

Thursday Thoughts
March 4, 2010
Carlton Rider
Principal

Last week I became aware of the fact that several of our students accessed pages on Facebook that contained material that discredited the name of our school and the reputation of some of our students and faculty. Two of the three Facebook pages were published(created) by current students. Some of our students who accessed Facebook contributed to the pages with comments and pictures. Others went into the pages, knowing before hand, the subject or person that was the focal point of the page as “fans” or “friends”. I am told that in doing so they were in agreement with statements made on the page about the individual. Such behavior is in violation of Diocesan Policy 5144.3, which deals with conduct by students when away from school, in addition to Diocesan Policy 6140.0, which deals with the acceptable use of technology, as well as general student conduct as found in our school handbook, especially in the areas of bullying, including cyber bullying, and harassment.

During the past several days, working in conjunction with the administration at Fisher Catholic and our own teachers, we have been able to identify those students who entered these pages, as well as those who published the pages. In determining consequences for either publishing a site, visiting a site, or contributing material that discredits the name of our school or the reputation of members of our student body or faculty, I sought guidance from both the diocesan school office and the administration at Fisher Catholic and will be seeking input from our advisory board. Depending on the person’s involvement, the recommendations from the diocese ranged from suspension from school to a warning to those involved that they could loose the privilege of using any technology equipment that is the property of the school for an undetermined amount of time. Using the input from the diocese and working with the administration at Fisher Catholic and our advisory board, we will be working toward developing a specific set of consequences to deal with both this situation as well as any future situations. This has been a very time- consuming ordeal and has taken a while to identify all who may have been involved in any of the three Facebooks mentioned above and their involvement. If your child has not spoken to you about their possible involvement, I would ask them if they were involved and to what extent. I realize that technology is ever-changing and that new challenges will in all likelihood confront us in the future in dealing with such situations described above. I can not imagine the hurt that those who were victims must feel. What concerns me is the fact that those who went into these sites are good students who come from good families. I am reminded of the words of a speaker we had a few years ago, Dr. Thompson, when talking about making choices: “Good choice, bad choice, my choice.”

In sharing responsibility with our parents in providing opportunities for our students to develop skills in helping to make good moral decisions, I feel that it is necessary for our school to take a leading role in educating our students as well as our parents in providing

information that both the student and parent might find helpful as regards the misuse of the internet and the consequences of such misuse. Our diocesan school office will be providing me with information to share with our parents and faculty in dealing with this topic under the link Facebook on our school's website. I will also be contacting our D.A.R.E. instructor, Officer Caton, to see if we can arrange an assembly for our students in grade 5 – 8 that will deal with civil issues connected to the misuse of the internet. I plan to make a program similar to this available to our parents in the near future on an evening that will be announced in advance so parents can make arrangements to attend. Fr. Franks and I met with our 5 – 8 graders this past Tuesday in the context of a prayer service to share thoughts concerning the moral issues involved in the misuse of the internet. I will continue to seek sources of information that will assist our parents in educating both them as well as your children in the proper use of the internet.

Sincerely,

Carlton Rider
Principal