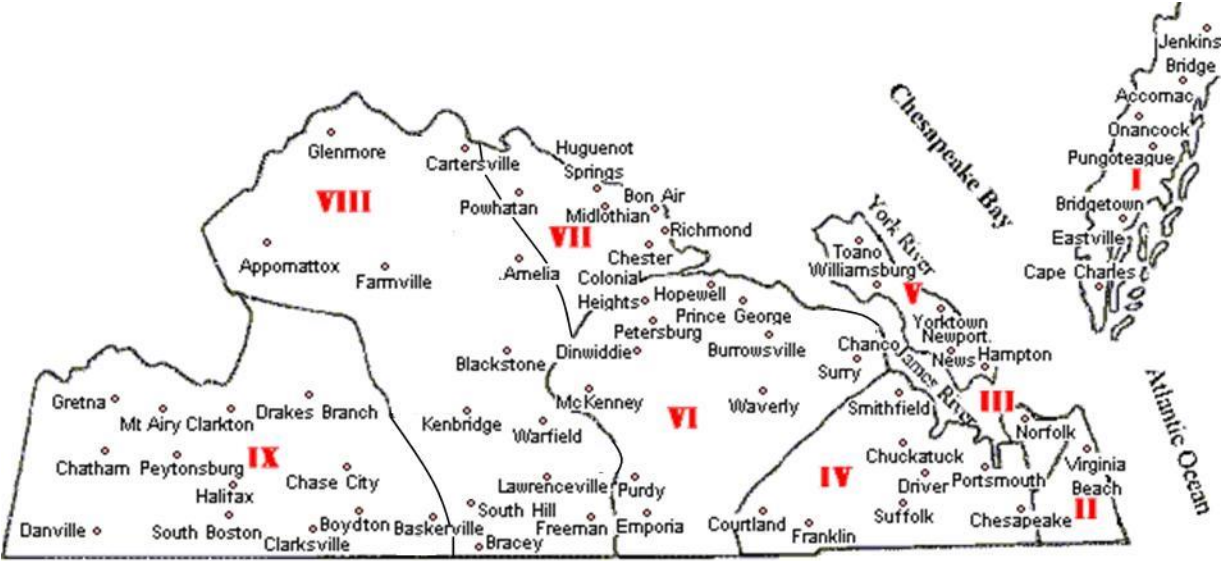


EPISCOPAL  
DIOCESE  
of Southern Virginia

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# Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia



## Our Vision

The Episcopal Church in Southern Virginia is a diverse Eucharistic community, committed to the Gospel, collaborating for strength, innovating for growth, equipping each other to live in the world as disciples of Jesus Christ.

# Diocesan Staff

## **Diocesan administrative office:**

11827 Canon Blvd., Suite 101, Newport News, VA 23606

(757) 423-8287 Main

(757) 595-0783 Fax

[www.diosova.org](http://www.diosova.org)

## **The Rt. Rev. Susan B. Haynes, Bishop**

(757) 213-3381, [bishop@diosova.org](mailto:bishop@diosova.org)

## **The Rev. Canon Roy Hoffman**

### **Canon to the Bishop Diocesan**

(757) 213-3390, [rhoffman@diosova.org](mailto:rhoffman@diosova.org)

Clergy should call Roy when they are preparing to retire or are leaving their present ministry; to assist vestries with their transition and for guidance on selecting a search consultant and transition pastor for the interim period. Wardens or clergy can call for help and resources on Letters of Agreement, Vestry retreats, Mutual Ministry Reviews, continuing education or sabbatical planning, or during a time of parish crisis or conflict.

## **The Rev. Canon Ed Tracy**

### **Canon for Administration**

(757) 213-3378, [etracy@diosova.org](mailto:etracy@diosova.org)

Contact Ed for assistance regarding: insurance and benefits, planning and oversight of Annual Council; administrative support to the Executive Board, Nominating Committee and Commission on Ministries; diocesan properties; and the Chanco Board.

## **Lynn Farlin**

### **Canon for Formation**

(757) 213-3377, [lfarlin@diosova.org](mailto:lfarlin@diosova.org)

Contact Caroline for assistance with: Christian Formation resources for clergy, staff and congregations, Anti-Racism Task Force, Commission on Aging, Safe Church programs, scholarship funds, training and consultations for parishes, Christian Education Network.

## **Megan Dern**

### **Youth Missioner**

(757) 213-3393, [mdern@diosova.org](mailto:mdern@diosova.org)

Contact Megan for assistance with: youth ministries, young adult ministries, campus and college ministries, parish consultations, training and formation for adults who work with youth, diocesan youth programs and events.

