

## HOPEFUL, NOT HELPLESS

*Access to explicitly sexual references and images has become universal and instantaneous. What passes for acceptable seems to be expanding. This booklet explores that reality in order to raise awareness and provide assistance regarding the challenge of pornography.*

*You may find this helpful for yourself or someone you care about. The questions are meant to lead to serious reflection. If you are a parish staff person, you will find this resource useful for discussion among particular groups.*

*Each person has dignity. No one should be used by another. Pornography attacks that dignity and uses another human being.*

### Introduction

A quiet tentative voice was on the other end of the line. “I don’t know what to do. I need to talk to someone.”

The conversation revealed a maze of hurt, anger, frustration, and self-blame. Megan had inadvertently stumbled upon some extremely harsh porn sites on the home computer she shared with her husband Joe. When she asked him about it, Joe brushed her off by saying it didn’t mean anything.

But Megan was not so sure. Joe was becoming less and less communicative. They were spending less time together. Occasionally she noticed him on the computer in the den with the door closed. As time passed, they were no longer going to bed together.

Megan felt that Joe was no longer interested in her. She began to wonder if he was having an affair. She began to question if she was not attractive or interesting enough or if she was simply not adequate in their love-making.

### Under the Radar No More

On the one hand possibly alluring, on the other hand repulsive, speaking or reading about pornography might be considered insignificant. *Playboy*, *Hustler*, adult book stores, and x-rated movies have always been with us. In the past pornography seemed to reside on the fringes of daily life. Today pornography has come front and center.

Seeking pornography in the past required some risk to one’s anonymity. One had to purchase a magazine from a clerk in a store. One had to risk being seen in an adult book store or entering/exiting an x-rated movie.

Today pornography can be accessed while channel surfing or searching the internet. There are no “store hours”. Pornography is available 24/7 within the privacy of one’s own home. Society’s growing tolerance of “soft porn” is seen in advertisements, movies, and television.

**For reflection/discussion:**

- What changes have you noticed regarding the presence of pornography in comparison to ten years ago?

**No hurt/no foul?**

Common attitudes toward pornography include: “It’s harmless.” “It’s a private thing.” “It doesn’t hurt anyone.” “I can stop looking at it whenever I want.”

The reality is that more and more people are reporting an **addiction** to pornography. Some people are losing their jobs because of the time they spend on line with pornography at work. The break-up of more and more marriages is being attributed, in part, to internet pornography.

**Some facts and statistics** (from [www.internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.htm](http://www.internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.htm).)

- 90% of 8-16 year olds have viewed porn on-line (most of them while doing their homework).
- US porn revenue exceeds the combined revenues of ABC, CBS and NBC (\$6.2 billion).
- Average age of first exposure to Internet pornography is 11 years old.
- 20% of men and 13% of women admit to accessing pornography at work
- 1 in 7 calls to Focus on the Family’s pastoral care line is about internet pornography.
- Approximately 40 million people in the United States are sexually involved on the Internet.

**For reflection/discussion:**

- What excuses do you hear to justify the use of pornography?

**Harmful effects of pornography**

Researchers are learning about the long-term effects of pornography. Drug addicts can get the drug out of their system, but pornographic images stay in the brain forever (Mary Ann Layden, Ph.D., co-director of the Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Cognitive Therapy, in her testimony before the United States Senate Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space on “The Brain Science Behind Pornography Addiction and the Effects of Addiction on Families and Communities,” November 18, 2004).

Testimony before the United States Senate Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space stated that “. . .through advances in neuroscience, (we now know that) emotionally arousing images imprint and alter the brain, triggering an instant, involuntary, but lasting biochemical memory trail” (Judith Reisman, Ph.D., president of The Institute for Media Education, Scientific

Advisor to the California Protective Parents Association, in her testimony before the United States Senate Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space on “The Brain Science Behind Pornography Addiction and the Effects of Addiction on Families and Communities,” November 18, 2004).

Pornography “obscures and destroys people’s ability to see one another as unique and beautiful expressions of God’s creation, instead darkening their vision, causing them to view others as objects to be used and manipulated” (Bishop Paul S. Loverde, pastoral letter “Bought With a Price: Pornography and the Attack on the Living Temple of God”, 2006).

Losing the ability to see one’s spouse or the person one is dating as a person of dignity, beauty, and worth places a tremendous obstacle in a marriage, dating, or friendship relationship.

