

# *Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus*

## **SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL: PERSPECTIVES AND GUIDELINES**

### **Introduction**

*“In the beginning was the Word ... and the Word was made flesh” (Jn 1: 1, 14).*

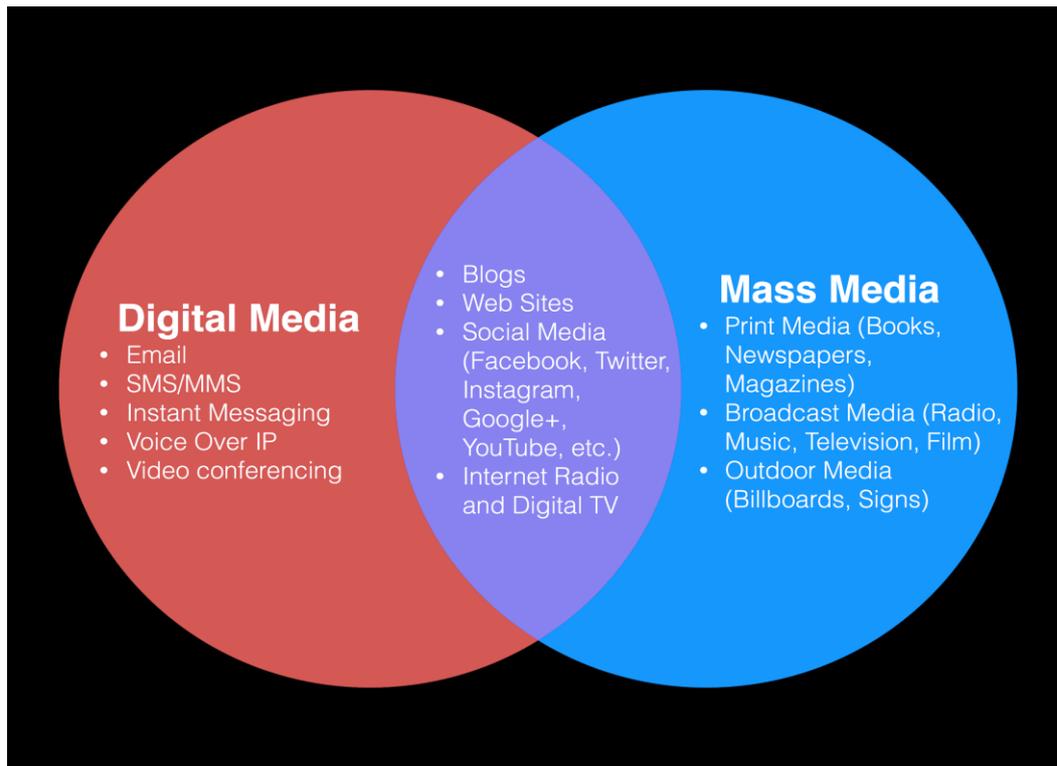
Communication is a great gift of God. God gave us expressive bodies and through the gift of speech we communicate with each other and build the human community. But communication can be corrupted and lead to disunity, strife, and conflict. Never before has communication been more convenient than in the modern age, brought together by digital technology and the emergence of the social media.

In numerous documents, the Catholic Church and the Society of Jesus have recognized the potential of social media in fostering the cause of evangelization and the witnessing to Jesus that the Christian is called to do. Social media is a powerful ally in New Evangelization (See *Evangelii Gaudium*, 87).

### **Definition of Terms**

Digital communications and social media, which is its consequence, refer to all types of communication made possible by the development of computer technology, both hardware and software. These technologies include but are not limited to texting, email, posting or commenting on social media, video conferencing, etc. Listed below are some terms that will help us form a common vocabulary:

- **Digital media:** any media that is encoded in a machine-readable format, and can be created, viewed, distributed, modified, and preserved on digital electronic devices; may also be used as synonymous to the term “new media”
- **Digital communication:** the electronic transmission of information that has been encoded digitally (as for storage and processing by computers)
- **Social media:** forms of electronic communication (such as web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content; include but are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, YouTube, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Flickr, Reddit, Vine, Snapchat, and SoundCloud
- **Social network:** a web site that is entirely driven by content published by its members
- **Mass media:** a diversified collection of media technologies that reach a large audience via mass communication
- **Blog:** a contraction of “web-log”; it is a type of website with regular entries arranged in reverse-chronological order; includes text blogs, photo blogs (consisting of uploaded photos), audio blogs (podcasts), and video blogs (which consists of regularly uploaded video files)
- **Content:** any digitized text, audio, video, and graphics that are published on digital platform (i.e., social media, email, blogs, websites) and that can be transmitted over the internet or computer networks
- **Online or Web Publishing:** the process of publishing content on the internet; includes building and uploading websites, updating associated webpages, posting blogs, and posting content on these webpages online
- **Social Publishing:** any form, new or emerging, of online content creation; it provides the reader with a direct channel to the writer to offer feedback, ask questions, and have conversations; may also be referred to as ‘post’ or ‘posting’
- **Instant Messaging (IM):** real-time, text-based communication between or among two or more people is done over the internet; similar to chat, but may also include modes with live voice or video, images or moving images, as well as file transfers (of limited size); includes but is not limited to Facebook Messenger, Viber, WhatsApp, WeChat, SnapChat, Telegram, Google Hangouts, Instagram Direct, Twitter Direct, and Skype.
- **Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP):** technology that allows users to make voice calls using broadband Internet connection instead of a regular or analog phone line
- **Selfie:** a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam, and shared via social media
- **Minors:** an individual under the age of 18
- **Vulnerable adult:** a dependent adult; one who lacks the mental capacity of an adult



Digital media may sometimes be referred to as **new media**. “New” means that that these technologies represent technological innovations and are placed in contrast to the traditional mass media of print, radio, and television.

- These are “new” in this sense that they are innovative and cutting edge. “New” then is a category of time, but as such is transient because what is “new” today will be tomorrow’s “old.”
- But “new,” has an even more profound sense. It is “new” because digital technology has fostered and opened the possibility of a feedback loop that is convenient and instantaneous. Unlike traditional media where communication tends to be top down or from center to periphery, from the sender to the receiver, now the receiver can interact with the sender, so that communication becomes two ways. New media is undermining that dominance of the sender and the control of the communication. Hence the term “social media,” which highlights interaction.

Because it is interactive, digital technology has made it possible for individuals to establish connections and relations with those they meet in cyberspace. This has given birth to the social network, fostered by such technologies as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, VoIP, and others.

## **The Basic Communication Model**

Because digital technology offers a new window in communication, it is proper to review the communication loop for it is in the context of communication that social media arises. All human communication involves the following:

- a sender or communicator
- a receiver or audience
- a message
- a medium or a channel

### **I. Sender or Communicator**

Members of the Society of Jesus and its associates are advised to be thoughtful and deliberate in their use of digital communications technology, and to apply the general Ignatian principles of edification, professionalism, apostolicity, and accountability.

#### **Edification**

The Society of Jesus dedicates itself to the promotion of the “greater glory of God” and the common good. Therefore, all online and digital communications, whether public or private, must strive not only to echo Jesuit values but also to always edify our fellow men and women.

We discourage our members from engaging in hate speech or cyber-bullying, and from publishing self-serving content. Posting selfies and bragging, especially when done frequently, may be considered as a form of narcissism. These negative or self-centered behaviors reflect poorly on the Jesuits, and only serve to drive people away, instead of drawing them closer to God.

#### **Professionalism**

As stewards of God’s people, we must remember that we are role models for the faithful and the youth of the Church. Although we cannot help but form close relationships and friendships with those whom we guide, we must still maintain a certain level of objectivity and professionalism. This must be evident in all of our digital communications by setting the appropriate boundaries. Otherwise, we risk losing the reverence and respect of the different publics we minister to.

Because we deal with people from all walks of life in our ministries – students and their parents, teachers, parishioners, indigenous peoples, migrants, prison inmates, and many others – we must be sensitive to their individual situations and needs. We must also take

special care when communicating with minors and vulnerable adults, and with the marginalized members of society.

## **Apostolicity**

The Jesuit communicator is an apostle and ambassador. While a Jesuit may want to dissociate himself from an apostolic body, the Jesuit will, in fact, find it hard to do so. As a vowed person, and more so in the case of the ordained, any communication he makes is difficult to separate from the community, the institution, apostolate or work to which he belongs, especially if he communicates from a position of authority. The receiving public will perceive the Jesuit as representing something greater than himself.