**The Rev. (Padre) Mario Meléndez**  
**Missioner for Latino/Latina/Latinx Ministries**

(757) 427-0963, [mmelendez@diosova.org](mailto:mmelendez@diosova.org)

Contact Padre Mario for resources and information for establishing or cultivating Latino/Latina ministries. (He also serves as Episcopal chaplain and co-pastor at Holy Apostles, Virginia Beach)

**Leah Sicignano**  
**Bishop's Executive Secretary**

(757) 213-3381, [lsicignano@diosova.org](mailto:lsicignano@diosova.org)

Contact Leah for assistance with: appointments with the Bishop, Bishop's visitation / Confirmation schedule, clergy licensing, lay ministry licensing, certification of lay delegates & alternates to Council, non-parochial reports, remarriage permissions, postulants & candidates for ordination, seminarians

**Susan Allen**  
**Assistant for Transition & Formation Ministries**

(757) 213-3391, [sallen@diosova.org](mailto:sallen@diosova.org)

Contact Susan for assistance with: clergy directory, clergy background checks, clergy conferences, clergy continuing education grants, Commission on Ministry, congregations in search, diocesan resource library, Fresh Start, letters of agreement, mutual ministry review consultants, Ministry Exploration Process, Safe Church

**Judy Dobson**  
**Comptroller**

(757) 213-3386, [jdobson@diosova.org](mailto:jdobson@diosova.org)

Contact Judy for assistance with: parochial reports, parish audits, parish pledges, Diocesan Foundation Composite Fund payments and withdrawals, diocesan budget, IRS mileage reimbursement rate, 501c3 (IRS non-profit status), the Ridley Foundation, and general financial questions

**Hope Leach**  
**Financial Assistant**

(757) 213-3374, [hleach@diosova.org](mailto:hleach@diosova.org)

Contact Hope for assistance with: parish audits, parish pledges, reimbursements, IRS mileage rate

# Convocation Deans

Contact information (phone and email) can be found on the diocesan website:  
[http://www.diosova.org/clergy\\_res](http://www.diosova.org/clergy_res)

**Convocation I:** The Very Rev. Robert Coniglio – Emmanuel, Jenkins Bridge

**Convocation II:** The Very Rev. Andrew Buchanan – Galilee, Virginia Beach

**Convocation III:** The Very Rev. John Rohrs - St. Andrew's, Norfolk

**Convocation IV:** The Very Rev. Keith Emerson - St. Paul's, Suffolk

**Convocation V:** The Very Rev. Ronald Ramsey – St. Cyprian's, Hampton

**Convocation VI:** The Very Rev. Charles Moore – Merchants Hope, Prince George

**Convocation VII:** The Very Rev. Dale Custer – St. John's, Chester

**Convocation VIII:** The Very Rev. Nancy Meck – Johns Memorial, Farmville

**Convocation IX:** The Very Rev. Susan Grimm – St. Timothy's, Clarksville

# Communications Resources on the Diocesan Website

The diocesan website is [www.diosova.org](http://www.diosova.org). There you will find numerous resources for clergy and lay leadership, including Communications Resources (located on the Congregation Resources page) and News & Publications (located on the home page). Any scheduled communications training or communicators meetings will be listed on the Upcoming Events page (located on the home page).

## Diocesan Communications Outlets

### **[www.diosova.org](http://www.diosova.org)**

The diocesan website provides resources for clergy and parish leadership. A few of the resources you will find include:

- Diocesan staff directory
- Diocesan calendar, prayer calendars
- News and communications resources
- Resources for clergy, vestries and lay leaders
- Information about and delegate materials for Annual Council
- Workshops, training and events
- Christian formation and Youth Ministry resources and information
- Transition Ministry resources and information for clergy and congregations in search
- Employment opportunities from around the diocese

### **Diocesan eNews**

The eNews is an electronic newsletter distributed on Tuesday each week that provides news from the diocesan office and the Episcopal Church and info on upcoming workshops and training available. Anyone may sign up to receive the Diocesan eNews by going to our website. Church communicators are encouraged to use the eNews as a source of content for their own newsletters and bulletins. Deadline is every Monday at noon.

### **Facebook**

Facebook is a social network on which the diocese maintains a page, [www.facebook.com/diosova](http://www.facebook.com/diosova). You can like our page and receive updates, photos, and useful articles in their news feed. We encourage comments and conversation so that you can get to know other members of our diocese. Users are also encouraged to share our posts on their own Facebook page or that of their church. We also have a Diosova Communicators group page ([www.facebook.com/groups/110339955722298/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/110339955722298/)). This is a useful place to network with other church communicators, share ideas and best practices and ask questions.

## **Instagram**

Instagram is a social network on which the diocese posts updates and news. Instagram users can follow us @Diosova.

## **YouTube Channel**

The diocesan YouTube channel is where you can find video from our diocese and the national church, including video messages from our Bishop. You can find us at [www.youtube.com/user/TheDioSoVa](http://www.youtube.com/user/TheDioSoVa).

