



ВОСТОЧНО-АМЕРИКАНСКАЯ ЕПАРХІЯ

Русская Православная Церковь Заграницей

EASTERN AMERICAN DIOCESE

Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

140 E Ridgewood Avenue · Ste 415, S Tower · Paramus, NJ 07652
(201) 940-7340 · office@eadiocese.org · www.eadiocese.org

№: **07.18.26**

July 11/24, 2026

Holy Equal-of-the-Apostles

Great Princess Olga

TO ALL DIOCESAN CLERGY

Dear in the Lord reverend fathers,

Social media is everywhere we turn and has become pervasive in our lives. As clergy and persons in responsible Church positions, we have a higher level of responsibility and a lower bar to measure our actions for appropriateness. In an effort to help put up some guardrails, the Eastern American Diocese is enacting a *Social Media & Digital Conduct Policy*.

The amount of time spent online is already a problem for most, even under the guise of pastoral work. Orthodox clergy and laity should be encouraged to spend time in personal rather than virtual communication, doing spiritual and physical good outside the virtual realm and away from their devices.

Those who are ordained to the clergy, as well as those entrusted with positions of responsibility or trust within the Diocese, bear a continuing obligation to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the sacred calling they have received. This obligation is not suspended in digital or online spaces, where private expression and public witness are often indistinguishable.

We ask all of our clergy to become familiar with the concepts described in this policy and to take them to heart, and to follow them. The *Policy* is applicable to all diocesan clergy (priests and deacons), as well as those in the Lesser Orders and all lay employees and volunteers when acting on behalf of the Diocese or its institutions. The *Policy* is also appropriate for all parishioners and can be a useful tool in parish discussions, lessons, or other interactions. A lengthy and challenging process was undertaken to

develop this policy in a spiritual, pastoral tone, but we now believe it serves as a very healthy basis to promote frank and useful discussions within our parishes and throughout the Diocese.

With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol followed by the name "Nicholas" in a cursive script.

Metropolitan of Eastern America & New York
First Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol followed by the name "Deodocio" in a cursive script.

Bishop of Manhattan
Diocesan Vicar

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol followed by the name "Luke" in a cursive script.

Bishop of Syracuse
Diocesan Vicar

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol followed by the name "Michael" in a cursive script.

Bishop of Boston
Diocesan Vicar

Social Media & Digital Conduct Policy

Eastern American Diocese Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

Purpose & Vision

The Eastern American Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia recognizes that contemporary forms of digital communication have become pervasive in daily life and exert a powerful influence upon public perception, personal conduct, and ecclesial witness. These technologies, while capable of serving constructive purposes, also present significant spiritual and pastoral risks when used without sobriety and discernment.

Those who are ordained to the clergy, as well as those entrusted with positions of responsibility or trust within the Diocese, bear a continuing obligation to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the sacred calling they have received. This obligation is not suspended in digital or online spaces, where private expression and public witness are often indistinguishable.

The purpose of this policy is not to regulate lawful private life, nor to impose intrusive oversight, but to offer pastoral guidance and prudent counsel. Its aim is to assist clergy, employees, and volunteers in exercising restraint, vigilance, and wisdom in digital conduct, thereby safeguarding themselves, the faithful, and the good name of the Church.

The vision underlying this policy is one of voluntary obedience, pastoral accountability, and shared responsibility, exercised in humility and love for the Church, so that all digital conduct may accord with the salvific mission, teachings, and lived tradition of Orthodox Christian life.

This policy is binding upon all diocesan clergy. It is also binding upon the Lesser Orders and all lay employees and volunteers when acting on behalf of the Diocese or its institutions.

Definitions

Church: The Eastern American Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and its canonical institutions.

Clergy: Bishops, priests, and deacons canonically ordained and serving within the Diocese.

Lesser Orders: Readers and subdeacons.

Employees and Volunteers: Lay persons entrusted with service or responsibility on behalf of the Diocese or its institutions.

Positions of Responsibility or Public Trust: Roles wherein conduct may reasonably be perceived as representing or reflecting upon the Church.

Digital Communication: Any communication transmitted or stored electronically, including messages, calls, posts, images, audio, and video.

Social Media: Digital platforms that enable public or semi-public sharing and interaction.

Public-Facing Content: Any content reasonably capable of dissemination beyond its intended audience.