**For reflection/discussion:**

- Have you noticed changes in persons you know who are using pornography?
- If you use pornography, have you noticed any changes in your relationships or have others mentioned changes they have noticed in you?
- Is there any online activity that you do not want significant others to know about or would be ashamed of if they knew? What is it and why?

**The Church’s teaching about person, love, and sexuality**

The essence of God is love. God has created us in his image – to give and receive love.

Our first vocation is to be a human person. To be human includes the ability to love and be loved, to give one’s gifts in service, and to relate to “Mystery” – a reality beyond oneself which we call God.

To love implies the capacity to have enough sense of self and self-worth that one can relate intimately with others and act for their good without using them for one’s own self-enhancement or self-gratification.

The root word of sexuality is “sexus” which means to cut or divide. Our sexuality is an energy that inclines us into relationship with others. It expresses God’s intention that we find our authentic humanness not in isolation but in connection. Each of us is incomplete in ourselves, seeking completeness in others.

Pornography distorts this view of the human person, love, and sexuality. It isolates, closes a person within oneself. It makes the other into an object to be used, not a person to be related to. Thus pornography frustrates the very purpose of sexuality which is meant to lead to intimacy and union.

## **Living a chaste life in a world which includes pornography**

When it comes to choices, eyes matter. We must monitor what we look at after we notice it. This pertains to people on the street, TV, internet sites, movies, magazines, etc.

To live a chaste life in today's world, a person first needs to value himself or herself. Secondly, a person needs to value chastity, the right ordering of one's sexuality according to one's state in life. Each of us needs to make choices that support how we value ourselves and our sexuality.

“Chastity is the joyous affirmation of someone who knows how to live self-giving, free from any form of self-centred slavery. This presupposes that the person has learnt how to accept other people, to relate with them, while respecting their dignity in diversity. The chaste person is not self-centred, not involved in selfish relationships with other people. Chastity makes the personality harmonious. It matures it and fills it with inner peace. This purity of mind and body helps develop true self-respect and at the same time makes one capable of respecting others, because it makes one see in them persons to reverence, insofar as they are created in the image of God” (no. 17, **The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality**, Pontifical Council of the Family, 1995).

Each of us needs wholesome friends, both men and women. Regularly turning to God in prayer needs to be part of our pattern of choices. Finally, we can use the sacrament of Reconciliation and regularly participate in weekend worship which includes receiving Christ in the Eucharist.

All of this helps a person to move away from being stuck on pornography to capturing (or recapturing) a desire to be pure of heart. At first there may be a sense of loss. But then there will be a sense of freedom.

Addiction to pornography won't go away on its own. A person needs the help of others and the grace of God.

### **For reflection/discussion:**

- Looking back over your life, have you noticed yourself seeking relationships which give you a sense of wholeness?
- Would you agree that “eyes matter”? Why or why not?
- How can we move away from seeing/viewing people as objects toward viewing people as God sees them?

## **Getting help**

Addiction to pornography doesn't happen all at once. It can begin by accident, through curiosity, because of boredom, etc. The initial phase may be socially motivated and often relieves a person of stress.

If continued, interaction with pornography may deepen, solidify, and harden causing an increased loss of control and a harmful dependence. A person becomes turned in on oneself, pre-occupied to satisfy this craving. The individual becomes disconnected from others, no longer able to maintain relationships.

*A person not fully aware of the addictive process may be defensive regarding involvement with pornography. The individual may have a sense of empowerment, feeling that all they need to do is muster self-control to overcome this problem. Without realizing it, pornography can more from curiosity, to pre-occupation, to taking over one's life.*

To begin moving beyond pornography, a person can begin with prayer, such as the following:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.

-Reinhold Niebuhr

It may be easy to get stuck in pornography by oneself but it is not easy to become free from pornography by oneself. The way to freedom is reaching out. A person needs to talk to a trusted someone. A person needs to pray and acknowledge one's sinfulness and dependence on God. Finally, a person can use the Church's gifts of Reconciliation and Eucharist.

If you, a friend, or a loved one is deep into or trapped in a cycle of addiction to pornography, there is help. Please reach out to a professional counselor or a confidential group who understands, has training, and works with people to develop healthy ways to express one's sexuality and regain the ability to relate to others in a wholesome way.

Where sin is great, God's grace abounds even more.

### **Ten Top Characteristics of a Healthy Relationship**

- 1) Joy**
- 2) Life-giving**
- 3) Honesty**
- 4) Communication**
- 5) Trust**
- 6) Unselfish – willing to put the other first**
- 7) Seeks the best for the other**
- 8) Brings out the positive in me**
- 9) Loves me in spite of my shortcomings**
- 10) Forgiveness**

- **How does pornography affect this type of relationship?**

## Resources

The following include web sites, DVDs, and books.