# Get Connected to Diocesan Communications

## **1. Sign up to receive the weekly eNews**

Our weekly Parish News & Events and Diocesan eNews are great sources of content for your own email, newsletters and social network pages.

## **2. Add the diocesan communications office to your email and/or mailing list**

We count on you to keep us up-to-date on what's going on in your congregation so that we can share that news with the diocese.

## **3. Join the Diosova Communicators Facebook group**

If your congregation's communicators are on Facebook, encourage them to join the Diosova Communicators Group ([www.facebook.com/groups/110339955722298/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/110339955722298/)). It's a great place to ask questions and share ideas.

## **4. Use the diocesan communications outlets**

The Diocese communications outlets for your use – the weekly Diocesan eNews emails, and our social network pages. You can make sure your news gets the best coverage possible by following the guidelines for writing a press release (see page 16) and including digital photos.

## **5. Make connections on social networks**

Let us know if your church is using Facebook or Instagram so that we can follow you and share your posts on our own social networks. Like us on Facebook and follow us on Instagram so that you can return the favor! Follow other congregations in the diocese who are on social networks. Again, it's a great source of content for your own pages and a great way for congregations to get to know each other better and get connected.



# Communications Grants

## **Purpose:**

Communications Grants from the Diocese of Southern Virginia provide congregations within the diocese with funding for development of digital communications.

Grant funds are intended to assist churches that do not currently make use of digital communications methods to create and implement a new digital communication program. Funds may also be used to assist churches with an existing digital communication program that have discovered needs within their congregation or community that can be addressed with a new digital communication initiative.

## **Eligible applicants:**

All congregations in the Diocese of Southern Virginia.

## **Grant Amounts:**

Awards may be as much as \$1,000. Awards are for one year.

## **Award Criteria:**

Applications will be evaluated on these criteria:

- Enables applicant to establish or significantly expand digital communications.
- Enables applicant to communicate more effectively with their congregation members, their community and the Diocese.
- The project will extend beyond the grant period.
- Preference will be given to smaller congregations and congregations in rural areas.

## **Additional Requirements:**

Grant recipients must submit a report within one year of the date the grant is awarded. Grant funds must be used within one year of award.

## **Submit application to:**

Send application to: Diocese of Southern Virginia, 11827 Canon Blvd., Suite 101, Newport News, VA 23606.

# Communications Grant Application

Name of applying congregation/group: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person (name & title): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount requested: \_\_\_\_\_

Project description (*include specific information about expenses*):

Signature of proposal author: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Clergy signature (or Senior Warden): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Submit application to: Diocese of Southern Virginia, Attn: Communications Grant application, 11827 Canon Blvd., Suite 101, Newport News, VA 23606.

# Resources for Communicators

## The Episcopal Asset Map

In 2018, the Episcopal Church combined its website's "Find a Church" feature with the Episcopal Asset Map, [www.episcopalassetmap.org](http://www.episcopalassetmap.org).

With the Episcopal Asset Map, you have the opportunity to tell the Church and the world about how your congregation is being called to serve God and neighbor. Each church has its own page on the Asset Map. When you share your faith stories, worship styles, ministries, and more, you widen the network of ministry experts in the Church and provide others with information that can help them as they discern where the Spirit is calling.

YOU DO NOT NEED A LOG IN TO ADD INFORMATION. The site shows the ways that the Jesus Movement is active in our local communities through worship, ministry, and service. Simply find your church on the map, click the "Update this place" and tell your story. Once information is submitted it will be reviewed and approved by a Bishop appointed map administrator.

## FaithStreet

The Diocese of Southern Virginia is partnering with FaithStreet, a service that is helping the millions of people who use the internet to find a church home, to connect to churches in our diocese. We have a "Find a Church" page on our Diocesan website, but research shows that the denominational affiliation of a church is not important to most people who are looking for a church or who are exploring Christianity. FaithStreet's goal is to help us reach those people more effectively. However, the addition of our diocesan FaithStreet network allows us to include zip code search on our "Find a Church" page - and that's super helpful to Episcopalians visiting or moving to Southern Virginia who do come to our diocesan website looking for a church. For all of these reasons, we would like for ALL our congregations to participate in this new network.

FaithStreet is really easy to use, and allows you to create a great looking church profile designed around reaching newcomers. And there is no cost to you! Here's what you have to do:

1) Go to our diocesan network on FaithStreet -

<http://www.faithstreet.com/networks/episcopal-diocese-of-southern-virginia>

2) Scroll Down and search for your church in the search bar by entering the zip code or city/state of your church (if your church is missing, email [support@faithstreet.com](mailto:support@faithstreet.com) and they will get you set up)

3) Once you find your church, click on the church icon and visit the page. There is a large, orange "Get Started" button. Click this button and then sign up to create an account. You can add additional Admins after you claim the page and sign up.

