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Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

A Pastoral Letter on the Dignity of the Human Person and the Dangers of Pornography

by

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Introduction

To the clergy, religious, lay faithful of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph and to all people of good will:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8): A way of discipleship.

In the Beatitudes Christ offers us a perfect model for true Christian living. Even more than the Ten Commandments themselves, they are a charter for the high moral calling Christ sets for His disciples.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. This one line from the Beatitudes offers a most sublime beginning point to our reflection. It tells us about God, ourselves and our ultimate goal. A pure heart is “blessed” or “happy.” Seeing God and being with Him forever in heaven is God’s plan for our eternal well-being. The Old Testament teaches that this purity is required if we are to approach God. “Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false” (Psalm 24, 3-4).

To be pure in heart implies that our love is wholly directed toward the good of the other person. We are “single-hearted,” and not divided in our love. Israel’s first and most important commandment is to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength (Deut 6:4-5). Jesus added definitively that we must also love our neighbor as our self (Mk 12: 29 - 31). This pure love – as demanding as it may be – is the high destiny to which we are called as children of the Father. Is it possible to fulfill such a love? Yes. It is possible because God has first loved us (1 Jn 4:10). As

disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to the happiness that comes from a clean and undivided heart.

Pornography: Epidemic Attacking Human Dignity

Daily there are challenges to this pure Christian love. For some months, representatives of our Catholic Diocese have been working with leaders of other faith traditions to address the serious dangers represented by the steady increase of pornography in our culture. Pornography is not new, but it has become a kind of plague in our society, reaching epidemic proportions. It is being propagated more widely than ever. Well beyond magazines, it is widespread on the internet, television, movies and videos, and now on cell phones and other handheld devices, many of which are marketed to children and youth. Pornography has become the secret entertainment of many people of all ages, walks of life, and economic backgrounds. Use of internet pornography is perhaps the fastest growing addiction in the world.

Pornography perverts the beauty of intimate love proper to marriage, presenting images of the body and sexual acts for base pleasure – regarding other persons as objects to be used, manipulated, and sold. It is a multi-billion dollar industry, eclipsing the amount of money generated by professional sports (cf. Chapter II, below). In this way pornography distorts the proper meaning and purpose of our sexuality and does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, consumers).

Use of pornography is a serious sin against chastity and the dignity of the human person. It robs us of sanctifying grace, separates us from the vision of God and from the goodness of others, and leaves us spiritually empty. Attraction to pornography and its gratifications is a false “love” that leads to increasing emotional isolation, loneliness, and subsequent sexual acting-out with self and others. It depends on the exploitation of other persons: frequently the desperate or poor, or the innocent young. Use of pornography has cost persons their jobs, their marriages and families. Traffickers in child pornography may end up in prison. It has often been associated with and has contributed to, acts of sexual violence and abuse.

In this pastoral letter, I wish to appeal to you all as members of the Body of Christ redeemed by His love, to reflect on the dangers of pornography in our society. We will see how pornography is a serious affront to our human dignity. I will share some strategies in response to this problem. I ask you to join with me in the Diocesan effort to combat this plague by recommitting ourselves and our families to purity and chastity. In this way we will live more completely as Christ’s disciples, growing each day in the freedom of the children of God. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

Chapter I: The Dignity of the Human Person

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. (Genesis 1:26): The respect due the human person is rooted in God.

As human beings we are created in the image and likeness of God. The dignity and respect due to every human person is not assigned by any group of people, nor granted by a government. Our dignity is not contingent on what we own, or even on what we do. We cannot buy it or sell it. This dignity and worth comes from God as a complete and inestimable gift.

How are we like God? We have an immortal soul, and we are meant to live forever with God in heaven. We are called to be holy as God is holy, and through Jesus Christ and His Church we may receive the means to attain holiness. Like God, we have a rational nature, the ability to reason. However, it is not just in reason that we find the divine image within us. We are like God because we are able to love. We can make a gift of our self to another person.

