

Print Page



Pastor preaches against porn

Chesterton church hosts awareness-raising event

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LIBERTY TWP. | When Craig Gross, pastor of the Grand Rapids, Mich., XXXchurch.com, was asked last month to meet Hugh Hefner and visit the famed Playboy Mansion in Calif., he accepted the invitation.

"It was like a jail," said Gross, 32, speaking to nearly 500 men and teenage boys gathered early Saturday morning at Liberty Bible Church in Chesterton.

"Hugh Hefner lives in the main house with his three Playmate girlfriends, who are currently on one of the top-rated cable reality shows 'The Girls Next Door,' and meanwhile, he's still married, and his wife lives in a house next door with his two sons, ages 17 and 15."

He said Hefner requires all three of his girlfriends be home by a 6 p.m. curfew every night to play Scrabble.

"It's all just a big fantasy," Gross said. "None of it is real. And that's what's so dangerous, because so many people buy into these unrealistic fantasies."

Gross is the founder of the nonprofit www.XXXchurch.com, or Triple X Church, which he started six years ago as a personal crusade against pornography.

Porn and Pancakes, the name of his local Saturday event, is part of a national campaign tour that Craig is using to spread the word about his mission to bring awareness to the pervasive presence of adult entertainment.

Often dubbed "militant" and "unorthodox" in his methods, Gross comes across as low-key, charismatic and even humorous in his approach.

He said his early encounters with pornography began in sixth grade, when he and a friend used to hide a "dirty magazine" in the tomato bushes of neighbor's garden. By the time he was a sophomore in high school, he said he was trying to "unscramble" the blocked out Spice Channel on his television's cable box.

"Today, you don't have to go to a bad part of town for pornography," Gross said.

"It's already in your home, on your computer Internet and even available right in your hand on your cell phone."

Gross said pornography is a \$59 billion dollar industry internationally, earning more than \$12 billion in the U.S., which means it rakes in more money than the all the major sports organizations -- NFL, NBA, MLB and NHL -- combined.

He said the average age people encounter their first pornographic image today is 11, and even 37 percent of women admit to regularly viewing pornography.

"And because of people like Paris Hilton and her sex tape, young women are idolizing people like Hilton, and so the numbers go up for women under age 30, with about 50 percent of them admitting to regularly using porn," Gross said.

Scott Goosen, 33, of Chesterton, said he attended Saturday's event out of curiosity and to help educate himself and others about the subject.

"The only way to solve a problem is to get the facts, talk about it and then do something about it," Goosen said.