

CUSTODIAL DIRECTORY ON THE USE OF NEW MEDIA



Philippine Provincial Custody of the Immaculate Conception and Blessed Bonaventure of Potenza

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. PRELIMINARIES.....	3
II. GENERAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES	3
III. LEVELS.....	4
A. Custodial Level.....	4
B. Priary Level	5
C. Ministerial Level.....	6
D. Personal Level	6
IV. SPECIAL CONCERNS.....	7
A. Formands	7
B. Youth Ministry and Family Life.....	8
C. Content Creators.....	8
D. Minors and Vulnerable Adults.....	9
V. CONCLUSION.....	9

I. PRELIMINARIES

The friars are to be formed in the good use of social communication. It contributes to human development, to the acquisition of knowledge, to the sharing of information, to wider relationships, and, not least, to the work of evangelization. The friars are to use media maturely, responsibly, and moderately, taking care that its use not impoverish relationships with friars in the same Friary nor cause damage to one's own consecrated life (Const., art. 66 § 3).

This document is aimed to the observance of the constitutional stipulation given above. The main reference used for the formulation of this directory is the *General Guidelines for the Preparation of Provincial or Custodial Directories on the Use of New Media* (henceforth GG) published by the General Curia on October 22, 2020. The General Statutes and other Church documents on social communications were also consulted.

It is a known fact that almost all the corners of the world have benefited from the *marvelous technological discoveries*¹ we call the internet through which all digital communications are made possible. The Church considers the tools for social communication as a great gift from God.² On the other hand, she is also conscious of the inherent risks it brings to individuals and to the global community.³

Cognizant to the opportunities of this modern human advancement, the Philippine Custody *empowered by the Holy Spirit, under the guidance of Mary Immaculate and Blessed Bonaventure of Potenza* would like to offer a response to the growing and pressing challenges with this directory.

II. GENERAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This directory applies the general inspirational norms as reflected in the General Guidelines (GG IV, *a-i*). The following points are quoted here for emphasis:

1. Every means of communication is an instrument, a space, a gift for the proclamation of the Gospel. The proclamation is guided by the magisterium⁴, and informed according to the Order's spirituality, charism, and mission and one's religious consecration.
2. The friars should present themselves on digital platforms in an identifiable way, one that is in consonance with their choice of Franciscan religious life and their mission.
3. His (The friar's) presence and style, in both public and private communications, must respect the dignity of people, taking into account the interests and purposes of such communications while paying particular attention to the signs of the times and the needs of the cultures where we operate (*cf. Const., art. 96 §§ 3-4*).
4. In accordance with the right to privacy and the principle of prudence, political, religious, or sexual opinions or statements that might cause confusion or scandal for being contrary to the Gospel shall not be disseminated through new media. The friars should be clear and unambiguous in the opinions they publish or share. They should be particularly careful to show

¹ Inter Mirifica, 01.

² *The internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God.* Pope Francis' message on the 48th World Communication Day, January 24, 2014. Please refer to **The Church and the Internet** document from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications for details.

³ *Linked to technological development is the increasingly pervasive presence of the means of social communications. It is almost impossible today to imagine the life of the human family without them. For better or for worse, they are so integral a part of life today that it seems quite absurd to maintain that they are neutral - and hence unaffected by any moral considerations concerning people.* cf. Caritas in Veritate, 73.

⁴ *In order to preserve the integrity of the truths of faith and morals, the pastors of the Church have the duty and right to be watchful so that no harm is done to the faith or morals of the Christian faithful through writings or the use of instruments of social communication. They also have the duty and right to demand that writings to be published by the Christian faithful which touch upon faith or morals be submitted to their judgment and have the duty and right to condemn writings which harm correct faith or good morals* (cf. CIC, can. 823).

respect to people and avoid provoking unnecessary arguments. If a conflict should arise, the friars shall maintain a mild disposition (*cf. Later Rule, chapter III*) ⁵.

5. Friars publishing materials shall respect copyrights and seek reliable sources, permission and accurate *and responsible* information. Likewise, in sharing or reposting digital content/s in social media platforms the source is to be duly acknowledged.
6. In addition, there are two indispensable guiding principles in digital life i.e. **promotion and regulation**. The former involves proper orientation, literacy, technical training, and discernment. The latter includes but not limited to accountability and transparency.

