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7 February 2011

Prot. No. 113/1/11

Circ. No. 11.07

Dear Brother Priests:

Please find enclosed **Internet and Social Media Guidelines for the Eparchy of Saint Maron** as well as the link to the recently issued USCCB guidelines. These are important guidelines for the use of Internet and social media websites which have become both extremely popular and an important tool for the Church. As the United States Catholic Bishops' have noted social media are "...the fastest growing form of communication in the United States especially among young people and young adults. Pope Benedict XVI sited the importance of this new form of media when he wrote that it "can offer priests and all pastoral workers a wealth of information and content that was difficult to access before, and facilitate forms of collaboration and greater communion in ways that were unthinkable in the past." Thus, the Church must engage this media, but as the Bishops' state, the engagement must be "...in a manner that is safe, responsible, and civil."

As we have noted, the Internet and social media have great value, but they also have the potential to do great harm both to our parishioners and the Church. There are too many cases where internet pictures of children have been photo-shopped or the children have become the targets of those who would do them harm. There are also some sad cases where peer to peer use of social media has been used as a means to humiliate or bully. Moreover, some sites can be used to post material or links to areas that are inappropriate for everyone. We must also take steps to protect the Church from public embarrassment or potential lawsuits. Thus while we use these wonderful new and evolving tools we must be mindful of the harm they can do.

The following guidelines are an attempt to establish commonsense protocols that will protect both the Church and Her members. It is my hope that they will lead to a safer use of the Internet and social media.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Gregory J. Mansour

Enclosure
GJM/cm

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**Internet and Social Media Guidelines for the
Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn**

The following are a list of general guidelines to cover the use of the Internet websites and other social media sites. These guidelines along with the recently issued United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Social Media Guidelines <http://www.usccb.org/comm/social-media-guidelines.shtml> should cover most situations faced by any pastor.

1. The use of **official** parish websites and other social media platforms are entrusted to the confidence of the Pastor and the Bishop. It is important to always remember that once something is placed on the Internet there are no deletions; it will remain forever in cyberspace just waiting to be found. Thus, the Administrator/Pastor or his delegate should keep close watch over all postings to ensure that none of them are harmful, embarrassing, dangerous, or illegal.
2. Any **unofficial** websites associated with the parish should carry a disclaimer reflecting that postings are not the expressed opinion of the Parish, Eparchy or the Magisterium of the Catholic Church.
3. The official website of the parish should reflect the dignity of the Church, thus web-hosting companies, paid for by advertising, should be avoided. The Church has no control over the advertising which could, at a minimum, reflect badly on the dignity of the Church.
4. Due to privacy concerns, only business (not personal) accounts may be established on Facebook or MySpace. That is because business accounts do not have an open wall and only allow for posting by administrator. The Pastor or a designated responsible adult should be the only administrator and the account should carry a disclaimer.
5. With the advent of photo shopping and other internet photo programs that can alter images, it is important that no pictures of minor children be posted. If pictures are posted, it should be done only with the written permission of parents.
6. Church staff should not use Church computers for personal social media sites. These sites raise numerous security and privacy concerns for the Church. The Pastor/Administrator is to make sure there are enough filters in place to prevent access to improper and unwanted material.

Issued February 8, 2011