The Safe Environment Policy of the Archdiocese of New York regarding Electronic Communication, Internet and Computer Use

As catechetical leaders introduce and use new technologies in faith formation programs, there is a need to recognize how the use of technology relates to creating safe environments, indeed safe virtual environments, for children as well as adults. The policy that follows, Electronic Communication, Internet and Computer Use is section 12 from the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Policy. This section of the policy provides clear guidance on best practices in the use of technology. It is divided into six sections, the bulk of which deal with electronic communication (see 12.2a for examples), proper relationships in communications, Internet and computer use, and social networking.

The rationale behind these policies is that appropriate, professional and Christian conduct should be the hallmark of ministry whenever we use technology. As we increasingly introduce new technologies into the faith formation setting, we need to have a clear idea of what is expected of us as catechetical leaders and catechists. Furthermore, we should be models for online behavior. The online environment, like its real world counterpart, needs to be evangelized. Each email, text, post, tweet or update should be a contribution to the building of God’s Kingdom.

Although written with children in mind, the policy can also be used as guidance on best practices for the interaction between adults when communicating electronically, using the computer and on the Internet. Although there is a difference between working with children and adults, there are some points of convergence. The catechetical leader must maintain professional and appropriate boundaries with the adults to whom they minister. Catechists, for example, should be treated in a professional and Christian manner whether in person or online.

It is important for the catechetical leader, whether working directly with children or not, to be aware of these policies. There may be moral and legal consequences to our actions. Moreover, as leaders, we represent the Church. Please give appropriate time to read and study the policy that follows. Acting in a professional and Christian manner whether in-person or online, enables the people we serve to have the best of encounters, with Jesus Christ Himself.