BEATITUDES OF OUR LORD SCHOOL

PRINCIPAL LETTER TO PARENTS

RE: SOCIAL NETWORKING

April 1, 2014

Subject: Assuring a Safe Environment for Student Internet Use

Dear Parents:

I am writing to you because I am concerned about the welfare and safety of your children while using the Internet, and I want to help you understand the Archdiocesan and school/parish policy on these matters. (See handbook pgs. 57 – 61)

Technological and communications advances pose new challenges to parents today in their efforts to keep their children safe. The Internet is a tremendous resource for information, but it can be a place that puts young people at risk. Various social networking websites exist that pose a special challenge to parents and youth because the information they post is available for anyone to see. Students frequently share more personal information than they should, including pictures of themselves and others, what school they attend, where they live or work, and when and where they will be participating in athletic or social events. Strangers can misuse these facts.

While many messages on the networking sites are age-appropriate and make efforts to limit access, many are profane, demeaning or of a sexually explicit nature. Because these messages are freely and publicly available, they pose a potential threat to all users. Even messages that are innocent when standing alone can become objectionable when placed, maliciously or not, in the context of profane and sexually explicit language and pictures. They then reflect poorly on the character of the user and any organization to which the user belongs, like the family, the school and the Church and can cause harm.

Social Networking Site members create personal profiles online to communicate with each other in a bulletin board format. Messages are posted to members and anyone may reply, with their postings open for the public to read, whether they are registered members. You have to be at least 14 years old to register for Instagram and at least 14 years old for Facebook® and Xanga.com®. You must be 18 to be eligible for certain additional services. Our information suggests that on sites that have age limits, young people may use false information or ages so they can register as members and receive all services.

I urge you to talk to your children and investigate their use of Internet networking sites. For example, you can inspect by logging onto the site and conducting a search by entering your children's email addresses, or by going to "groups" and conducting a search by name of the school or any other organization to which your children belong. If you have children who are under the eligible registration or full service ages, you have an obligation to shut down or modify their use for

many reasons, one of which is that they will have lied about their ages when they registered. Instructions on how to shut down a site yourself are attached.

A form letter addressed to social networking sites is provided for you to use to request that your child's site be taken down and to report offensive material. You can also contact most social networking sites by email by scrolling to the bottom of the Home page and clicking on the "Terms," "FAQ," "Contact us," "Help" or similar terms to find the appropriate contact for the subject you wish to address. The school also reserves the right to shut down all sites that refer to the school even if parents do not pursue the matter.

General information and guidance about children's online use, is available at the Federal Trade Commission: http://www.ftc.gov/privacy/privacyinitiatives/childrens_educ.html

You can keep your children safe by:

1. Becoming educated on the matter.
2. Getting rid of email accounts and social networking, gaming for your elementary and middle school children, and limiting personal email accounts to high school or later. Younger students may use your family email address to talk with relatives and approved friends.
3. Putting passwords on all your computers and changing the password frequently.
4. Making sure you have firewalls and software loaded to restrict the sites your children can visit on the computer. Software such as Spectorsoft™ records and reports what is said and posted online. Information about internet filtering and monitoring software is available at Software4parents.com.
5. Putting the computer in a room where it is in plain sight of all adults.
6. Teaching your children how to report and deal with intrusive emails, texting, or other electronic communications and with inappropriate telephone calls.

If you have any questions about the Archdiocesan policy on Internet use for young people or about this letter, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Maria Watson, Principal