4) Complete your profile. Be sure to include pictures!

5) Add a "Find Us on FaithStreet" badge to your church website. You'll see how to do this once you have signed up. The badge is located in your Church Dashboard on FaithStreet. If you need help installing the badge on your website, contact [support@faithstreet.com](mailto:support@faithstreet.com) and they will help you install it at no cost.

6) Invite your church members to "join" your FaithStreet page and leave positive testimonials about your church. You'll see the "Community Members" section on your FaithStreet page. A few positive testimonials from community members can go a long way towards making newcomers feel welcome.

7) Email [support@faithstreet.com](mailto:support@faithstreet.com) with any questions or problems.

## Episcopal Church Logos & Signs

You can find free downloadable Episcopal Church shields and logos here (including shields with clear backgrounds):

[http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/Imageshop\\_345\\_ENG\\_HTM.htm](http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/Imageshop_345_ENG_HTM.htm)

To purchase a "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You" sign with your church's name on it, go to: <http://faithgoods.com/church-signage/>

## Official Portraits of Bishop Haynes

If you are looking for the official portraits of Bishop Susan Haynes – to frame and display or to use in communication media – you can download them from Bishop Haynes' page of the diocesan website: [http://www.diosova.org/congregation\\_res/article467068.htm](http://www.diosova.org/congregation_res/article467068.htm)

## Presiding Bishop Portrait

If you are looking for the official portrait of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry – to frame and display or to use in communication media – you can download them here:

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/posts/michaelcurry/michael-curry-official-photographs>

## Copyright-free photos

Stock photos should be used VERY judiciously (and sparingly) in your communication media. However, stock photos can be great backgrounds for website slides advertising upcoming programs or events, backgrounds for custom Facebook covers, etc. When using stock photos, be sure to choose copyright-free images. You can find some really good ones at these sites:

- <https://pixabay.com/>
- <https://www.pexels.com/>
- <https://unsplash.com/>
- <https://freerangestock.com/index.php>
- <http://www.lifeofpix.com/>
- <https://stocksnap.io/>

## Education and support for communicators

### **Diosova Communicators Facebook Group**

This private Facebook group is a useful place to network with other church communicators, share ideas, resources and ask questions. [www.facebook.com/groups/110339955722298/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/110339955722298/)

### **Online Resources**

- **[www.churchmarketingsucks.com](http://www.churchmarketingsucks.com)**  
Whether or not you find the name offensive, this site offers a tremendous wealth of church communications resources and ideas.
- **[www.caffeinatedchurch.org](http://www.caffeinatedchurch.org)**  
This is a great curation of communications resources by Mike Orr, the communications director for the Diocese of Colorado.
- **[www.episcopalcommunicators.org](http://www.episcopalcommunicators.org)**  
Episcopal Communicators is a membership organization for communicators at parish and diocesan levels. Whether a member or not, you can join their Facebook Group, [www.facebook.com/groups/episcopalcommunicators](http://www.facebook.com/groups/episcopalcommunicators) and network with other church communicators.
- **[www.acts8movement.org](http://www.acts8movement.org)**  
Acts 8 is a group of enthusiastic Episcopalians dedicated to renewing the church through discipleship, evangelism and the use of current technologies for communication and strategic action.

- **www.ecfvp.org**  
Episcopal Church Foundation's Vital Practices blogsite offers a variety of resources related to congregational vitality, including communications. You can also find them on Facebook at ECF-Vital-Practices.
- **www.umcom.org**  
The communications office of the United Methodist Church provides excellent communications information and resources.

## Books

- *Speaking Faithfully: Communications As Evangelism in a Noisy World*  
By Jim Naughton and Rebecca Wilson, Morehouse Publishing, 2012
- *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways*  
By Meredith Gould, Liturgical Press, 2013
- *Click2Save: The Digital Ministry Bible*  
By Elizabeth Drescher & Keith Anderson, Morehouse Publishing, 2012
- *Tweet if you ♥ Jesus: Practicing Church in the Digital Reformation*  
By Elizabeth Drescher, Morehouse Publishing, 2011
- *The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World*  
Keith Anderson, Morehouse Publishing, 2015

# How to write a press release

There are plenty of newsworthy events and stories in your congregation. Being able to write an effective press release and developing a good relationship with your local media outlets will go a long way to getting your news the attention it deserves.