Private Communication: Communication intended for limited recipients but not presumed secure.

Scandal: Conduct that becomes an occasion for confusion, temptation, or weakening of faith.

Public Witness: The manner in which conduct reflects upon the Church and her teachings.

Manipulated or Fabricated Content: Altered or generated digital material presented misleadingly.

Pastoral Accountability: Ecclesial response aimed at guidance, correction, and restoration.

Guiding Principles for Digital Conduct

Clergy and those serving the Church are to conduct themselves online with sobriety, dignity, and vigilance, mindful that ordination and ecclesial service confer a continuous public responsibility.

Digital conduct should preserve the Church's public witness, avoid scandal, and reflect restraint in self-presentation. Communications should be measured, peaceable, and oriented toward edification rather than contention.

Private familiarity, impulsive speech, and excessive self-disclosure are to be avoided, particularly where context may be lost or distorted. Silence and restraint are often preferable to public engagement in hostile or provocative environments.

All guidance herein is offered in a spirit of voluntary obedience and pastoral care.

"Humility is accompanied by modesty and self-collectedness: chastity of the senses, moderation in speech, a gaze not conspicuous, and a hidden heart. The humble man does not seek to be seen or praised, but offers all good to God."
— St. Isaac the Syrian

Risk Awareness & Protective Practices

The present age is marked by ease of communication and ease of distortion. Digital communications should not be presumed private. Words and images may be recorded, altered, or disclosed without consent.

Group communications entail shared responsibility and vulnerability. Materials shared within such settings should be limited to what one would not regret being disclosed more broadly.

Modern technologies enable the fabrication and manipulation of digital media. Content of uncertain origin, or content that appears sensational or inflammatory, should be approached with caution and discernment.

Anonymous and contentious forums seldom foster peace or edification. Clergy and those serving the Church are counseled to refrain from public disputes online.

Clergy and faithful alike should actively work to reduce time spent on social media and digital platforms, guarding against excessive or habitual engagement that distracts from prayer, family life, pastoral responsibilities, charitable works, and face-to-face fellowship.

Particular care should be taken to avoid forms of digital consumption designed to foster continual attention, impulsive reaction, or unhealthy attachment.

Falsehood, rumor, and accusation are rarely remedied through digital engagement. Such matters should be addressed, when necessary, through appropriate ecclesiastical channels or with restraint and silence.

Excessive self-disclosure weakens pastoral boundaries and obscures the distinction between personal expression and public witness. Confidential information concerning others is not to be disclosed.

Digital expression should be offered in one's own name and voice, without misrepresentation or concealment of identity. No member of the clergy or other person serving in an

"The tongue is a small member, yet it can wound deeply; and he who would heal souls must first guard his own speech, lest by careless words he scatter what he was called to gather."

— St. John Chrysostom

ecclesiastical office should present personal opinions as speaking on behalf of the Church or the Diocese unless expressly authorized to do so. At the same time, clergy should remain mindful that their public conduct and communications may be perceived as reflecting upon the Church and its ministry, or even as the voice of the Church.

Those holding the Lesser Orders are set apart for specific liturgical ministries, and should exercise humility and prudence in the public use of ecclesiastical titles, attire, or other identifiers associated with those ministries. Outside of the liturgical setting or official Church communications, the titles Reader or Subdeacon should not be used. Public statements and online activity by those in the Lesser Orders are personal unless expressly authorized by competent ecclesiastical authority. Accordingly, they should not use clerical attire, liturgical titles, or related identifiers in online profiles or communications.

The words, images, and materials of others are to be treated with respect and should not be shared without appropriate consent.

When uncertainty arises regarding appropriate digital conduct, seeking counsel from ecclesiastical authority is an expression of wisdom and obedience.

Vigilance in digital conduct serves peace, avoids scandal, and safeguards the Church's witness.

Pastoral Care in Digital Spaces

Digital media may serve as a useful means of communication, education, and initial evangelization, but it is not a substitute for the lived sacramental life of the Church. The ordinary work of pastoral ministry is fulfilled within the parish through worship, Confession, spiritual guidance, and participation in the Holy Mysteries. Clergy should therefore use digital resources principally to invite and direct people into the life of the parish, rather than to cultivate ongoing online pastoral relationships. Except where extraordinary circumstances require otherwise, Confession and sustained spiritual counsel should occur in person. Clergy should ordinarily encourage those seeking spiritual direction to establish and maintain a relationship with their local parish priest.