- \* [www.covenanteyes.com](http://www.covenanteyes.com) Covenant Eyes Accountability software is the Standard for Internet Integrity with Accountability through Monitoring. The program is designed to help Covenant Eyes Members (the people who use the software) learn how to explore the Internet free from the dangers, risks, and liabilities of Internet pornography. In the process a member develops internet integrity.
- \* [Http://saa-recovery.org](http://saa-recovery.org) Sex Addicts Anonymous, SAA, is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other so they may overcome their sexual addiction and help others recover from sexual addiction or dependency. An individual is able to locate meetings in their area.
- \* [www.cosa-recovery.org](http://www.cosa-recovery.org) COSA is a recovery program for men and women whose lives have been affected by someone else's compulsive sexual behavior. In COSA, individuals find hope whether or not there is a sexually addicted person currently in their lives. With the humble act of reaching out, an individual begins the process of recovery.

[www.recoverynation.com](http://www.recoverynation.com) Addiction recovery for the sex, love and porn addicts and those affected by someone else's compulsive sexual behavior. Provides a recovery workshop, partner's workshop, and couples workshop for free.

- \* [www.iitap.com](http://www.iitap.com) The Certified Sex Addiction Therapist (CSAT) designation is offered by the International Institute for Trauma and Addiction Professionals (IITAP). The CSAT certification is designed to provide formal training and knowledge in the task-centered approach for the treatment of sexual addiction and sexual compulsivity. An individual can find a therapist in their area.

[www.tobforteens.com](http://www.tobforteens.com) for resources regarding Theology of the Body for teens. Also useful for adults

[www.AscensionPress.com](http://www.AscensionPress.com) for workshop and presenter information

<http://xxxchurch.com>

[www.pureonline.com](http://www.pureonline.com)

[www.pureloveclub.com](http://www.pureloveclub.com)

[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

network.Lansing/EastLansing

- \* **Achieving Chastity in a Pornographic World**, by Fr. Thomas Morrow, New Hope Publications, 2006
- \* **As for Me and My House**, a print, media, and workshop resource on developing a pastoral response to pornography from the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, 913-721-1570, [socialjustice@archkck.org](mailto:socialjustice@archkck.org)

**Blessed Are the Pure In Heart: The Dignity of the Human Person and the Dangers of Pornography**, pastoral letter, by Bishop Robert Finn, Bishop of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Missouri, 2007

**Bought With a Price: Pornography and the Attack on the Living Temple of God**, pastoral letter, by Bishop Paul Loverde, Bishop of the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia

**Breaking Free: 12 Steps to Sexual Purity for Men**, by Stephen Wood Family Life Center

- Publications, 2003
- Contrary to Love: Helping the Sexual Addict**, by Patrick Carnes, Hazelden, 1989
- Courage to be Chaste**, by Fr. Benedict Groeschel, Paulist Press
- \* **God's Plan for You: Life, Love, Marriage and Sex**, by David Hajduk, Pauline Books and Media, 2006
- Love, Marriage. . . & Pornography? How the Forbidden Fruit of the Modern-Day Tree of Knowledge is Destroying Our Relationships**, by Robert Borys, book and DVD, 2006
- Men and Women Are From Eden: A Study Guide to John Paul II's Theology of the Body**, by Mary Healy, St. Anthony Messenger Press/Servant Books, 2005
- The Pornography Plague and the Path to Christian Purity**, CD by Jeff Cavins, Saint Joseph Communications, 2007
- \* **Pure of Heart: Breaking Free From Porn**, 5 CDs, by Jeff Cavins, Catholic Answers
- \* **Pure Manhood**, by Jason Evert, Catholic Answers, 2007
- \* **Pure Womanhood**, by Crystalina Evert, Catholics Answers, 2007
- Theology of the Body Explained: A Commentary on John Paul II's *Man and Woman He Created Them***, revised edition, by Christopher West, Pauline Books and Media, 2007
- \* **Theology of the Body for Beginners**, by Christopher West, Ascension Press, 2004
- Theology of the Body for Teens**, by Jason Evert, Crystalina Evert, and Brian Butler, student workbook, leader's guide, Ascension Press, 2006
- The Twelve Steps and Catholic Spirituality**, by Fr. Leo Dolan, The Leaflet Missal Company, 1991