For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Cor 6: 20) New life in Christ.

Even when through sin, man had fallen and seriously injured this gift of our dignity; God continued to love us and sent us a Redeemer. We were purchased – and at a great price!

Human life was embraced and elevated in the Incarnation. In the coming of Christ, “in the flesh,” God united Himself in some way with every human person. In the Easter or Paschal Mystery, Jesus’ passage through death into Resurrection and new life, He won a definitive victory on our behalf and established for us the hope of eternal life on high. Through Baptism we share in God’s life by means of a divine adoption. In this first sacrament, our purification is accomplished in the efficacious sign of flowing and life-giving water. God has reestablished our eternal value. Each of us is challenged: “Child of God, become fully who you are!”

Are we worth dying for? Are we worth being crucified for? God’s answer is yes. Our question to ourselves must be, “Is God worth living for?”

But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ (Mark 10:6): The dignity of human sexuality.

This dignity of the human person includes our sexuality. Our sexuality is more than our gender. It is part of our person. It gives us the ability to connect and give ourselves in love to another person. Our human

sexuality is an important means by which we can share in the love and creativity of God. In marriage, a man and a woman are invited to establish a complete, exclusive and lifelong union of two individuals as one. This union is the proper relationship by which it is possible for them to become co-creators with God and to let their love for one another become fruitful in bringing another human life into the world.

In the misuse of our sexuality human weakness and selfishness can manifest themselves, sometimes in terrible ways. Human sexuality is a gift but not a toy. It is a gift to be respected and directed toward its proper end: loving and personal communion with others.

***My offenses truly I know them; my sin is always before me. (Psalm 51:5):
The reality of sin.***

This vision of who we are in God is a beautiful one. But we know that it is marked by the bitter, painful reality of sin. The ability to choose to love means that we can choose, likewise, to hurt or ignore one another. Sin is real and it is destructive.

The original unity of Adam and Eve was fractured by Original Sin. As important and fundamental as our human sexuality is, it also provides the means whereby our fallen human nature expresses itself in deep and sometimes horrific ways. Adultery, fornication, prostitution, rape, sexual abuse and exploitation, much of modern day slavery, crimes of passion and pornography all illustrate this fallen aspect of our human nature. The dignity of the human person has been wounded and scarred by sin. When we sin we become less the person we are called to be in Christ. Sin dehumanizes us. The fact that Jesus was sinless does not make him less human but more human. Sin makes us less human. The grace of Christ restores us.

Having understood the dignity of the human person, we can better examine what compromises this dignity. Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).

Everyone should look upon his neighbor as another self, bearing in mind above all his life and the means necessary for living it in a dignified way lest he follow the example of the rich man who ignored Lazarus, the poor man. Today there is an inescapable duty to make ourselves the neighbor of every man, no matter who he is.

Gaudium et Spes, 27

Simply put, sin separates us from one another and from God. Sin impairs the relationship between the creatures, and between the human

person and God. Ultimately sin is to be understood in terms of freedom and love. Sin is an abuse of freedom and a failure to love.

Only in the knowledge of God's plan for man can we grasp that sin is an abuse of the freedom that God gives to created persons so that they are capable of loving him and loving one another.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 387

Every athlete exercises discipline in every way ... to win an imperishable crown (I Cor 9:25) The life of virtue.

Sin separates us from God while virtue seeks to unite us to God. When we have discovered God's love for us and the high destiny which is ours, we strive again and again to attain all that God has in store for us. For this purpose the virtues are a vitally important part of the Christian life. By a virtue we mean "... a habitual and firm disposition to do the good." As we grow in virtue, we seek to become more like God, more holy. Sin can produce a kind of atrophy that weakens and can even paralyze our moral muscle. Virtue is a conditioning of our moral muscle that strengthens us and helps us to maximize our potential. In the moral life there is an entire constellation of virtues regarding different situations in life. There is a virtue that calls us to respect and care for our human sexuality. We call it chastity.