III. LEVELS

A. Custodial Level

1. The Custody shall establish an Office of Communication and Evangelization (OCE). The Office's main objective is its engagement in Evangelization and vocation promotion through media in all its forms – *print, visual, social communication, etc.* Thus, the Office shall maintain the Custody's website and take charge of the Custody's office page on various social media platforms (*Facebook, X, etc.*). It is preferable that the office be located within the Custodial Curia.
2. In addition, the OCE's responsibilities would include the following:
 - a. present a systematic program in all levels for the Custody's common reflection regarding Evangelization through the use of Social (New) Media;
 - b. coordinate with other levels regarding their respective page on various social media platforms (*Facebook, X, etc.*). They are also to receive proposals from various levels and evaluate them.
 - c. If needed act as editorial board which review materials to be published in the friars personal/ministerial accounts. The criteria to be followed is reflected in the Procedures for Managing Publications of the General Guidelines (*GG VI*). This is done so that future complications from potential controversial digital contents from friars may be avoided.
 - d. give fitting and timely interventions or feedbacks to any issues pertaining to the proper and good use of any media as reflected in this directory (*cf. CIC, can. 823*). In a word, they are to implement according to their competence the policies/norms written in therein;
 - e. identify shared digital contents (photos, graphics, articles, blog posts, etc.) of friars, friaries, and ministries to be printed in color and to be eventually stored in the Custodial archives. Moreover, they shall devise a system of organization for these printed materials for easy reference and retrieval.
 - f. serve as a spokesperson for the Custody should the need arises;
 - g. provide an annual update to the Custos and definitory regarding the programs, concerns, and development of the office.
3. The OCE shall be composed of the following: (a) Friar in charge of evangelization, (b) the Custodial secretary, (c) the Vocation Director, (d) the Custodial Youth Minister. They are assisted by a *lay partner* – he may be a website animator.

⁵ "I counsel, admonish and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to quarrel or argue or judge others when they go about in the world, but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble, (*cf. 2Tm 2:14 and Ti 3:2*), speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming."

4. The Custos and his Definitory shall formulate the internal norms of the Office and shall be directly under the supervision of the Provincial Custos. These local and internal norms supplement the operational guidelines for each jurisdiction given in the General Guidelines (*GG Chapter V, # 2-3*).
5. Lastly, the tenure of office and similar details will be reflected in the internal norms.

B. Friary Level

1. The Friary Chapter guided by the guardian shall be responsible for the implementation of the policies indicated in this directory. Moreover, this directory adopts the operational guidelines for each local community given in the General Guidelines (*GG Chapter V, # 4*) namely:

In the annual planning of its House Chapters, each friary shall:

- a. reflect upon and indicate ways of using new media to enrich the Community's ministry and apostolate (*cf. Const., art. 56 § 1*).
 - b. establish ways of presenting the community and its activities, including on new media.
 - c. In order to promote the cloister, even in a virtual sense, a community should set up rules for sharing digital materials that come from outside and establish norms for protecting images, videos, and community texts which are inappropriate for sharing externally (*cf. Const., art. 25 § 3, 53 § 1, and 66 §§ 1-3*).
 - d. In the case of broadcasting or webcasting liturgical celebrations from the churches of the Order or from others where the friars are presiding, fidelity to the liturgical norms should be observed, avoiding any personalism or eccentricity. Particular attention should be given to the homily, with the awareness that its words cannot be erased. Furthermore, one should make sure that the technical, audiovisual quality of the broadcast is as high as possible. The norms on this matter issued by the respective diocese and by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) shall likewise be respected.
 - e. The Community should review points 5a, b, and c annually, if possible.
2. In particular, the friary through the guardian has the competence to:
 - a. open or identify a digital account in any chosen social media platform (*FB, X, etc*). This will be the official page of the friary. The link of the page shall be submitted by the guardian to the OCE.
 - b. as a supplement to 1.c above, photos and videos of friary cloister areas are not to be published publicly in any form of media communications except with the expressed permission of the guardian or the major superior. Digital sharing of these photos and videos may be done only among friars.
 - c. after the proper community discernment, if deemed suitable “digital fasting/discipline” shall be an integral part of community penance.
 - d. adopt and formulate new and temporary norms/policies applicable to specific circumstances of the friary. The guardian or the friary chapter may delegate a friar to be the NM in-charge in the friary level.
 3. The friary secretary will have the following duties:
 - a. as contributor of news articles and photos of the friary and friary apostolate to be published in the Custodial website
 - b. to post in the friary bulletin board all official communications from the General, Provincial and Custodial levels.

