



Diocese of Austin

SUPERVISION OF PROGRAMS WITH MINORS: TELECOMMUNICATION AND DISTANCE LEARNING MINISTRY EVENTS

POLICY

Diocese of Austin policies on Ethics and Integrity in Ministry apply to the use of telecommunication systems for distance learning and ministry events with minors in much the same manner as for in-person on-site, off-site and overnight ministry and events. Telecommunication between minors and Church personnel is permitted for legitimate ministry-related purposes and must reflect the Catholic faith and her teachings; transparency and accountability are required.

For these guidelines, telecommunication refers to communication at a distance using phones, computer networks and the Internet for remote/virtual participation in catechetical, educational, social, and any other programs for minors sponsored or organized by any parish, Catholic school or organization in the diocese. Such technologies include video conferencing, virtual classrooms and group texts.

Although developed specifically to address ministry with minors during pandemic, these policies will apply to any remote/online ministries or events developed by the parish/school in the future.

Supervision of Programs with Minors – Telecommunication and Distance Learning Ministry Events

- a. All adults supervising any program involving minors must be EIM compliant, with a **minimum of at least two** EIM compliant adults present.
 - (1) Catholic school virtual classrooms shall have at least one EIM compliant adult, with frequent monitoring done by the principal or designee throughout the day.
- b. The majority of adults supervising a program involving minors must be 21+ years of age (at a minimum one adult must be 21+ years of age).
- c. One adult should never be alone with one minor; however, Catholic school teachers may meet individually with a student for educational purposes as long as a parent is present and/or the session is recorded.
- d. The following ratios use an adults-to-minors formula with the understanding that there must always be a minimum of 2 EIM compliant adults present.
 - (1) Elementary age: PreK-5th – 2:24; 1 additional adult for additional minors (1-12)
 - (2) Middle school age: 6-8th – 2:30; 1 additional adult for additional minors (1-15)
 - (3) High school age: 9-12th – 2:40; 1 additional adult for additional minors (1-20)
 - (4) Because Catholic school classroom teachers typically have more training and student supervision experience than do volunteers for most parish programs or events, school ratios may be greater than those stated above.

- e. Video telecommunications should use a public location, or a communal location in the home, with a background clear of distracting or inappropriate items and messaging and in keeping with Catholic values.
- f. All leaders and participants should be attentive of attire and wear clothing appropriate to an in-person session.
- g. Telecommunications should use public platforms, be by invitation unique to each session/event and require admission by a program moderator (e.g. catechist, youth group leader, Scout leader).
- h. Two-way platforms for online teaching may include, but do not require, parent attendance. In such cases, if the parent is only responsible for their student (vs serving as a co-catechist), there is no EIM requirement.
- i. Sessions may be recorded by schools and ministry/event coordinators for auditing purposes and may not be published in any form, including any social media forums. Minors may not record sessions.
- j. As with any use of technology, there is potential that conversations or stored data could be accessed by unauthorized persons.
- k. The parent/legal guardian will provide signed informed consent for their student to participate in remote/online ministry or events. This consent may be proved in a parish or school-specific consent form that includes these policies and a statement of consent specific to review of policies and permission.
- l. The following are appropriate and acceptable uses of telecommunications with minors:
 - (1) Using a minor's home or family phone number or a group list tool (text or email) for communicating /scheduling with minors;
 - (2) Providing parents with links/access to sessions, emails and other communications;
 - (3) Providing minors with parish/school or group-related email addresses or accounts to contact adult leaders rather than providing personal contact information;
 - (4) Securing permission of parents or legal guardians before posting photos of minors, or details of ministry or program activities, on any form of media (identifying information should not be included); and
 - (5) Ensuring that at least two EIM compliant adults moderate any social network site; passwords and site information should be available to parish/school administration.
- m. The following types of telecommunications may not be used with minors:
 - (1) Inviting minors to be "friends" or "fans", or "following" minors on social networking sites; and
 - (2) Using any telecommunication method with minors for personal (non-ministry) purposes including personal conversations, sharing photos/videos or arranging individual face-to-face meetings.