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# Church Counsels Women Addicted to Pornography

By **JOHN LELAND**

LENEXA, Kan. — It was the final session for the women at [Westside Family Church](#)'s Victory Over Porn Addiction group, and the youngest member, a 17-year-old named Kelsie, had not had a good week.

"I slipped two nights this week," she said, to nods of support from the other women in the group.

"I decided that every time I'm tempted I'll just let everything out to God," she said, "then pray specifically for someone else, do selfless acts, to get away from being selfish."

The group's leader, Crystal Renaud, offered gentle counsel. "Pray for yourself, too," she said.

To the wide array of programs offered by evangelical megachurches like Westside, the group adds what Ms. Renaud says is something long overdue. While churches have addressed pornography use among the men in their congregations and among the clergy, a group for women who say they are addicted to pornography is new territory, she said.

"In the Christian culture, women are supposed to be the nonsexual ones," said Ms. Renaud, who also runs an Internet site called [Dirty Girls Ministries](#), choosing the name to attract people searching for pornography. "It's an injustice that the church is not more open about physical sexuality. God created sex. But the enemy has twisted it."

Ms. Renaud, who is taking a [DVD course](#) in sexual addiction counseling from the American Association of Christian Counselors, said she started the group and the Web site based on her own experiences. She became interested in pornography at age 10 after finding a magazine in her brother's bathroom. After that, she said, "I wasn't able to get enough of it."

"At school I wanted to go home and look at it more," she said. "Then I went online. I'd stay late at the library to look at it. Eventually I got into masturbation, phone sex, cybersex." She also cracked the code on the family's satellite television service, she said. "That was my life for eight years." Then, she said, she met a Christian woman who helped her stop.

The Victory Over Porn Addiction workshop, which Ms. Renaud started in 2008, is the smallest of small groups. Last week's graduation ceremony, the end of a nine-week curriculum, had three members.

But Ms. Renaud is nothing if not entrepreneurial, tapping the networking possibilities of the Internet and Christian conferences — for women, for sex addicts, for church speakers and for parachurch groups. “So much of it these days is being able to be viral,” she said. “I use [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), e-blasts to get traffic to the site. You get people to do your marketing for you.”

In May she plans to attend a three-day seminar in Las Vegas called [Launch 501c3](#), for Christians who want to start nonprofit organizations. The founder of Launch 501c3 is Craig Gross, a youth pastor who in 2002 helped start a Web site called [XXX Church](#), one of the first ministries for pornography users. For Ms. Renaud, XXX Church is a model for building her ministry.

After a cool reception in the early years, 200,000 to 250,000 unique visitors now view XXX Church’s site each month, and its free Internet monitoring software, X3, is downloaded 500 times a day. And Mr. Gross and others in the group have paid speaking engagements most weekends. A 30-day online workshop sells 100 copies a month, at \$99 each, Mr. Gross said. About 20 percent of the buyers have been women, he said.

Michelle Truax, the event planner for Fireproof Ministries, which includes XXX Church, said that when churches asked for programs directed at men, she suggested that they also consider programs for women.

But Mr. Gross said: “The problem is, most churches have male leadership, and if you want to pitch an event like that, they’ll say, ‘Our women don’t struggle with that.’ This is going to be the next wave, but you’re going to get a lot of blank stares. ‘Really? Come on, this isn’t a big deal.’ ”

The programs at Ms. Renaud’s group and at XXX Church diverge from secular sexual theory by treating masturbation and arousal as sins rather than elements of healthy sexuality. Emphasis is on recovering “sexual purity,” in which thoughts of sex outside marriage are illicit.

Ms. Renaud uses weekly assignments from a sexual addiction workbook called “[L.I.F.E. Guide for Women](#),” which emphasizes prayer, Christian fellowship and the use of “accountability partners” to hold the users to high standards of abstinence.

Chanel Yeary, 19, said that she had considered a secular therapist but that it was too expensive. Besides, she said, therapy when she was younger had little benefit. “With a shrink you have to pay her to be there,” she said. “Here, with my accountability partner, I know she’ll be there for me.”

Michele L. H., 27, who spoke on the condition that her last name not be used out of respect for her husband and son, said Ms. Renaud’s group had helped her stay in her marriage. When she was young, she said, relatives sexually abused her and made her look at pornography as instruction in how to behave. As an adult she needed pornography to be aroused with her husband, she said.

“I’m learning the correct way of intimacy and bonds,” she said of the group. “It’s learning what your spouse wants, his needs.” In her first weeks, she recalled, she struggled to avoid masturbation.

“She’ll text me with loophole questions,” Ms. Renaud said. “I’ll say, ‘No, it doesn’t work that way.’ ”

“But I need to release myself,” Michele said.

“I’ll say, ‘O.K., pray about it,’ ” Ms. Renaud said. She added, “Distraction is a big part of recovery.”

Kelsie, the 17-year-old, also agreed to speak on the condition that her full name not be used. She said that she had been taught secular views about masturbation, but that Ms. Renaud’s way made more sense.

She added: “You have to take into consideration what’s best for the one you’re going to be with. Say someday I’m married and my husband can’t please me as much as I please myself. That’d be terrible.”

For the graduation ceremony, Ms. Renaud passed out balloons and asked the group to write down the things they were giving up. Out came the bad stuff: Porn, Masturbation, Lustful Thinking, Cutting, Feeling Useless, Dad’s Bad Choices, Self-Gratification, Self-Mutilation, Unhealthy Thoughts.

They finished by popping the balloons and hugging. Ms. Renaud allowed that the culture’s forces were against them.

“This group should be much larger, but they’re afraid to come forward,” she said. Even after seven years without pornography, she told the group, looking at it too long it might attract her. Recently, she said, she watched “Titanic,” including the nude scene, without a relapse.

Kelsie seemed to draw inspiration from Ms. Renaud’s story. “It’s a cool thing to be able to say, ‘I’ve overcome sexual addiction,’ ” she said. Then she added, “I want to get there.”