

MGL Internet, Email & Social Networking Policy

The Internet provides a vast array of communication possibilities for evangelisation and facilitating relationships. The Missionaries of God's Love will harness these new opportunities for the good of discipleship and evangelisation, ensuring that they are always used well, respecting at all times the dignity and rights of all involved in their use.

There is no doubt that the new forms of social media can be used for the promotion of the Gospel, aiding the Church and its various organisations in its missions. The Missionaries of God's Love is committed to having robust guidelines regulating the use of the internet within its communities to ensure the protection of both minors and vulnerable persons as well as our brotherhood and evangelical lifestyle. These guidelines will outline the vision for responsible and appropriate use of the internet and social media networking within the Missionaries of God's Love Brothers.

Internet Use Generally

As Missionaries of God's Love, we exist to proclaim the Good News of Jesus to the ends of the earth. We were founded under the grace of the "New Evangelisation," one that is "new in its ardour, new in its methods and new in its means of expression" (JP II Haiti 1983). We have a particular heart for reaching out to the young, the un-churched and those on the margins of society. As such, the internet is not only important but an essential tool of evangelisation for us. Living in the twenty-first century, it is also becoming more and more a normal means of communication between individuals.

The internet is basically an open public forum and as such, it is virtually impossible to ensure complete privacy in any of its forms. This makes the internet a possible tool for both good and evil. In our use of the internet, we must ensure that we protect the rights of those we contact and clearly and correctly regulate and monitor any form of contact with minors and vulnerable persons.

As with the rest of our lives as consecrated men, we need to be careful that all of our internet use – the kinds of sites we access and the content and manner of our communication with others – is consistent with Christian values and the teaching of the Catholic Church. The way that we use the internet, in other words, is yet another way that we can give witness to the love of God.

General Guidelines for Online Communications

When using any computer or device at all times a brother will:

1. Be respectful, polite, and considerate and communicate with charity and the awareness of the dignity of all persons.
2. Ensure communications are open, transparent and consistent with his vocation as a Missionaries of God's Love.
3. Identify himself and use his own name.
4. Respect the privacy of others and ensure that no information is communicated or published that should not be made public.

When using any computer or device under no circumstances does a brother:

1. Access child pornography on the internet. In some states and countries this may constitute a mandatory reporting offence, and thus if discovered, leave the brotherhood no option other than to report such an offence to the relevant civil authorities according to the prescribed course of action in such a situation.
2. Engage in any illegal activities on the internet.
3. Violate the copyright of videos, pictures, audio or text. This includes ensuring that one has the right to download, stream, or copy any materials accessed on the internet or another computer or computer system. Furthermore:
 - a. Any images of persons used in advertising or on MGL Websites must have permission from the individuals.
 - b. Any use of the image of a minor must have the written permission of the parent(s) of the child.

4. Download, copy, install or transmit commercial software, shareware or freeware without the consent of the System Administrator in either the Formation or Mission House. Mission houses may decide on their own policy in regard to acceptable programs that are needed in setting up laptop computers for ministerial use to avoid having to always seek permission when downloading programs from a set list.
5. Access pornographic or other sites inappropriate to our consecrated way of life, such as dating sites.
6. Access, submit, post, publish, forward, download or display any materials that are obscene, threatening, discriminatory, harassing, illegal, or abusive in any way.
7. Access or promote gambling, inappropriate or excessive gaming, or any other inappropriate activity.
8. Use a computer or the Internet for personal financial gain, commercial, advertising or solicitation purposes.

The internet may be used to facilitate the solicitation of funds for the purpose of MGL projects and ministries. An MGL brother would coordinate with the Head of the House or Head of the Mission (whose responsibility it is to monitor fundraising activities) in order to ensure that the need is worthy and so that any form of 'donor fatigue' can be managed appropriately.

Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Persons

It is a priority of the Missionaries of God's Love to ensure the protection of children and vulnerable persons in our use of online communication. Children and vulnerable persons use technology to communicate in various ways including the use of email, internet browsing, social media, text messaging, online chats, video conferencing, phone, mobile phone and on a variety of devices. This protocol applies to all those forms of technology.

