

Porn & Pancakes

Chesterfield County church goes under the sheets this weekend to examine porn

By Donna C. Gregory

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Sex is everywhere these days -- primetime television, the Internet, on magazine covers at the grocery store checkout, even in the veiled innuendos of Disney movies - and now it's headed for previously taboo territory: church.

This weekend, men from across the Richmond metro are invited to merge two of their biggest turnons -- sex and food -- during **Porn & Pancakes**, a breakfast-time forum that will look at the impact of pornography on society and male-female relationships. The event is sponsored by **New Venture Christian Church**, also known as relaxedchurch.com, and will bring in speakers from XXXchurch.com, billed as the "No. 1 Christian porn site." Created in 2002 in Grand Rapids, Mich., XXXchurch.com is a national nonprofit that's trying to bring awareness to the high financial, emotional and spiritual costs of porn.

"[Porn & Pancakes] is kind of a cutting-edge terminology that to some people brings a bit of shock and awe that the church has the audacity to deal with pornography. In Christianity, sometimes the things we don't talk about the most are the things we struggle with the most," explained **Jason Harper** from XXXchurch.com.

Harper will be one of the key speakers at Porn & Pancakes, which will be held Saturday, Oct. 13 at Midlothian Middle School, beginning with breakfast at 8 a.m. He will be joined by Donny Pauling, a former porn producer who will reveal a behind-the-scenes look at the adult film industry.

According to Family Safe Media, pornography generated \$97 billion in worldwide revenues last year. More interesting statistics: more than 28,000 Internet users are viewing pornography every second, and a new adult video is created in the U.S. every 39 minutes.

"[The effect of pornography] is such an epidemic, and it's an epidemic people don't want to talk about. For too long we've been willing to just hide our head in the sand

and not tackle the issue that there's an elephant in the room," said **Steve Thornton**, New Venture's lead pastor.

In decades past, people had to drive to their neighborhood convenience store to purchase adult magazines hidden in blacked-out wrappers or purchase X-rated movies through mail-order catalogues. Today, viewing what's down below is as easy as pushing a few buttons on a television remote or computer keyboard. And one doesn't even have to pay extra to see it -- just turn on HBO after midnight on any weekend night.

"It's so easily accessible," said Thornton. "Pornography used to be more magazines and videos, and that's still in the picture, but in recent years, that's switched to the Internet, because people can sit in their homes, and they don't even have to go out to buy it."

Pornography is also readily available at homes away from home. Many hotel chains offer adult movies as a service for guests.

"It's part of branding," said one hotel worker in Chesterfield who asked not to be identified. "People expect it. People do things in hotel rooms they normally wouldn't do. Sometimes it's something the guests ask for. We've had some guests complain if we don't offer it."

Hoping to curb access to adult programming, Chesterfield Board of Supervisors Chairman **Kelly Miller** asked the county attorney's office last fall if local governments have any power to dictate what channels cable companies make available to customers.

"We don't have any right to control the programming cable companies provide," said **Mike Chernau**, senior assistant county attorney, during a follow-up interview last week.

Comcast, the county's leading cable provider, says it offers features to help customers limit their access to such programming.

"Comcast Digital Cable includes parental control features that allow parents to choose what they want their children to be able to watch. These allow parents to block pay-per-view and ON DEMAND purchases, to block out adult programming titles, and to block entire channels or programming that is rated for more mature or adult audiences," said **Aimee N. Metrick**, director of public relations for Comcast's Eastern Division.

Commercially-sold Internet filters are also available to help monitor access to online pornography, but nothing is foolproof.

XXXchurch.com is asking the pornography industry to take a more proactive approach in limiting access to adult Web sites, especially to minors. Such sites typically use a "click-thru" page that asks visitors to verify they are not under age 18. "But I've never met a 15-yearold looking for porn who clicked 'no,'" said Harper.

Such easy access has created what's now called "the porn generation."

While proponents of porn might say its racy images are filling a need for release, critics argue that it has harmful effects.

"Pornography takes you further than you want to go, it costs you more than you're willing to pay, and it'll keep you longer than you want to stay," said Harper.

"Pornography is disrespectful and extremely hurtful to women," continued Thornton. "Ask a girlfriend or wife if they think it's ok. It says you have to go somewhere else to find your satisfaction. It's not innocent. It causes men to have a disillusioned idea of relationships."

"It creates false expectations within the context of a healthy relationship," added Harper. "In the movies, a woman never says 'no.' It sets up a fantasy world that cannot be lived out."

That fantasy world can lead to relationship problems and in some cases, sexual addiction. Porn & Pancakes is meant to bring these issues into the open and to encourage men to break any fixations they might have with pornography.

"The XXXchurch.com folks will bring in a number of resources," said Thornton. "They will provide a lot of materials that will help people take the steps to get out of it."

XXXchurch.com will make accountability software available to all who attend the Porn & Pancakes event. The software acts as a watchdog, generating a monthly report of questionable Web sites that have been visited online. Theoretically, the software enables friends or partners to monitor each other's Internet activities and then hold each other accountable if online pornography is viewed.

"We want people to have some ability to go beyond just talking about it. We want them to have some steps they can take," said Thornton.

It's important for people to realize that XXXchurch.com is not looking to bring an end to pornography, said Harper.

"It is not our desire to shut down the pornography industry. We recognize the value of freedom of speech. We simply want to put the facts on the table and let people make an educated decision."

For more information on the event, visit www.richmondpornandpancakes.com.

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