

Ministries offer help for Christians with porn addiction

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FRESNO, Calif. (RNS)—Every February, SouthPoint Foursquare Church reminds young members that “True Love Waits,” as part of a global campaign launched by Southern Baptists that stresses abstinence until marriage.

A few days after Valentine’s Day this year, 80 teenagers and some parents attended the church’s weekly youth night to hear a related message: Jesus loves porn stars, but looking at pornography makes it much harder to find him.

“We feel that church should be the first ones to talk to you guys about this. If you have a problem with porn, you’ve got to talk to God, and you’ve got to go to someone you can trust,” said Brandon Piety, the guest speaker from [XXXChurch](#), an organization aimed at helping Christians overcome pornography addictions.

About half of the traffic to the organization’s website comes from people who are searching for a different kind of XXX experience, which leaders considers a good outreach strategy.

Brandon Piety of XXXChurch, a Christian group that tries to help people overcome pornography addictions, spoke about his mission at SouthPoint Foursquare Church in Fresno, Calif. (RNS PHOTO/Nicole Neroulis)

Previous generations had to seek out magazines or movies, but now hardcore content is available anytime, free of charge, to anyone with Internet access.

Responding to this increased accessibility, affordability and anonymity, faith-based organizations now offer their own strategies for overcoming pornography addictions, targeting evangelicals and others who consider the images sinful.

According to statistics compiled by Baylor University, about half of observant Christians consider pornography a major problem in their households. The problem is not limited to lay members; a 2002 survey of pastors by Rick Warren of California's Saddleback Church found in one month, 30 percent had viewed pornography.

Some Christians consider just having lustful thoughts shameful, let alone spending hours viewing X-rated images.

This makes them especially vulnerable, both as potential addicts and as people too embarrassed to seek help, said Roderick Hetzel, a psychologist at Baylor, which launched a pornography resource at its counseling center three years ago.

"Whatever you're keeping secret tends to control you," he said. "In the past, churches either just condemned the behavior and therefore the people, or ignored the issue."

It's hard to say whether more Christians are addicted to pornography now, or just more comfortable admitting their problems due to the growing outreach efforts, he added.

While Internet companies have offered filtering programs for years, Christian anti-pornography groups such as XXXChurch and Covenant Eyes have pioneered software that creates "accountability partners"—such as a

pastor or spouse—who receive an e-mail report when the user visits an adult-oriented website.

Mark Larson, 29, a youth leader at SouthPoint, endorses this method, and he and his wife have offered to serve as accountability partners for the church's teens. As pornography becomes more prevalent in society, he said, teenagers and preteens must be taught to avoid it, through prayer and counseling.

Business has boomed for [Freedom Begins Here](#), the 3-year-old organization that sells toolkits with video testimonials, [Covenant Eyes](#) software and other anti-porn information to churches and Christians across the country.

About 400 groups and more than 1,000 individuals across the country have purchased the kits; they expect to sell 20,000 more this year, said Pastor Ted Cunningham, a spokesman for the Arkansas-based organization.

“People believe that the church protects us from sexual addiction, but it doesn't,” he said. “The church is finally getting to a point where we realize we've got to start talking about this.”

The advanced software programs, video testimonials and dedicated church events are long overdue, agree recovering porn addicts like Pastor Bernie Anderson, who struggled in silence during the 1990s.

He ended up getting help through *Every Man's Battle*, a book and workshop, but said the options available today make it easier to seek out help.

Anderson, 38, a minister at the Wasatch Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church in Salt Lake City, Utah, chronicled his seven-year addiction in his book, *Breaking the Silence: A Pastor Goes Public about His Battle with Pornography*. In his sermons, he stresses the need to talk about sexual addictions openly, as a preventive measure.

“Christian communities in general have avoided the topic of sex and sexuality, and it’s made us more susceptible to some of these issues,” he said.

In addition to the faith-based resources available, Hetzel recommends that porn-addicted Christians seek professional counseling to get to the root of their problems.

“Sexually addictive behaviors usually aren’t just about sex,” he said.

“A lot of people have underlying fears about intimacy and vulnerability that they need to work through. That person would need more than a filtering system or an accountability partner.”