It is a fact that while technology can be used for much good in keeping people in contact with one another, it can also be an instrument through which great harm can be caused to those least able to defend themselves against it. In order to ensure responsible use of the internet, all forms of social media and all online communications MGL brothers will follow protocols and guidelines. He will:

1. Not use inappropriate language and images, e.g. material that is harassing, defamatory, bullying, threatening, sexually explicit, obscene, profane, illegal or otherwise offensive.
2. Not invite or accept invitations to connect online with friends under 18 who are not family members. This also applies to any gaming that may be undertaken on internet or cell phone/mobile phone. If it is deemed necessary to have a minor as a friend then the written permission of the parent of the minor is to be obtained outlining the necessary reasons for it. The exception to this may be the Official MGL Ministry Page should there be agreement that it is acceptable for minors to be 'friended' on this type of site only.
3. Keep privacy settings at the minimum level of openness. Never allow others to 'tag' him in a photo without first gaining his approval. The timeline filter should be 'on' at all times.
4. Never post pictures of himself alone with minors. An exception to this may be clearly formal group photos where the group being photographed are all minors such as a First Communion setting.
5. Never send or receive images of a child or request from a child images of a child or children. If images of a particular child or children are received from a child, they should be deleted immediately and consideration should be given to whether a notification is required.
6. Discern carefully all status updates, photo uploads and groups joined as to their appropriateness to our witness as consecrated men and Missionaries of God's Love. In this context the following should be avoided:
 - Excessive posting of photos when traveling. Traveling is not necessarily a given for the people with whom we minister. It is rare that the poor can afford to travel. Having taken a vow of poverty, it is important that the witness of our lives is consistent with it. Any other form of posting of text or photos that is not consistent with our vow of poverty and commitment to a simple way of life is to be avoided.
7. Ensure his profile picture is a photo of himself in 'brown and whites,' with the cross and flame visible or in liturgical dress. This provides the clearest visual sign that we are consecrated men. Furthermore, it is not permitted to use a pseudonym online, so that it is clear we are not hiding anything.

Protecting the MGL Lifestyle

We need to note here that we live in societies where addictive behaviour is on the rise and causing all sorts of damage to individual, family and community relationships. The internet, when used in a reflective and responsible way can foster and strengthen our interpersonal relationships. However, without care and attention, it can be another means by which addictive practices are both established and furthered to the detriment of both the individual and the community. This is why we should be carefully monitoring and reviewing the effect internet and mobile/cell phone usage is having on our lifestyle of prayer, brotherhood and evangelisation.

There are times when their use will not be appropriate in order to guard our lifestyle and charism. The MGL also reserves the right to monitor the use of the internet services in its houses. In the normal state of affairs there will be a filter placed on the internet in order to exclude, as far as possible, those sites that we know to be inappropriate. This may include blocking, if possible, advertisements on the social networking and internet sites as most of this material is inappropriate to our way of life and often totally contrary to it.

As consecrated men, we are seeking to develop a contemplative spirit in our lives. Easy access to and use of entertainment options from the internet do not necessarily help us in this regard. We choose the 'quiet life,' that is a life with minimal intrusion of social media in order to protect our contemplative spirit and to make ourselves available to the Holy Spirit at all times possible in a spirit of reflection, devoid of the hyperactivity of constant access to social networking and internet services.

As consecrated men who have chosen to give ourselves to the Lord within the Missionaries of God's Love, it is part of our witness to the all-consuming love of God that we do not make unreflective use of the internet as seems to be the case with so many of our contemporaries.

Important Protocols

1. We may use the internet for formation, study, ministry and communication purposes. However, we should remain vigilant so that its use is always at our service and we are not being driven by it in any way.
 - a. Any Brother's presence on the Internet and Social Media must be transparent. His presence must clearly identify him as an MGL.
 - b. It is the individual brother's responsibility to monitor the time he spends accessing the internet. However, another brother, particularly the Head of the House or Mission is free to challenge a brother if he considers his use/time on the internet, to be excessive or inappropriate.
2. In keeping with our vision for a life of contemplation and simplicity we limit our use of the internet for personal entertainment or recreation (e.g. downloading movies, non- ministry related you-tube clips, watching TV programs, playing games, and the like).
3. In order to protect our life of prayer, we do not, generally speaking, email or use social media before Morning Prayer or after Night Prayer, that is, between the hours of 10:00pm and 8:00am. This is in order to facilitate the growth of a contemplative spirit within both the individual and the brotherhood as a whole.
4. Any involvement in political activities of any sort need to be submitted firstly to the Head of Formation for those in formation and to the Head of the House for those on mission before embarking upon them. A brother's continued participation in political activities will be under constant evaluation.

