

Dear Families,

This week I want to address issues of safety and good judgment as they apply to your daughters' use of blogs, or weblogs. I spoke to the girls today at morning assembly, and encouraged them to speak with you at home this weekend.

Weblogs are continually updated on-line journals for sharing thoughts and opinions, photos, video clips, and links to other sites. There are hundreds of these online journals, and new ones are created monthly. The user easily creates an account and personalizes the content. Weblogs can be private (password protected) or public, that is, open to anyone using the Internet.

Used responsibly, weblogs can be wonderful tools for learning and for communication; for example, Hurricane Katrina evacuees created blogs to keep in touch. Unfortunately, these online journals also pose frightening temptations and hazards for our children. My specific concerns are the following:

- Many students create public pages, so that anyone can view everything on the site. They post far too much personal data--photographs, full names, birth dates, school, and so forth—making them vulnerable to predators. Even incomplete information can easily be collated with other sources, a yearbook or directory, to trace an individual.
- Inappropriate language and sexual references are everywhere on these sites, encouraged in part by surveys and illustrations provided by the weblog company. Their use shows poor judgment, violates the computer AUP policy, and dishonors the mission and goals of a Sacred Heart education. Their use demeans everyone, primarily the student herself, but also the school community she represents.

For all of us, this is a teaching moment. You and I cannot eliminate blogs, but we can teach the girls to use them more responsibly, and we can heighten their awareness of safety and privacy issues. We will continue to talk to the students about Internet use, and we are talking to students individually as well. I have told the girls that I expect their public sites to be cleaned this weekend, and to stay clean. Because the school's software blocks access to weblogs, and login times indicate that students do their blogging in the evenings, you may want to review your household Internet policies to address the use of online journals. In addition, I recommend that you familiarize yourself with some of the sites. Several used by our students are www.MySpace.com www.Xanga.com www.Blogger.com and www.facebook.com Facebook seems to be the most secure, allowing a group to communicate only with one another. Please call if you have questions.

Responsibility and respect are central to Goal Five, which calls us to “personal growth in an atmosphere of wise freedom.” I love your girls, and I hope that together we can help them grow in their ability to make good, generous decisions in all they do. Thank you.