This is so because the Jesuit is an apostle, who is sent on mission, not fully of his own fabrication, but in response to a call. He stands as ambassador for his community and apostolic work, for the Society of Jesus, and for the Church.

## **Responsibility and Accountability**

Many are emboldened by the anonymity that digital communications can provide. However, online communications and text messages can be logged, archived and forwarded. IP addresses can be tracked. Blogs, forum posts, and comments are often not even protected by privacy settings, and are visible to the public. Therefore, even when posting on the strictest and most private settings, it is more prudent to consider published content to be permanent and visible to the public.

Members of the Society of Jesus, its employees and volunteers are personally responsible for their published content, and can therefore be held personally accountable. Jesuits may choose to maintain separate email and social media account for their professional and personal communication. Nevertheless, Jesuits should always endeavor to publish content that reflect Catholic and Ignatian values. If the appropriate superiors or administrators deem any published content as inappropriate, embarrassing or harmful, the Jesuit must be ready to delete or un-publish it.

To avoid any embarrassing incidents, Jesuits must always express their views with appropriate language and civility. They should be especially cautious when writing in haste or when writing emotionally.

Before publishing content, sending an email, or sending an SMS, Jesuits should take the time to read the text again for errors. They may publish only when certain that the text will not somehow be misinterpreted or misunderstood. Jesuits must also take care not to offend or contradict the faith, morals, and teachings of the Catholic Church. Otherwise, Jesuits are discouraged from publishing such content, as these may cause embarrassment or harm to the reputation of the Society of Jesus, as well as their own. Finally, Jesuits must always avoid any communication that might be construed to contain inappropriate content or sexual innuendo.

## **II. Audience**

The Jesuit addresses multiple audiences such as fellow Jesuits, his natural family, co-workers and colleagues or those with whom he works, clientele or those he serves, and the general public.

**Guideline 1: Ambassador.** Conscious that he is an apostle and an ambassador of Christ and his Church, the Jesuit acts accordingly.

**Guideline 2: Sensitivity.** The Jesuit is aware of his audiences and tailors his communication accordingly. He is especially aware of and protects the vulnerable, like children and youth, those who have been victimized or undergoing psychological and spiritual problems, the poor and all who look up to him (See *Evangelii Gaudium* 209-215).

**Guideline 3: Power.** As ambassador of the Church, he possesses a large share of social capital that places him in a position of power when communicating to an audience. This power he wields deliberately, responsibly, and with a discerning heart.

**Guideline 4: Impartiality.** A Jesuit is careful not to show favoritism or undue interest in a particular person, especially to students, co-workers, clients and those with whom he deals regularly by befriending them through social media. A Jesuit follows the safer path of befriending a group rather than an individual.

**Guideline 5: Minors and vulnerable adults.** A Jesuit is careful in befriending minors, especially without the knowledge and consent of parents and responsible adults. Before contacting minors or vulnerable adults through digital means, a Jesuit must ask permission from a parent or legal guardian. This includes sending “friend requests.” Because of the position of a Jesuit or the respect given them, a person being contacted may feel obligated to accept the request. If, on the other hand, a child or vulnerable adult sends a “friend request,” the Jesuit must first inform their parent or guardian before accepting.

To further protect them from harm, permission must also be granted before posting pictures, video, and other information that may identify that minor or vulnerable adult. Jesuits should always provide the parents

and legal guardians of minors and of dependent vulnerable adults with access to and copies of all our communications with their minor child or dependent vulnerable adult, including email, chat logs and text messages.

Jesuits and their associates should avoid engaging in online games with minors and vulnerable adults. Many online multi-player games are violent, and the content ratings and warnings are not as strictly enforced. Playing these kinds of games with them, may foster greater camaraderie, but it may also lessen their respect and reverence for the Jesuit as a priest.

### **III. Message**

While it applies to traditional media as well, the Jesuit's message is marked by the spiritual legacy of St. Ignatius, and his emphasis on *discreta caritas*, "discerned love." In communicating, the Jesuit is guided by five principles that are summarized in the acronym **THINK**:

#### **T = TRUE**

The Jesuit is on the side of truth. All his messages are TRUE to the best of his knowledge.