Create a clean heart in me O God. (Psalm 51:12): The virtue of chastity.

For some, chastity can have an almost negative connotation. As part of the cardinal virtue of temperance, chastity calls on us to moderate our sense pleasures, keeping the use of our sexuality within the limits of what is appropriate, using this life-giving power for only a worthy goal.

But chastity is a virtue in its own right; it is a strength. It is not just the absence of something bad. It is the presence of something good. That something is respect. The virtue of chastity repeats acts of respect for others and for ourselves.

Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and woman. The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2337

Those who treat others as objects might experience some passing pleasure but they are not going to be happy. Chastity exists not to prevent happiness but to allow happiness to mature and blossom. Chastity helps us to see people as they really are. It helps to ground us in truth.

Chastity does not stand in the way of love but rather exists to protect it. Chastity expresses love. Before he became Pope John Paul II, Karol Wojtyla wrote a book entitled *Love and Responsibility*. This writing emerged through his pastoral work with university students, which included marriage preparation. While some would say that the opposite of love is hate, he taught that the opposite of love is use. The idea is that if you do not love someone, you will end up using that person. This is known as the *Personalistic Norm*. Negatively stated, it means that one may never use another person as an object for one's own pleasure. Positively stated, it holds that the only proper response to a person is love.

Love and Responsibility insists that the structure of love is that of an interpersonal communion. In this we find a reflection of the Blessed Trinity as a communion of love. The future Pope insisted that chastity is always about persons. He argued "...love is an affirmation of the person or else it is not love at all." The moral virtue of chastity can only be thought of in association with the theological virtue of love. Only the chaste are capable of loving. To the degree we are chaste we can love others; while to the degree we are unchaste we will use others. Thus, chastity is both a prerequisite and expression of love. Chastity is not a *no* but a *yes*, a yes to another person as a person and not as an object to be used. Chastity may involve saying no, but that no is always in service of a greater positive goal.

Chastity is necessary for all Christians, regardless of their state in life, whether they are single, married, or celibate. All are called to respect human dignity. All are called to love.

Those who are **single** are called to a chastity that respects others and refrains from sexually acting out in ways proper and exclusive to the married.

Chastity is also important for those who are **married**. For them chastity does not usually mean sexual abstinence but fidelity, and within their marriage, a deep respect and love, never treating one's spouse as an object. In this deep love they are to reveal the love between Christ and His Church and give an insight into the very mystery of God.

Those who are called to **celibacy** are also called to chastity. In perfect continence they are to love God and neighbor for the sake of the Kingdom and as a sign of the life to come.

Chastity is important for all Christians and all people of good will. Chastity calls us to love as God loves. It is ordering our sexuality according to the plan of God. Chastity is how we love others in sincerity and truth.

Chapter II: The Problem of Pornography

Lust indulged starves the soul. (Proverbs 13:19): A real problem.

Our human sexuality is created as something good by God. It is a gift. It also suffers from the effects of original sin and so can manifest not only good but evil. Pornography is one such evil. It assaults human dignity and commodifies people and human sexuality. It starves the human soul which has a spiritual dimension which must be nurtured by giving and receiving a personal love.

While pornography is not a new problem, the development of the mass media and recent technological advances have made it much easier to access this deceptive evil.

Pornography violates modesty, chastity and truth. Human sexuality involves **modesty** which protects the privacy of individuals regarding what is most personal and intimate. To invade this privacy, and unveil what should remain hidden, is an assault on human dignity.

While **chastity** exists to serve love, pornography treats another human being (or an explicit sexual description or action) as an object to be used. It can oftentimes flow from narcissism and selfishness. It replaces love with use. Remember the Personalistic Norm: People are never to be used as objects for one's own pleasure. People are to be loved. People are not to be treated as raw material to be used by the emotions, compulsions or addictions of others. To paraphrase John Paul II, the problem with pornography, in a sense, is not that it reveals too much of the person (exposed in the image), but that it reveals too little of the person. Pornographic images are designed to reveal nothing but the person's sexual organs and sexual faculties; nowhere does the unique personality, the depth of the person, appear. The pornographically exposed person is, quite literally, de-personalized: in becoming an "object" for another's use, he or she ceases to be seen for what he or she is: a "subject" who deserves love and respect.