- c. identify shared digital contents (photos, graphics, articles, blog posts, etc.) of *de familia* friars, and the friary apostolate/s to be printed in color and to be eventually stored in the friary archives. Moreover, he shall devise a system of organization for these printed materials for easy reference and retrieval
4. Friaries provide proper liturgical books (breviary, lectionary, sacramentary, etc.) for the daily and ordinary use of the friars. Meanwhile, travelling friars/friars in transit may use digital applications of the same books. The digital applications to be used should be in conformity with the approved liturgical books.

C. Ministerial Level

This level covers the well-established apostolates of the Custody namely: Parishes, OFS, MI, JPIC, and Spirituality Centers

1. The elected, delegated, or appointed friar for the apostolate shall be responsible for the implementation of the policies indicated in this directory. He shall do it according to the competence given to him.
2. Each apostolate shall open or identify only one digital account in any chosen social media platform (FB, X, etc). This will be the official page of the ministry. The link of the page shall be submitted to the OCE.
3. To follow-up or clarify any public communications through any media (print or digital) issued by the respective apostolate, the OCE shall contact the friar-responsible or another person identified by the same friar beforehand.
4. The friar-members of the parish community shall be guided by the norms published by the responsible or mandated office for communication in their respective diocese or the CBCP.

D. Personal Level

This section pertains to all friars of the Custody regardless of his level of formation. This is the practical application to the guiding principles mentioned above.

1. Each friar shall be held accountable to all that he does virtually. Should any accusations or allegations arise from what he digitally posts, shares, or comments, he alone shall be legally and criminally liable (*GG IV.c*). He shall likewise undergo due process according to the norms of the Church and the Order if need be.⁶
2. Transparency and honesty as accountability are equally valued in our digital life. Hence, each friar is to identify ONE personal digital account in any chosen social media platform (FB, X, etc.). The OCE will virtually communicate to him through the same identified account (*GG IV.b*).
3. Should a friar find himself in any difficulty managing his digital life, he shall in all HUMILITY clearly express his concern and ask for assistance from those responsible for his initial and on-going formation – Custos/guardian/formator. Those responsible should respond to the needs of the friar with the help of the community in the best possible way.⁷

⁶ Among others, the provision found in **CIC, Can. 1368**: *A person is to be punished with a just penalty who, at a public event or assembly, or in a published writing, or by otherwise using the means of social communication, utters blasphemy, or gravely harms public morals, or rails at or excites hatred of or contempt for religion or the Church.* Furthermore, in **CIC, Can. 1386 § 3**: *...any person who by means of any technical device makes a recording of what is said by the priest or by the penitent in a sacramental confession, either real or simulated, or who divulges it through the means of social communication, is to be punished according to the gravity of the offence, not excluding, in the case of a cleric, by dismissal from the clerical state.*

⁷ ...Let each one confidently make known his need to the other, for if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit! When any brother falls sick, the other brothers must serve him as they would wish to be served themselves (*Later Rule, chapter VI*).

4. There is no real substitute to the perennial and time-tested values of self-discipline, mortification, asceticism, and vigilance. Hence, all the friars with the help of God's grace shall seriously put into practice these values.⁸ In addition, the friars shall learn to know, respect, and internalize the healthy boundaries which arise from his religious consecration.⁹
5. In purchasing gadgets for personal or ministerial use, the friars should be mindful not to be a counter witness to the life they profess. Any purchase that exceeds the ceiling amount set for the guardians¹⁰ should be explicitly permitted by the guardian. Any donation of the same kind shall also be explicitly permitted by the guardian.
6. Lastly, it is sufficient for a friar to inform the Major Superior before opening a personal account aimed at evangelization (GG, V # 8b).