The fundamental expression of Orthodox life is within the physical world into which Our Lord incarnated: a believer participates in the Sacraments and divine services at their parish. The digital era has opened a new milieu for pastoral care and evangelization, but it cannot, and must never, replace parish life.

“Vainglory is the beginning of pride; and pride, once enthroned in the heart, blinds the mind and estranges the soul from peace.”

— St. John Climacus

A believer’s confessor/spiritual father should be their parish priest. In certain circumstances, such as a parishioner who is discerning a monastic vocation, the parish priest may bless frequenting a monastery for Confession. Confession and spiritual counselling should take place in person. Monastics in this example, and all clergy in general, should not accept remote spiritual children, and should direct them to their local parish priest for Confession. Remote relationships with spiritual children are not sustainable and should be discouraged.

Pastoral Accountability & Response

Concerns arising from digital conduct are to be addressed in a pastoral and ecclesial manner, consistent with the teachings, discipline, and spirit of the Orthodox Church. The purpose of accountability is not punishment, but guidance, correction, and restoration.

This policy is not intended to encourage informal surveillance, ideological monitoring, or the reporting of disagreements arising from good-faith pastoral judgment. Concerns

should be raised only where conduct reasonably appears inconsistent with the standards set forth herein or where the Church's witness, peace, or good order may be adversely affected.

When concerns arise regarding the digital conduct of clergy or those serving in positions of responsibility, such matters should be brought directly to the appropriate ecclesiastical authority. Public accusation or online dispute is to be avoided.

Those exercising ecclesiastical oversight are to respond with discernment and pastoral care, taking into account the circumstances and impact of the conduct in question.

"Obedience cuts off self-will and preserves the soul from delusion; through obedience a man is guarded from the snares of his own reasoning."

— St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

Matters requiring formal review or corrective action shall be addressed in accordance with the *Appendix: Accountability & Enforcement*, which forms part of this policy.

All involved are reminded that obedience freely offered and humility in correction serve the peace of the Church and the salvation of souls.

Appendix: Accountability & Enforcement

A. Conduct Inconsistent with This Policy

Conduct that may warrant review includes, but is not limited to:

- Public statements or digital content that contradict the teachings of the Orthodox Church.
- Digital communications that cause scandal, confusion, or division among the faithful.
- Disclosure of confidential pastoral or administrative information.
- Online behavior unbecoming of clergy or those serving in positions of ecclesial responsibility.
- Public engagement in partisan political disputes or divisive geopolitical controversies in a manner that alienates portions of the faithful or compromises the Church's pastoral neutrality.
- Presentation of personal opinions as official positions of the Diocese without authorization.
- Repeated refusal to observe the guidance outlined in this policy.

Nothing in this policy shall be construed to prohibit clergy from teaching, preaching, or speaking on matters of faith, morals, social concern, or pastoral responsibility in a manner consistent with Orthodox doctrine, pastoral responsibility, and the directives of ecclesiastical authority.

Mere disagreement, personal offense, political dissatisfaction, or discomfort arising from faithful pastoral teaching shall not, by themselves, be considered scandal or constitute a violation of this policy.

The determination of inconsistency rests with ecclesiastical authority.

B. Process for Review & Episcopal Oversight

1. Concerns shall be directed to the appropriate Dean.

2. The Dean shall promptly inform the Secretary of the Diocesan Administration.

3. Where warranted, the matter shall be presented to the Ruling Diocesan Bishop.

4. The Ruling Bishop shall determine appropriate pastoral directives or corrective measures.

All stages of this process shall be conducted discreetly and with due regard for reputation and ecclesial order.

“Where there is argument, there is seldom peace; seek first the peace of Christ, and leave contention behind.”
— St. Ambrose of Optina

C. Outcomes & Ecclesial Consequences

The aim of corrective action is amendment and preservation of peace.

Lay employees, volunteers, or those in Lesser Orders, who fail to comply with episcopal directives issued under this policy may be removed from ecclesial responsibilities or have their service terminated.

Members of the clergy who refuse to comply with lawful directives issued by the Ruling Bishop concerning digital conduct are engaging in disobedience to ecclesiastical authority and may be subject to appropriate canonical discipline consistent with the discipline of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

No appellate mechanism is established within the Diocese for determinations made under this Appendix.