What's newsworthy? Some possibilities include:

- Clergy – calling a new rector, retirement, an award, publishing a book or article, a special speaking engagement, work with a community organization or ecumenical group.
- Programs – Classes, study groups, lecture series, Vacation Bible School, recreational programs
- Unique services – Blessing of the Animals, ecumenical services, special musical performances, outdoor services or services in a public location.
- Volunteers – Opportunities for volunteers, mission trips, human interest stories about members doing unique or extraordinary work
- Building – Expansion or renovation of your buildings, new organ, memorial windows

Content and format both count when you're writing a press release. Sending along a well-composed picture will also help. Here are a few tips to help your releases get the most attention.

Press release format outline:

1. **Headline** – Keep it short, simple and direct. Make sure your headline gives the reader a reason to continue reading.
2. **Subhead** – A brief statement of the main point of the release.
3. **Location & Date** – Begin the opening paragraph with the city and state where you are located and the date of the news release (month, day, year).
4. **Body** – This is where you tell your story. Make sure you include your most important information right from the start. You want your lead paragraph to make the reader want to continue. But you also want to make sure that the basic information is contained here since there's no guarantee the reader will read all of your release. The lead paragraph should contain your news and the rest of the release provides more detail. Be sure to include quotes – they make the news more personal and add interest and texture.
5. **Church information** – A standard paragraph that contains a brief statement about your church, its mission.
6. **Contact information** – This paragraph should include the name of the contact person and a phone number and email address. Also include your website URL and any social network information.

Tips for writing your release:

- The Five W's – Who, why, what, when, where. Pick the most important of these to include in your lead paragraph. The rest should be included as you expand on your story.
- Give your story a personal touch – Include quotes. Share the story of a person involved.
- Be objective – Keep your opinions to yourself. Avoid fluffy, hyperbolic and promotional language. Don't use exclamation point.
- Write concisely and use active voice.
- Avoid religious jargon and church terms that only you or other Episcopalians would understand.
- Keep the release short – just one page if possible – but be sure to include all the important facts.
- Include a well-composed photo with your release. When photographing people, try for an action or casual shot. Photos of folks that look like a police line-up aren't very interesting.

Sample Press Release Outline:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT: Contact Person, Organization Name, Phone Number, Email, Website URL

YOUR HEADLINE

City, State, Date- The first paragraph. Begin your press release with a two sentence paragraph that provides a quick overview of the news why it is important. It should read easily and make your news sound exciting to a general audience.

Next, provide some background information on the program or event. Make sure to write your release in terms that your target audience, and the general public will understand.

Your text should explain the purpose of your event and intrigue the reader to find out more, visit your website, contact you for more information.

ABOUT

The final paragraph should be a brief introduction to your church. Include a summary of other events or happenings and a brief history. Also include "For more information, contact:" as the last sentence.

###

(### indicates that the press release is finished)



# Style Sheet

*The Episcopal Church offers its own style guide online. You can find it at [http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/107902\\_123318\\_ENG\\_HTM.htm](http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/107902_123318_ENG_HTM.htm)*

## **Bible**

Use a capital “B” for Bible. Use a lowercase “b” for biblical.

## **Bishop**

Our bishop is the Rt. Rev. Susan B. Haynes, Bishop of Southern Virginia. Bishop Haynes is the 11<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Southern Virginia and was ordained and consecrated a bishop on February 1, 2020.

## **Churches**

Churches should be listed by name and location: Epiphany, Danville

## **Committees & Commissions**

Use capital letters for the names of committees and commissions, including the Executive Board and Standing Committee. Use lowercase letters to describe deans and presidents.

## **Clergy**

Use “the Rev.” followed by the name: the Rev. John Smith. “The” is only capitalized if it is at the beginning of a sentence. Do not include academic titles. Use “the Rev. Dr.” only if the individual has earned a doctoral degree (not an honorary degree) and reference to the degree is relevant. Do not refer to clergy as Father, Mother or Rev’d.

## **Convocations**

Use Roman numerals to designate convocations. Capitalize the “R.” “Convocation IX.”

## **Diocese**

Use “the Diocese of Southern Virginia” or “the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia” or “the Diocese.”

Use “a diocese” or “diocesan” or “our diocese.”

## **Episcopal**

Episcopal is an adjective. Episcopalian is a noun. It is incorrect to refer to Episcopalians as Episcopal or to refer to the Episcopal Church as the Episcopalian Church.

## **The Episcopal Church**

Use “the Episcopal Church”

Use “Church” when referring to the national/general Episcopal Church organization.

**Gospel**

Use a capital “G.”

**Numerals**

Spell out numbers less than 10. Use Arabic numerals for numbers 10 and larger, unless they start a sentence.

**Phone Numbers**

Use 757-423-8287. Do not use slashes, periods or parentheses. The number “1” should not precede long-distance numbers.

**Pronouns**

Do not capitalize pronouns referring to God. Avoid using gendered pronouns for God.

**Scripture**

Capitalize “Scripture.”

**Titles**

Titles should not be capitalized unless they directly precede a name: “Communications Officer Ann Turner” or “Ann Turner, communications officer.”