IV. SPECIAL CONCERNS

A. Formands

This directory adopts the operational guidelines given for individual friars as reflected in the General Guidelines (GG V, # 5-7) to wit:

1. For young men in initial formation (postulants, novices and temporarily professed):
 - i. Each Province or Custody is to regulate the use of media in its Provincial (Custodial) Directory of Formation (*cf. Const., art. 133, § 2*) and in the Formation Guidelines for Houses of Formation (*cf. Const., art. 133 §§ 3-4*), duly taking into account the cultural and historical contexts as well as the specific needs at different stages of formation.
 - ii. Some Jurisdictions find it useful to the formation experience to emphasize the transition from the world to the friary by establishing different usage of the Internet and social media, for example, limiting their use, especially during the novitiate.
 - iii. One should remember, however, that the main need is to train friars to use new media in a way that is in keeping with our form of life, "taking care that its use not impoverish relationships with friars" (*Const., art. 66 § 3*).
2. During the period of temporary vows, there should be mandatory and systematic orientation courses on the use of new media, so that the friars "use media maturely, responsibly, and moderately" (*Const., art. 66 § 3*).
3. Solemnly professed friars also require some common reflection on the use of social networks. This reflection should be accompanied by formation which explains how even electronic means of communication can contribute "to the work of evangelization" (*Const., art. 66 § 3*). However, these means must be governed and managed in a manner that is consonant with religious life. From this perspective, each Jurisdiction should locally promote forms and formational periods for all the friars concerned.

⁸ *Trusting in the words of our Lord and relying on His help, the friars are to care for their spiritual lives and practice asceticism, keeping guard over their own hearts. They are to avoid the near occasions of sin, use means of social communication responsibly, and cultivate mature and authentic friendships* (Const., art. 25, §3).

⁹ Cf. Const., art. 66, §3.

¹⁰ As approved by the 9th Ordinary Custodial Chapter the set ceiling for guardians amounts to One Hundred Thousand Philippine Peso (100,000 Php).

B. Youth Ministry and Family Life

The Church being aware of the contemporary challenges facing the family and the youth has provided meaningful opportunities of encounter among which in the universal level are the World Meeting of Families and the World Youth Days. Hence, responding to the same challenges, the Custody's Vision and Mission and the present Custodial Quadrennial Plan offers the following general guidelines:

1. Strengthen our apostolates among Filipino families and young people using the NM. This may start with a right orientation and education to families and young people regarding the benefits and risks of NM.
2. Make our apostolate avenues of encounter and *healing* among young people and the family especially those who are ideologically colonized.¹¹
3. Avail of every means to meet young people and families in person and virtually for spiritual accompaniment. This is aimed to bring out the best in them as members of the domestic Church.
4. Promote and foster *safe environment* for all, most especially the young.

C. Content Creators¹²

The General Guiding Principles in chapter two of this directory and the Procedures for Managing Publications given in chapter six of the GG are most relevant to these group of friars. These are the additional guidelines to keep in mind:

1. There are many ways to evangelize using NM. These takes the pride of place: Scripture based faith-sharing commonly known as *lectio divina*, commenting on Biblical readings/passages, catechesis, streaming liturgical celebrations, and the like. The creativity of the friars must be employed here.
2. Before sharing and posting, conscientious fact-checking should be done, so that dissemination of fake news and false information may be avoided. If an error is discovered after publication, one should take steps to correct it and apologize if necessary. (GG VI, 1.c)
3. In monetizing any created and shared contents at any level, the revenues are to be clearly indicated. The proceeds may be used for formation, mission apostolate or improvements of tools used for evangelization etc. Monetization includes but not limited to gaining stars, posting/announcing of *verified* bank accounts and e-wallet applications (Gcash, Pay Maya etc.) for donations/pledges. Monetization should have the expressed permission from the Custos.
4. Friars should be prudent and discerning in endorsing any brand, products, or destinations. These should be wholesome and not cause potential scandal or controversy among the faithful. This also holds true in collaborating with sponsors.
5. In creating and sharing content, a friar has to be careful that his community life is not affected. Hence, any major commitment/s for talks, conferences, etc. to be broadcasted in Mass Media or any social media platforms shall have the permission from the friary chapter.

