

Archdiocese releases youth technology guidelines

Facebook invitations and instant messaging buddy requests fly fast and furious in the Internet age.

Archdiocese of Baltimore employees are being encouraged to be more discriminating when accepting those invitations from youth.

An archdiocesan document released earlier this month, labeled Technology Procedural Recommendations, seeks to answer lingering questions for teachers, religious educators, youth ministers and volunteers about proper virtual communication boundaries.

Co-authored by Scott Miller and Kristin Witte, staff members of the archdiocese's Division of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, the 30-page document tackles nearly every technological communication tool, from cell phone text messaging to e-mail.

"The common perception is that there's a dichotomy between the real world and the virtual world and that one is less public," Miller said. "That's not true."

The document was first sent to pastors and is being rolled out to schools and parishes. A letter signed by Auxiliary Bishops Mitchell T. Rozanski and Denis J. Madden, as well as Dr. Ronald J. Valenti, superintendent for Catholic schools, provides introduction.

Archdiocese representatives should not have youth they serve as "friends" or "buddies," according to the document. Instead, young people should be steered to parish-related pages where a more professional decorum reigns.

"It reminds adults that they are representatives of the church and they should do it in appropriate ways," Miller said of the document. "It says, no matter the settings ... remember who you are."

Witte said social networking pages or text messaging can blur mentor and pupil

relationships. Representatives of the church should always be mindful of how they represent themselves.

“We don’t compartmentalize our Catholic identities,” Witte said. “We are also Catholic on the Internet. There needs to be a line virtually as well.”

The document is available for reading at:

www.archbalt.org/youngchurch/policies-guidelines.