# Your church's website

Your website is the front door of your church. According to Richard Reising, author of *Church Marketing 101*, visitors will likely evaluate six to 12 websites before they make a decision to physically visit. If your website has out-of-date information, poor design, or is difficult to navigate, chances are visitors will click on over to some other church's website. Here are a few tips to keep in mind to make your website the best it can be:

- **Cater to the visitor**  
Remember that the visitor/newcomer is your primary audience. Make sure the information a visitor needs is easy to find: When are the services? What kind of worship style will it be? What will my kids do? What does the church look like inside/outside? Don't use church jargon – visitors may be new to the Episcopal Church or to church in general.
- **Pictures really are worth a thousand words**  
Really good, candid photos of your church and parishioners can tell the story of who you are better than paragraphs of text. You want your website – photos, design, text – to give visitors a true sense of who you are and what it will be like when they visit you.
- **Provide content for your members too**  
Your parishioners have different needs from your website than visitors do. Talk with ministry leaders and find out what they need from the website: recruit volunteers for the food pantry, online registration for Vacation Bible School, etc.
- **Clean Design**  
Don't fill up your pages with a lot of text or too many pictures. People don't want to have to wade through too much text or try to navigate a crowded page to find what they're looking for. Good design is important. You don't want your site to look dated. Find sites you like and use them as inspiration – but make sure your site is an authentic representation of who you are!
- **Update Frequently**  
Commit to keeping your website current and it will be more appealing to visitors and more likely to become a place for members to visit often. Your church won't look relevant if Christmas information is still up when Easter rolls around.
- **Link to Social Networks**  
Consider using Facebook or Instagram. These are great ways to build community. Get a YouTube channel and post videos of sermons. It'll save space on your website. Be sure to include links to any social networks on your home page. And use your social networks to drive traffic to your website.

## **Recommended Website Services**

American Church – [www.americanchurch.com](http://www.americanchurch.com)

Yes, these are the same folks from whom we buy pledge envelopes. American Church offers solid online giving and website services as well, and extremely affordable.

FaithConnector – [www.faithconnector.com](http://www.faithconnector.com)

A content management system especially for churches.

Ministry Designs – [www.ministrywebsitedesigns.com](http://www.ministrywebsitedesigns.com)

A content management system especially for churches.

Ekklesia 360 – [www.ekklesia360.com](http://www.ekklesia360.com)

A content management service available through the Episcopal Church.

Blogger – [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)

A simple, free website option for very small parishes with extremely limited technical/financial resources. Contact Ann Turner, [aturner@diosova.org](mailto:aturner@diosova.org) or 757-213-3388, if you would like assistance with creating a customized Blogger site for your parish.

# Photo Releases

The Diocese subscribes to the following policy and recommends that churches and diocesan organizations do the same.

Photos and images of children under age 18 may be included in print and online publications only when a parent or guardian signs a release. If no release form is available, photos may only be used if the children's faces are turned away from the camera. The Diocese refrains from publishing children's names in conjunction with photos.

Congregations may establish an "opt-out" photo and video policy for adults. Photos and video that feature adults may be taken and published except for those adults who request to not have their photos shared. A sample "opt-out" form can be found on page 31.

**Please see the Recommended Practices & Guidelines for Social Networks & Other Forms of Digital Communications in this manual for important information about the use of photos and a sample media release form.**

Churches can include a photo release as part of their Sunday school registration form or other permission forms.

# Social Media Guidelines

## Facebook

*Provided by the Episcopal Church Center*

### No personal info

Besides your name, please do not include personal information. Facebook is a public website, and any information may be linked to your name and published on the Internet.

### No selling

Please do not market your wares here, no matter how useful or wonderful.

### Be nice

Your Facebook page should be a safe place to engage in conversation. Please remember that the page belongs to a Church, and think of it as a place for fellowship. Show tolerance for divergent opinions. No personal attacks or insults. We understand that there can be many varied opinions on an issue, and we welcome all views and ideas.

### Best Practices

- Create and post content worth sharing – content that people will share with their friends.
- Share content from pages you “Like” – Liking and sharing content from other pages, like the diocesan and national church Facebook pages will help build and engage and larger audience.
- Join the conversation – answer questions, comment when necessary.
- Make your website more social – use “Like” boxes, Facebook connect and other tools on your website.

## Twitter

*Provided by the Episcopal Church Center*

### Twitter posts (tweets) are limited to 140 characters including spaces. Why?

Short Message Service (SMS) is the text communication service component of phone, web or mobile communication systems, using standardized communications protocols that allow the exchange of short text messages between fixed line or mobile phone devices. SMS has a limit of 160 characters. Twitter set the 140 limit to allow for some buffer space.