¹¹ This was underscored during the speech of Pope Francis, which he delivered during the Meeting with Families at the Mall of Asia Arena, Philippines on January 16, 2016. Providentially, this speech may have provided the stimulus for the spread of the devotion to the sleeping Joseph in the country.

¹² A digital creator is someone who creates content across digital platforms. The content can be videos, photos, graphics, blog posts, or other forms of media - and the platforms can be YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, a website, or any digital space. Often called content creators, digital creators produce content meant to engage an audience (Accessed on October 10, 2023 in <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/digital-creator>).

6. In maintaining the *virtual cloister* from which we evangelize, the boundaries of the physical cloister should be respected. Hence, sharing of any photos or videos taken within the defined cloister areas of our friaries and presences is to be strictly prohibited.

D. Minors and Vulnerable Adults¹³

This directory adopts the section on special issues in the General Guidelines (GG VI, # 1 and 3) which deals with *procedures on managing publications and digital archiving*. Furthermore, given the sensitivity and urgency of the topic on minors and vulnerable adults, this directory repeats them here with some additions towards the end.

1. Communication with minors is to be limited to occasions that are part of a friar's mission and ministry, avoiding contact of a personal nature.
2. The following must be avoided: aggressive, threatening, or intimidating comments; any form of ambiguity regarding sexual content; and photographs or comments that have a sexual or morally inappropriate content.
3. Photographs in which minors appear, or details of activities with minors (other than those deriving from a friar's mission and ministry) acquired at celebrations or in public settings, must not be published without the permission of parents (or guardians).
4. Care must be taken to act with discretion in contacts with minors on social networks or in personal accounts, in full compliance with national civil regulations. Moreover, the norms and guidelines issued by the CBCP should be observed.
5. As a supplement to the general guidelines given above, the following are to be taken into consideration:
 - a. Friar shall not engage in any familial and personal issues of a minor or vulnerable adult that is beyond his scope and competence.
 - b. Friars shall notify the parents/guardians if messages received from a minor or vulnerable adult have improper and disturbing content or are excessive in number. He is also to consult his guardian (local superior) on this matter.
 - c. Friars are enjoined to avoid the following for they are prone to misinterpretations: *suggestive comments, green jokes, expressions with double meanings, unbecoming terms of endearment, (i.e. babes, pangga, tito, ninong, kuya)*.
 - d. Lastly, the Custody shall identify an agency, institutions, professionals – both in the religious and secular sphere in handling issues which are beyond the competence of friars. This is for referral purposes only.

V. CONCLUSION

This is an *ad experimentum* document until the end of this quadrennium. This may be improved upon and developed further as we grow in our experience.¹⁴ The task of putting into practice the provisions of the directory falls into every friar's shoulders while the task of guiding its implementation is given to

¹³ *Vulnerable adults* in the restrictive sense refers to the physically and psychologically challenged individuals. *Minors* are those aged 18 below. This definition is adapted by this directory.

¹⁴ The next World Youth Days in South Korea will tackle on the subject of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This would deepen our understanding on this subject.

the competent authorities – the OCE, the Custos and the definitors, the guardians, the formators, and apostolate in-charge.

As this text opened with a quote, so we finally close likewise with a quote for our personal and common reflection:

Good communication helps us to grow closer, to know one another better, and ultimately, to grow in unity. The walls which divide us can be broken down only if we are prepared to listen and learn from one another. We need to resolve our differences through forms of dialogue which help us grow in understanding and mutual respect. A culture of encounter demands that we be ready not only to give, but also to receive. Media can help us greatly in this, especially nowadays, when the networks of human communication have made unprecedented advances.¹⁵

We invoke the powerful intercessions of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Anthony of Padua who preached the Gospel in words and works. St. Clare, the *Patroness of Television*, and St. Maximilian Kolbe, *Patron of the Internet* who in our times is an example and inspiration in the proclamation of the Gospel using media communications.

We likewise entrust all our endeavors and plans to the powerful patronage of the Most Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. AMEN.

This directory was approved on December 11, 2023 and takes effect on January 07, 2024 Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord.

¹⁵ Pope Francis' message on the 48th World Communication Day, January 24, 2014.