In the event that a violation of any of the *MGL Social Media Protocols* comes to the attention of the MGL then the brother in question will be approached in the first instance by the System Administrator of the House in which he lives and, if deemed necessary, the matter will be brought to the attention of the Head of the House or Mission such that the proper pastoral actions may take their course.

MGL brothers will:

1. Recognise that prayer, meal and brotherhood times are times when using cell phones/mobile phones and social networking is not appropriate.
2. Avoid all possibility of scandal when posting or 'liking' posts, pictures and pages.
 - a. This includes never posting pictures where you are holding children or pictures that may be misconstrued in a scandalous way even if they are completely innocent.
3. Avoid all inappropriate jokes, colourful language, gossip, and in general, anything that could be construed as negative speech in the public forum.
4. Always remember that as an MGL he is a 'public figure,' and never a 'private figure' on social media sites, and so:
 - a. All posts of MGL brothers on every form of public media must conform to the teaching of the Catholic Church.
 - b. Always inform the Head of the House in which you are living of any form of participation in any Blog or Vlog Site other than those run by the MGL. A brother should be open to the fact that because of the public nature of his vows within the MGL that at times it may be discerned that continued participation in some Blog Site discussions is inappropriate. In this regard the MGL reserves the right to protect its public image – exposure to public perusal – at the expense of the individual's perceived right or desire to participate in that particular conversation or form of activity
5. Seek to limit any time-wasting practices in the use of both cell phones/mobile phones and social networking.
6. Always be aware of the amount of time being spent using social media and surfing internet sites. As a rule of thumb, anything over one hour a day should be considered excessive.
7. Not access the internet or make phone calls between the hours of 10:00pm and 8am, except for emergencies.

In the Formation Setting

Those in initial formation, as an aid in their transition into consecrated life, will have less access to the internet and social communications media than vowed brothers.

1. **Pre-novices**, in order to help them transition well into consecrated life, will have limited access to any personal social networking accounts for the entirety of their pre-novitiate year. The Formators will determine which social networking sites, if any that may be used. Any other accounts will need to be closed either before or when an individual joins the MGL Formation Program.
2. **Novices** will not have access to personal social media facilities except email, and that on a limited basis. Exceptions to this may be allowed e.g. the need to contact family in an emergency situation where there is no other way to contact them quickly and effectively.
3. Both **Pre-novices and Novices** will be required to cease contributions to any Blog or Vlog sites in which they participate. Once they have taken vows and have entered into the Seminary House they can enter into a discernment of their ongoing participation in such activities with their resident Formators.

The MGL brothers may also have their own Household or Mission Facebook sites. The following rules apply to its use:

1. There will be one brother only in each house who acts as an administrator for local content (e.g. events, fundraisers, etc.).
2. The Leader of the Brothers will also be an administrator.
3. We do not want "friend to friend" conversations on our pages that have nothing to do with us.
4. All brothers on Facebook should be sharing MGL Brothers events on their personal pages as appropriate.
5. Any photos of ministry, brotherhood/fun and prayer should be sent to the administrator to add to the albums. Earlier protocols regarding these ought to be followed.
6. At this stage, "messages" and "tagging photos" of the MGL brothers should be deactivated.

Email Use

As Missionaries of God's Love, all that we do – public or private – reflects our call to be consecrated to the Lord and to witness His love to others. Unless necessary for ministry purposes, a brother should have only one email address, so as to avoid confusion when communicating through email. That email address should clearly identify his name for ease of recognition and transparency.