### Clear language rather than vague literary headlines are preferred. Why?

Entice readership with clarity.

### Tweets should never be a link only. Why?

There is no reason for anyone looking at our twitter timeline to click on a link without any accompanying text headline/description.

### **Mentioning other Twitter accounts in your tweets IS COOL! Why?**

These twitter accounts will see that they have been mentioned by your tweet. This ALWAYS appreciated and a great way to build your Twitter community.

### **Use the link shortener service. Why?**

With only 140 to play with it's essential that a link shortening service be used. We are using **bit.ly** (pronounced bit-lee).

### **Follow others selectively. Why?**

To follow nobody gives off the airs of deafness. To follow none indicates that ENS is not interested in anyone's opinion, feelings or point of view. Follow half of all who follow.

### **Say 'thank you' or somehow acknowledge supporters and new follows. Why?**

Others 'tweeps' will either 'mention' @episcopal\_news or retweet or RT @episcopal\_news's tweets. When this happens, it's good-form to say thanks by mentioning them back. As new followers happen, welcome them with a thank you.

### **Respond to questions. Why?**

People will ask questions relating to your posts or completely random topics. Not responding is not an option. Non-response to legitimate questions furthers the ideas that the church and or 815 are in some ivory tower surrounded by fences above the common folks. This is not what social media is about.

### **Sample tweets**

- More new follows, welcome! @sojack @tenacemusek @luizcaetanogt @LGBTProgress @father\_so @day1online @StElizRoanoke @FrRickLord
- RT @EpiscopalRelief: Today is #WorldHumanitarianDay - please pray for aid workers worldwide who serve those most in need.
- 5 years after Katrina, oil spill worries mix with memories <http://iam.ec/961uV9>
- RT @TheEPPN: UN acknowledges water as a human right <http://bit.ly/9I8HQI> #MDG
- PENNSYLVANIA: Rector asks bishop to "prayerfully consider making sacrifice of not returning" to diocese as bishop <http://iam.ec/bfpXTa>
- Bulletin inserts for Aug. 22 describe interfaith efforts at Faith House Manhattan (@FaithHouseNOW) <http://iam.ec/cgR4VW>

## **Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia**

### **Recommended Practices & Guidelines for use of Social Networks & Other Forms of Digital Communications**

As an ever increasing number of people use and prefer digital communication over other forms, it is essential that the church be present in this mission field. Social networks and email can enhance communication, faith sharing and deepen relationship. The following recommended guidelines apply commonly accepted principles of health boundaries and safe church to digital networking and communication.

#### **Commonly Accepted Principles of Healthy Boundaries and Safe Church:**

- Adults have more power than children and youth.
- Clergy have more power than people with whom they have a pastoral relationship.
- The mutuality of friendship cannot exist when there is a disparity of power.
- Two unrelated adults must be able to maintain visual contact with each other any time they engage in ministry with children or youth.
- Windows in doors allow transparency of interactions with children, youth and adults who may be vulnerable.

#### **General Information About Digital Communication:**

- All communication sent digitally (email, social networking sites, notes or posts, etc) is NOT confidential and may be shared or re-posted to others.
- Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent, as a window in the door provides transparency in the physical world.
- In the virtual world healthy boundaries and safe church practices must be adhered to as they are in the physical world.
- In the virtual world, “friend” can mean anyone with whom you are willing to communicate through that medium. In the physical world, friend can mean much more in terms of intimacy, self-disclosure, mutuality and expectations for relationship.
- Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world.

### **Recommended Practices & Guidelines for Interactions with Children & Youth**

#### **Relationships on Social Networking sites**

- Adults who minister to children and youth are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile. Individual personal profiles may be used to interact with real friends, family and peers. Adults should not submit ‘friend’ requests to minors or youth. Youth may not be able 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.

- If an adult chooses to accept friend requests from minors or youth who are associated with their community of faith, other adult leaders must have full access to all aspects of that adult's profile and correspondence.
- Adults who want to connect via a social networking site with youth to whom they minister are strongly encouraged to set up a closed group account that the youth may join. Youth requesting to 'friend' an adult can then be invited to join this group rather than be accepted as a friend on an adult's personal profile account. The purpose of these two separate accounts is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with youth and real family, friends and colleagues.
- Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy and/or appropriate local authorities. If the material is on a church affiliated site, that materials should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with appropriate local authorities and/or police.

