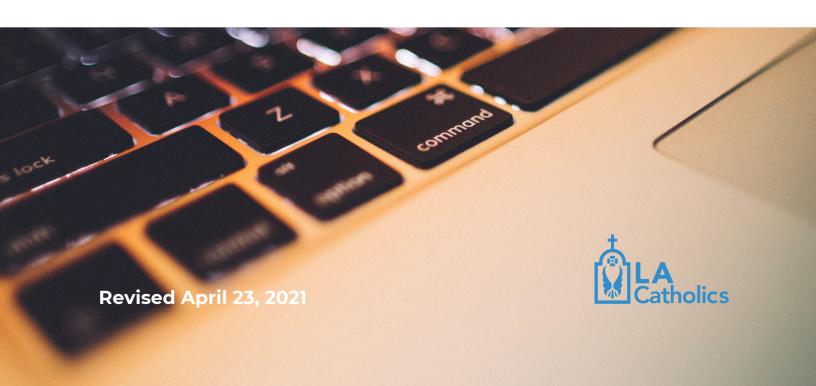# Guidelines for Using Digital Meeting Platforms

For all those involved in ministry online

Archdiocese of Los Angeles

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LA Catholics

Table of Contents

Almost everyone involved with Church ministry today has an electronic presence, whether it's as simple as texting a time to meet for a Rosary or as sophisticated as running prayer podcasts or becoming a Catholic internet influencer. Successfully navigating the "electronic information superhighway" can be both easy and complicated. The following basic dos and don'ts are intended to help your Digital Ministry comply with the law and archdiocesan policies.

Before You Start

Be aware that the policies set forth in [Chapter 10 of the online Administrative Handbook](#) apply to any electronic device you may use for ministry, whether it's your own device or whether it belongs to the parish, school or archdiocese. This means that your electronic communications are not private and can be accessed and reviewed at any time by the parish, school, or Archdiocese.

Make sure that the people responsible for overseeing your Digital Ministry know what methods you use to communicate electronically. For scheduled ministry activities involving groups, let those responsible know when you will be engaging in those activities.

Use only parish, school or archdiocesan accounts for digital meeting platforms (e.g. Zoom, etc.) that are used in your ministry. Personal accounts are prohibited. If your parish, school, or other ministry cannot provide an account, contact the C3 Technology team at 213-637-7611 or the Office of Religious Education for help in getting an archdiocesan account.

For parish and school accounts, the pastor/principal, and a minimum of two other staff members designated by the pastor/principal must have administrator and log-in rights to any online platform used for Digital Ministry. You must disclose to these administrators any usernames and passwords you use to access the accounts.

If minors or vulnerable adults are going to be involved in your Digital Ministry, you must have permission from their parent(s) or guardian(s). The ORE [Registration Guidelines for Parish Faith Formation Programs](#) include a [Sample Registration Form](#) that you can use for this purpose. Whenever possible, you should also use the [Contract for Appropriate Internet Use By Minors](#).

Communicate regularly with key people, including your pastor, other staff members and ministry coordinators, ministry volunteers, participants, and parents/guardians of participants who are minors. Ensure these people know what methods you will use to communicate information to them and when they can expect to receive the communication. Provide information about which digital platforms will be used and how they will be used in your ministry. Be sure any communication with minors follows Archdiocesan policy (see: https://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/chapter-10/section-10-7/topic-10-7-2).

Plan for Success

Develop a plan that includes times for prayer, encounter, accompaniment, formation, and community building. Use up-to-date and relevant resources, especially if the resources are digital.

When online remember:

- Less is more. Long digital activities may be difficult for participants, especially children.
- Have a clear plan for the online activity and follow the plan.
- Provide participants with a schedule ahead of time that includes the dates, start/end times, who should participate, a brief description of the activity, and the organizers' contact information.
- Start and end on time.

Recording Rules

Recording digital activities, whether audio only or including video, is against California law without the prior consent of all participants. If copyrighted materials are used, recording without a license or permission is also a violation of law.

If a digital activity will be recorded, let participants know ahead of time. You must have a signed Parent/Guardian Release for a Student or Minor (Non-Commercial) for all minors who are going to participate in the activity. Adult participants must also consent, preferably in writing using the Adult Release (Noncommercial).

Before starting a recording, you must tell all participants that they are being recorded. The law on recording applies to the participants as well. They are not allowed to record the activity without the prior consent of all participants (Penal Code Section 632).

Maintain Control and Monitor Your Digital Activity

Require pre-registration for all participants. Keep control over admitting or excluding participants.

Do not share a link to a digital meeting or other activity on an unrestricted, publicly available social media post or website. Provide the link directly to the pre-registered participants.

Require a password or use the waiting room feature (if available) to control the admittance of participants and any guests.

Regularly monitor all the screens to make sure all participants are conducting themselves appropriately. Do not allow the use of false identities or anonymous participation, such as screen or face filters.

Respect copyrights. Refer to https://handbook.la-archdiocese.org/chapter-10/section-10-4/topic-10-4-2.

Share Safely

The person in charge of the Digital Ministry activity must maintain control over the screen-sharing feature that allows videos, images, documents, webpages, etc. to be displayed. No one should be able to share their screen without permission from the person in charge.

The chat feature in digital meeting platforms is useful for Digital Ministry. However, when minors are participating in the Digital Ministry activity, all participants must be able to view all chats. Disable the private chat feature when setting up the activity in the digital meeting platform. Never use the chat feature or direct messaging in social media networks to communicate with minors.

If you conduct a Q&A session or have a group chat, let the participants know you are monitoring and saving the Q&A or chat. Do not allow any bullying or use of inappropriate language in a Q&A session or a chat.

Be Professional

Maintain professional standards. When online, you are expected to model appropriate behavior and all communications must be faithful to the teachings and values of the Catholic Church.

Your username(s) should be professional and profile pictures or any other photos must be appropriate.

Dress modestly; avoid extremes in grooming.

Be mindful of your screen background (i.e., what others can see behind you on camera). All views should be appropriate; avoid shots of intimate spaces such as beds, toilets, open closets, and the like. Use an appropriate virtual background if necessary.

Avoid sharing personal information that is unrelated to the subject of your Digital Ministry activity, especially when minors are participating.

Hold all participants accountable for maintaining context-appropriate and age-appropriate language, gestures, humor, discussion, and online behavior.

Don't go it alone. Like in-person gatherings, Digital Ministry activities involving minors (or vulnerable adults) must comply with safe-environment policies (including Virtus training and fingerprinting) and have at least two adults present. If parents/guardians are participating in the Digital Ministry activity with their child(ren), one adult leader is sufficient for the activity.

Rules for One-On-One Meetings

On rare occasions, you may need to conduct a one-on-one meeting with a minor or a vulnerable adult. Such meetings should be arranged by the person in charge of the ministry to ensure appropriate approvals take place and only parish, school or archdiocesan accounts are used.

Before scheduling a one-on-one virtual meeting with a minor or a vulnerable adult, inform the parent(s)/guardian(s) which adult in the ministry will be meeting with the minor or vulnerable adult, the date and time of the meeting, and the reason for the meeting. The parent(s)/guardian(s) must give written permission before the meeting.

Parishes must maintain a log of any scheduled one-on-one meetings that take place in the context of your Digital Ministry. The log must include the name of the adult(s), the name of the minor, the reason for the meeting, the date and time the meeting took place, and the meeting ID information from the digital platform. A copy of the parental/guardian permission, if applicable, must be included in the log.

The pastor (or other supervisor) should be informed in advance who will be participating in such a meeting.