Social Networking

Today, social networking is a powerful tool for connecting especially with young people and as such is an important tool for evangelisation. As Missionaries of God's Love, we seek to harness this positive potential of social networking for both evangelistic and communication purposes, while being very aware of its limits and negative potential.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, in its *Social Networking Protocol for the Catholic Church in Australia* reminds us that:

“While the gifts of social networking are vast, it is important to remember in our engagement that the digital world is not exclusive. Social networking should never replace real relationships with people, and particularly in a ministry context, efforts should be made to avoid simply digital relationships.

This is also important in the sense of retaining the Church's focus on the poor. The majority of the world still cannot afford a computer, many have little access to educational possibilities and as such struggle with literacy; or perhaps they live in remote areas with limited access to technology. Hearing others talk about their social networking experiences can be profoundly isolating for those unable to take part.”

As missionaries with a particular focus on spreading the Good News of God's Love to the young and those on the margins of society, we should be very conscious of these issues. Our use of any social networking media will be in keeping with the standards set by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, any relevant local laws and the following guidelines:

Further Ministry Guidelines

Online Behaviour

An internet presence is a positive and desired means for the MGL to engage in the ministry of discipleship and evangelisation. MGL brothers who engage in such ministry are expected to do their work with the same diligence and accountability as those engaging in the more traditional forms of ministry.

1. Online behaviour should always demonstrate a Christ-centred love for others... and a respect for human dignity. Appropriate boundaries should always be taken into consideration and observed, particular in relating to young people in a youth ministry setting.
2. All relevant protocols and laws are to be observed as is appropriate.
3. Those who engage in social networking as part of their Church ministry should do so in the name of evangelisation, that is, to build appropriate relationships that can encourage and foster growth in faith. This engagement should facilitate growing in relationship with Christ. The following principles are important:
 - a. A brother engaging with the internet ought to be open with the Head of the House/Mission as to the content and sense of his engagement.
 - b. The content—audio, video and written—should strive for excellence in its category and thus meet the legitimate expectations of those for whom it is intended.

Content requirements

Content should contain nothing that could justifiably be perceived as giving unnecessary offense to other persons, groups, nations or institutions. At the same time, we recognise that even the proclamation of the Gospel may “offend.”

1. In addressing issues that are or may be considered controversial or sensitive, an MGL brother should seek out the counsel of others with knowledge and experience of these issues and have the content reviewed by them prior to its posting. However, either with or without such a prior review, an MGL brother must always remove any content immediately at the request of his local superior or the superior’s delegate for internet content.
2. If an MGL brother notices inappropriate content as part of another MGL brother’s engagement with the internet then he has a responsibility to either challenge the brother in question or report the inappropriate content to his local superior.
3. Internet presence that allows for synchronous communication (comments, bulletin boards, forums and so on) must include a code of conduct for participants. An MGL brother responsible for such Internet presence must ensure all content and actions on the site meets the code of necessary codes of conduct. The sharing of information on sites should be of appropriate materials for faith formation or catechesis. Social-Networking sites can be ideal for promotion of Church events or activities and for sharing worship resources in a wide range of formats, be it video, text or sound.
4. The teachings of the Catholic Church should be consistently upheld in these social networking activities, and should not move beyond appropriate personal communication with those in the ministry setting.
5. Clear distinctions should be maintained between personal and professional communication in the social networking environment.
6. Brothers are to abide by any particular protocols for social media that are required by their local bishop.
7. Clergy, Church workers or religious who use social networking sites in a professional capacity should keep this distinct from a private capacity and care should be taken in accepting or adding ‘friends’. There is great potential for a blurring of boundaries in the social networking field.
8. The use of photographs or videos should be carefully monitored, and permission should be sought from all who appear in photographs or videos before being posted or tagged. While in some public contexts, it can be assumed that people know they are being photographed to go on a website or a Facebook page; other situations might not be so obvious. Material should always be appropriate, and the sharing of embarrassing or offensive photos or videos should always be avoided.
9. Commentaries appearing on social networking sites of a rude or offensive nature or those which are vulgar or which could be interpreted as bullying should be immediately removed.
10. Privacy should be of the utmost importance, and care should be taken to protect people, especially youth, from their personal information being displayed on a social networking site. This particularly refers to phone numbers and email addresses.

A digital communication policy also exists for MGL Staff and Volunteers. All staff and volunteers working with MGL should refer to the Internet, Email & Social Networking Policy for Staff & Volunteers