#### **Groups on Social Networking Sites**

- Closed groups, but not 'hidden' groups, should be used for youth groups (J2A, Rite 13, Confirmation, Pilgrimage, mission trips, etc)
- Groups should have at least two unrelated adult administrators as well as at least two youth administrators
- Invitations to youth to join the group should be made by youth administrators, unless a youth previously asked an adult administrator to invite him/her to join the group.
- Norms should be created to govern what content is appropriate and inappropriate for an online youth group.
- Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the clergy and/or appropriate local authorities. If the material is on a church affiliated site, that materials should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with appropriate local authorities and/or police.
- Inappropriate material that does not raise suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately removed from the site.
- Any content that details inappropriate behavior (outside the bounds of the established norms) during a church sponsored activity should be addressed by adult youth leaders and parents.
- Social networking groups for youth should be open to parents of current members.
- Parents should be informed that the content of youth pages or groups that are not sponsored by the church are NOT within the purview of adult youth leaders.
- Adult leaders of youth groups and former youth members who, due to departure, removal from position, or are no longer eligible because they 'aged out' of a program

should be immediately removed from digital communication with youth groups via social networking sites, list serves, etc.

### **Recommendations for Norms for Social Networking Site Groups**

Norms should acknowledge that materials posted on church sponsored sites and/or group pages are NOT confidential. Norms should also acknowledge that content deemed inappropriate will be removed from the site or group page. The following issues should also be addressed:

- Appropriate language
- Eligibility of membership
- Loss of eligibility of membership
- Who, how and when may photos be tagged (e.g. members may tag themselves in a photo but may not tag others)
- Appropriate and inappropriate behavior of members
- Compliance with mandated reported laws regarding suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation

### **Recommended Practices & Guidelines for Interactions with Adults**

- Clergy are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile to shield both adult and youth members from viewing content that may be inappropriate.
- Clergy should not submit 'friend' requests to parishioners and others to whom they minister. The disparity of power may not give the other person the ability to decline such a request.
- Clergy who want to interact with parishioners via a social networking site may want to consider setting up a group account that all parishioners may join. The purpose of having a separate personal profile and a parish group is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with parishioners and real family, friends and colleagues.
- Clergy should consider the impact of declining a 'friend' request from parishioners. These encounters may create a tension in 'real world' relationships. Clergy can direct 'friend' requests from parishioners to the parish's group page.
- Clergy who work directly with youth are encouraged to establish church-sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with youth members.
- When a cleric's ministry at a parish or other ministry setting ends, the cleric should remove parishioners as 'friends' or contacts in all forms of digital communications.

### **Recommendations for Video Chats, Blogs or Video Blogs**

- Adults should refrain from initiating video chats with youth.

- Participants in a video chat or blog should consider what will be shown in the video such as their surroundings, their clothing/state of dress, etc.
- All transcripts of online text chats, video chats, blogs or video blogs should be saved when possible.
- All clergy and adults engaged in ministry with youth should consider the content and nature of any post that will be read by or visible to youth. Your voice is often considered the voice of the church.

### **Recommendations for Publishing/Posting Photos and other online content**

- Congregations must inform participants when they are being videoed because church buildings are not considered public space.
- Any faith community that distributes video of its worship services or activities on the web or via other broadcast media must post signs that indicate the service will be broadcast.
- For children under age 18, congregations may only post photos/video for which they have a release on file for any minors featured in the photo or video. Congregations are encouraged to develop an “opt-out” photo and video policy for adults. Photos and video that feature adults may be taken and published except for those adults who request to not have their photos shared. A Media Opt Out form is useful for this purpose and a sample is provided in these guidelines.
- Congregations should establish a policy regarding the identification or “tagging” of individuals in online photos. The best practice is to not identify or “tag” any individuals in photos or videos. Tagging of youth and children is prohibited. When written permission is obtained from parents/guardians, the captioning of photos or videos of minors is permitted. The caption should not include the minor’s full name, nor should it be linked to any online profile.
- Only photos that respect the dignity of every person depicted in the image should be published.

### **Recommendations for Use of Email or Texting (Includes Twitter)**

- Email can be an appropriate means of communicating basic factual information such as the time of an event, agenda for a meeting, text of a document, etc.
- Email is not an appropriate communication method for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or require extensive conversation.
- If an email message is longer than a few sentences, then the matter might be more properly addressed via live conversation.
- Humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted in an email.
- All email users should take a moment to consider the ramifications of their message before clicking the ‘send’ or ‘reply all’ button.

# Sample Media Release Form

**Opt In: For children under age 18, please complete the section below.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, Parent/Guardian of (you may list multiple names)

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Grant permission for CHURCH NAME to take photos/video of my child(ren) during church events and to use these images in church publications, website and social media. I understand that photos and videos will NEVER be accompanied by captions or tags that include names or any other identifying information.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Opt Out: We respect the fact that you may wish to NOT have photos or video of yourself, or your children under age 18, used for church purposes. If this is the case, please complete this Media Opt Out section below.**

I do not wish my photograph, or those which include members of my family who are listed below, to be used by CHURCH NAME for church purposed, including but not limited to: still photography, video, electronic and print publications and websites.

Please list all household members included in the opt out:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_