#### **H = HELPFUL**

The Jesuit's task is to build up other people and the Body of Christ. Every message can build or harm.

#### **I = INSPIRING**

Human communication is not merely cerebral. All human messages have an affective component to them. A Jesuit is aware of the affective component of his messages and its effects on the receiver.

#### **N = NECESSARY**

Some messages are better left unsaid or unsent. The Jesuit is aware that the social media makes communication so convenient that a knee-jerk reaction is fostered often giving rise to communication that is neither helpful nor harmful but merely fills cyberspace.

## **K = KIND**

Since charity is the norm of all Christian behavior (Jn. 13: 35/ Mt. 11:29), the Jesuit's messages are always kind or at least do not have the potential to harm.

Messages have different "shelf life" depending on the media. Email and postings on social media remain long after the communication is over while telephone or VOIP conversations are fleeting. Because of the longer shelf life in some media, messages may lose their context after time and be subject to misinterpretation so a hastily posted message may have negative effects in the future.

**Guideline 6: Discernment.** When he has doubts and reservations about his message, the discerning Jesuit may decide that it is best not to communicate and to remain silent. If he discerns otherwise, he makes it clear that the message he is sending is doubtful or uncertain. It is best not to spread rumors and speculation.

**Guideline 7: Impact.** The Jesuit examines his message if it is helpful in building others and the Church, and if the message inspires and is necessary. He avoids those that may harm or affect people negatively or is merely filling cyberspace with useless chatter.

**Guideline 8: Propriety.** As an apostle and ambassador, the Jesuit safeguards how he projects himself in cyberspace. A Jesuit guards in posting messages, texts and images that may be inappropriate or may send confusing messages. These may even be innocent postings like what and where one eats, especially gourmet and haute cuisine in luxurious restaurants, celebrating liturgies inappropriately dressed, or selfies, which may appear objectionable or interpreted by the audience as such.

**Guideline 9: Charity.** The Jesuit pauses before sending a message, especially if it can be uncharitable or can be interpreted by the receiver as such. He is especially careful in communicating if he is in a heightened emotional state, like euphoria or anger, even rage. He applies the principle of Ignatian discernment, that the best state to make a good judgment is when one is in equilibrium.

**Guidelines 10. Ranting.** Because of its convenience, messaging through the social media is open to misuse. A Jesuit avoids ranting and ventilating negative emotions and pet peeves through social media.

While the seeming anonymity of social media does encourage ranting and ventilating (and there are sites exclusively for such behavior), social media is not the appropriate venue to do so.

*Note:* While ranting and ventilating may have the immediate effect of releasing psychological tension, when broadcasted through social media it can have an unintended consequence for the sender. Since the sender is known only through communication, the audience can build a media persona for the sender and he is branded as a ranter and venter. Such image can negatively impact future communication from the sender--communication, which may be more balanced, sane and responsible. Ranting can backfire in a big way.

**Guideline 11: Conflicts.** A Jesuit does not quarrel with fellow Jesuits or others through social media. If a Jesuit has any issue with another; following the Gospel (see Mt. 18: 15-20), the Jesuit first confronts the person individually and ideally face to face before going public (See *Evangelii Gaudium*, 98). The Jesuit may, however, engage in debate as long as the debate remains on the level of issues and ideas and is always civil and kind.

**Guideline 12: Personal versus Official.** A Jesuit clearly distinguishes between a personal opinion or position and an official one. He says this clearly and repeatedly, if needed, in his message. He takes responsibility for any misquotation or misrepresentation of his statements by third parties. Always, he corrects in the spirit of charity.

#### **IV. Medium**

While the five principles regarding the message applies both to traditional media and social media, the social network or cyber community, which is its consequence, has characteristics that shape the message. As media theoretician Marshall McLuhan, presciently wrote in the 1970s, "the medium is the message." Social media affects communication, especially the message being sent. Social media raises four areas of concern, which in some cases touch the ethical. This is summarized in the acronym PAPA.

