Email Etiquette, Best Practices and Email Policy

These policies have been written to ensure that we uphold the good reputation of Good Shepherd and to ensure that we are representing the church well by effective, accurate and compassionate communication.

1. Use proper grammar and punctuation

2. Enable spell checking

3. Read the email before you send it.

4. Include a signature.

5. Do not write emails in capitals.

6. Write effective subject lines. The goal should be to summarize the message without being too wordy or vague.

7. Don't make the mistake of thinking your e-mails are private. They're not. You should never include any information in an e-mail that you wouldn't want published on the front page of your local newspaper. In other words, never send confidential, proprietary, sensitive, personal, or confidential information through e-mail. You should also refrain from making inflammatory, emotionally charged comments in e-mail.

8. Before you forward an e-mail, make sure that all recipients need to receive the message. In addition, be careful when forwarding sensitive or confidential information. Never forward proprietary information to external audiences or to unauthorized recipients. Before clicking the Send button, review whether a message's contents are appropriate for each listed recipient.

9. Don't be a party to a flame war. Flame wars are heated e-mail exchanges that are more emotional than reasoned, and they have no place in professional communications. If you receive a flame or suddenly find yourself in a flame war, take a little time before responding, if you respond at all. Think about the situation and reply rationally not emotionally.

You may also decide not to reply but to deal with the issue in person. Often, flame wars are started because of a simple misunderstanding. An ill-phrased comment (or even a well phrased one) can be misconstrued by a recipient, who then fires off a salvo in response. Instead of replying, go talk to the person and discuss the message. If talking with the person doesn't end the problem, involve a supervisor for assistance in resolving the issue offline.

10. Be smart about handling attachments. E-mail attachments consume inordinate amounts of e-mail server space and network bandwidth and are often the culprits behind virus outbreaks—but they're often the easiest way to transfer files. Just be sure to follow these guidelines when e-mailing attachments:

- Don't attach large files to an e-mail; anything over one or two megabytes shouldn't be sent via e-mail.
- Limit the number of files you attach to a message to five or fewer.
- Save attachments to your hard drive and then delete the e-mail message containing the attachment.
- Don't open unexpected attachments or those sent by unknown parties.
- Always scan files with an antivirus program before opening an attachment. Never click an attachment without first confirming that it's virus-free.
- Don't annoy recipients by forwarding attachments they can't access. If an attachment requires a new or less-common application, say so in your message.

11. Properly use CC and BCC

The carbon copy (CC) and blind carbon copy (BCC) features found in most e-mail clients allow you to send copies of an e-mail to others you need to keep informed but who aren't necessarily the primary recipients.

When copying others, be certain the e-mail message pertains to them. If you use e-mail address lists, verify that all of the members of the list should receive the e-mail, too, and remove those who don't need to be included. And use the BCC feature sparingly. If sensitive topics require BCCing others, it may be best to take the matter offline and discuss it in person.

12. Prohibited content: The email system is not to be used for the creation or distribution of any offensive, or disruptive messages, including messages containing offensive comments about race, gender, age, sexual orientation, pornography, religious or political beliefs, national origin or disability. Employees who receive any emails with this content should report the matter to their supervisor immediately. Unlawful messages, such as copyright infringing emails, are also prohibited.

13. Timely response to email is crucial. When you get an email in your inbox, you should immediately do one of three things…

Respond immediately
Delete the email (if you have responded or it is spam)
File the email in a folder and schedule a calendar remind to follow up to it later

If you follow the checklist above, your email inbox will remain empty, your communications will flow nicely, and you will never have to worry about missing an email and apologizing to the sender again.

Now, just because the above is a recommended way to handle incoming emails, this does not mean you should drop everything you are doing to attend to them as soon as they hit your inbox. Instead, schedule certain times throughout the day to check and respond to emails.