## **P = PRIVACY**

For all intents and purposes, privacy does not exist in social media. The very technology, which keeps track of all transactions, through time and space tagging means that somewhere what one has sent through email or posted in social media remains. Even in sites like Snapchat, which erases any posting within 24 hours and is on one's screen for 10 seconds, does not completely erase everything. Josh Constine writes in *techcrunch.com*: "Not everything on Snapchat disappears. As much as the app wants memories to span just 10 seconds and live for just 24 hours, one piece of content doesn't self destruct." Even in personal computers when things are deleted, it is only the address that is deleted but the content, stored in fragments on the hard drive remains. Any hacker can access content in the net and a personal computer if the hacker has the proper key.

It is also known that governments, like the United States National Security Agency (NSA), routinely gathers information about Internet users and their engagement in social media. It does this purportedly to protect against terrorist attacks. Many social media sites have built-in algorithms that track one's usage routinely. From this information a profile of the user is built and then sold to advertisers, who then send advertisement to the user's personal computer. This also explains why when one opens a site, he notices that it is already suited or tailor fitted to his interests and needs. Social media survives through ad placements.

Another aspect of privacy is that all communication in the social media is potentially broadcasted to all. The social media is more analogous to the traditional tri-media of print, radio and television rather than a private handwritten letter sent by snail mail. Every transaction and posting is more akin to having one's own newspaper, radio program and talk show. The social media is a BROADCAST MEDIUM.

The technological characteristics of social media, therefore, impact audience and transform the message one sends. What one might send privately can be potentially accessed. This raises another privacy issue: how to safeguard private even confidential information when using the social media. Jesuits may not publish other people's personal information without their permission. Even with their permission, if the content is that of a minor or a vulnerable adult, the Jesuit must first get permission from a parent or legal guardian before posting any personal information, pictures or videos. Education and knowledge of this matter is important.

**Guideline 13: Confidentiality.** Because the social media is a broadcast medium, the Jesuit is especially careful about matters of confidence and privacy. He discerns the most responsible and effective method or medium of communication that both delivers the message and safeguards the right to privacy. He may decide to forego altogether social media and opt for a face-to-face encounter.

## **A = ACCURACY**

Accuracy can be understood in a number of ways. First, the accuracy of what one communicates and this links with Guideline 4 on safeguarding truth. Second, the accuracy of what one reads in social networks and the Internet. Since its inception, the Internet has not been policed. In fact, Netizens abhor any curtailment of freedom of expression. Sites like Wikipedia have no board of experts to check on entries. The latter's philosophy is that if many participate, the entries in Wikipedia will become more accurate. It is important then to check sources of information before transmitting them to safeguard truth.

## **P = PROPERTY**

Property has taken a new turn with the introduction of digital technology. Property is no longer limited to physical property but encompasses intellectual property, which is the new capital in the digital age. Digital piracy and unauthorized use of other people's intellectual property in the form of texts, images, videos and other forms that can be transmitted through the Internet is a major problem. Property questions involve the use of duly licensed software, proper permissions and the proper citation and acknowledgment of sources. Jesuits may use limited portions of copyrighted material only for non-profit, education and news-reporting purposes. In such cases, it is still good practice to cite the source of the material. If copyrighted works are sued for other purposes, then the appropriate fees must be paid.

A Jesuit's intellectual property rights, especially when misquoted or misappropriated, can be a problem. This must be addressed immediately so as not to harm his person and the name of the Society of Jesus.

Alternatives to copyrighted works are materials licensed under Creative Commons or the Public Domain (50 years after publication). The Creative Commons license is less restrictive, but the original author chooses the restrictions in addition to receiving credit. On the other hand, copyright has already expired for works in the public domain. No credit or royalties need to be given.

**Guideline 14: Copyright.** As one who stands for justice, the Jesuit respects intellectual property rights and copyright. He acknowledges sources used and asks for permission when called for. He avoids pirated material and uses licensed software.

## **A = ACCESS**

Access here refers to access to digital technology, access to information and communication and, when related to privacy, access to confidential information. Access to technology has spawned the digital divide between those who have access and those that do not. Jesuits belong to those who have access. Access gives power, which must be managed responsibly and charitably. Access also has to do with how or what information is shared. How to

protect the privacy and confidentiality of information in media that are inherently public is an issue.

**Guideline 15: Permission.** If a Jesuit, an employee, or a volunteer wishes to create an official online account for his community or organization, he must first get the approval of the Superior or Rector of a Community, the Provincial or Socius of a Province, or the Director of Work of an Apostolate. These individuals are also the only people who may make official statements on important issues. Unless authorized to do so, a Jesuit must never claim to represent the Society of Jesus or its ministries. A request for consent must be submitted to the appropriate superior in order to use the name or logo of the Society of Jesus and its entities.

**Guideline 16: Account Ownership.** The ownership of an organization website or social media account belongs to the Community, the Province, or the Apostolate. All passwords and other information necessary to establish ownership and control must be surrendered to the appropriate Superior, Rector, Provincial, Socius, or Director of Work. They may also assign one or more administrators to help maintain their accounts. Administrators will have full permissions and access to the account. These people will also receive email alerts of any page activity sent to their assigned email account.

**Guideline 17: Personal Websites.** Jesuits and their affiliates may create personal websites as their medium for self-expression. It must be recognized though that anything published on a personal website is no different from making such information available in any public forum. Even when engaging in social media for personal use, a Jesuit's comments may be viewed as a reflection of the Society of Jesus and even the Catholic Church. He should therefore use prudent and reasonable judgment to avoid publishing content that may potentially cause embarrassment to the Society of Jesus, its members, its affiliates, and even the Church. If some of the content posted on the personal website may not exactly reflect Jesuit values, the owner should include a disclaimer on his personal site. An example of this would be: "The views expressed on this site are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Society of Jesus." This is highly recommended especially if the Jesuit or associate is highly visible in the community, and the

material posted is related to the work of the Society. The Society of Jesus also reserves the right to review the personal website of its members, personnel, and affiliates.

**Guideline 18: Identity.** It is advisable that a Jesuit identifies himself in all digital communications. He should use his real identity rather than posting or commenting anonymously, under a fictitious name or a false identity. He should be honest and clear as to who he is and which ministry he represents. By doing this, he is making his communications more credible and professional, and he is also building a credible online reputation.

**Guideline 19. Self-regulation.** Because digital media is convenient and ubiquitous, it pervades our daily lives. A Jesuit regulates and monitors his use of social media, his messages and posting. He does not wait for an external monitor, the Rector or the Provincial to call his attention to inappropriate postings. He always bears in mind T-H-I-N-K.

**Guideline 20. Correction.** A Jesuit welcomes and readily accepts fraternal correction in his engagement in social media. When someone uses social media inappropriately, it is the fraternal responsibility of fellow Jesuits, especially friends and community members, to guide the brother. When fraternal correction fails, the Rector or Superior is tasked with fraternal correction. The Rector may delegate this to the Minister. As much as possible, matters should be handled at the local level, rather than bringing them to the attention of the Provincial. If needed, the Rector or Superior may appoint a community monitor of social media activity.

**Guideline 21. Time Management.** A Jesuit disciplines his use of social media so that it does not interfere with his apostolic work, the completion on schedule of his projects and commitments, nor does it compromise the values of religious life like maintaining a healthy daily routine, protecting solitude, maintaining boundaries, which are all necessary conditions for prayer and a vibrant spiritual life. The Jesuit schedules the use of social media responsibly and avoids wasting time, a precious apostolic commodity that is irreplaceable.

**Guideline 22. Passwords.** Increasingly, Jesuits no longer use the printed text or make hard copies of their writing and communication. When a Jesuit dies, the practice of the Archives of the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus (APP-SJ) is to collect the Jesuit's computer, remove and store its hard drive. However, the contents of that drive are closed to APP-SJ if the Socius and the Province Archivist have no access because of passwords. Also since much communication is done through email, likewise APP-SJ has no access to such email. In these cases, there will be no useful record about the Jesuit and his dealing with the Society and other people.

It is suggested that Jesuits deposit their passwords with the Socius and to update these passwords when they are changed. The passwords will be treated like an "advanced directive," to be activated only at the Jesuit's death and for reasons where a greater good is expected.

If a Jesuit judges in the Lord that some information in his computer or emails poses potential harm to himself, another person, his community, the Society of Jesus, the Church and anyone concerned, the Jesuit may in his judgment delete such information. Once information enters APP-SJ the standard practice is not to delete or throw anything. Archives are mandated to conserve whatever is turned over. It catalogues material but keeps everything as is.