Pornography violates **truth**. It leads people into a world of unreality, a world of fantasy that isolates them from other people and the commitments and respect which should govern our relationships. Some persons seek pornography out of loneliness and a low self-esteem. It is a painful irony that their use of pornography serves only to isolate them more and more from other people. The more invested people are in this fantasy world, the more detached they become from real people, real issues and real life around them. Lust isolates. Love unites. Pornography leads people away from the truth. Chastity helps people to grow in truth.

Pornography inevitably leads to other grave sins. For example, the use of pornography is frequently coupled with masturbation, another

disordered sexual activity that further turns a person in on himself, isolating him from others. Pornography use often leads one to seek other disordered forms of sexual gratification, which involve the exploitation of others for one's own selfish ends. Pornography does not remain a "private" vice; by allowing one to view other persons as means rather than ends, it eventually damages all of one's familial and social relationships.

The path of sinners is smooth stones that end in the depths of the nether world. (Sirach 21:10): The bitter fruit of pornography.

The statistics are staggering. But behind all this there are not just numbers, there are people whose lives are harmed, and whose eternal salvation is jeopardized. There are those exploited by pornography, those who use it and then the family and associates of both groups. Pornography affects lives, moral strength, relationships, marriages, the lives of children, community life, and even such things as property value and community safety.

Sometimes those who use pornography claim, "I'm not hurting anyone." Pornography, like all sinful behavior, offends the one sinned against, the one who sins and God, the source of all truth. The destructive work of the devil, who Sacred Scripture calls "the father of lies," is to distort in us our sense of what is good. He tells us that others are for our use and enjoyment; that satisfying our cravings will make us happy. But the "happiness" is fleeting. We are spiritual beings sharing God's own life, and this enticing adventure has no spiritual substance. It leaves us deceived, ashamed, unfulfilled and confused.

Within the person, pornography wreaks harm physically, emotionally and spiritually. Pornography can become as physically and chemically addictive as alcohol, drugs or gambling. The graphic images of pornography burn themselves into our sense imagination. The more deeply and frequently this happens, the harder the road to freedom will be. Like other addictions, pornography is a progressive affliction. It takes more and more graphic presentations to achieve the desired effect. As this continues it can lead to acting out and to crime.

Pornography stunts a person emotionally. Those addicted may withdraw from friends, family and even their own spouses. Pornography leads them into a world of unreality with idealized, unrealistic figures who do not engage one in a truly human manner. As people withdraw, their interpersonal skills and relationships weaken. They look at others as objects rather than as people with the capacity for friendship and love. They become preoccupied with every situation and person they encounter: will it provide for me the gratification I seek? If one is seriously mired in this vice, the addictive behavior often persists even after it leads to

obviously damaging consequences, e.g., destruction of a marital relationship or loss of a job from viewing pornography at work. In a real sense, one can become enslaved to pornography in a manner analogous to drug addiction. As with other addictions, the viewer requires more and more explicit, disordered material to achieve the same effect; this produces a downward spiral that becomes progressively more difficult to correct.

The spiritual life is about growing more in the image of God. Pornography makes us less like God as it leads people to treat others as objects and not as unrepeatable gifts of God. Pornography leads one not to make a greater gift of oneself in love, not to serve but rather to be served. In the end one becomes caught and enslaved in hurtful habits rather than virtue.

Viewing pornography for this distorted venereal pleasure is, objectively, a mortal sin. It is seriously contrary to the life God intends for others and ourselves. It kills the life of sanctifying grace. If we are in serious sin we must not approach Holy Communion until we have received sacramental confession. Often we are too ashamed to come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and we wander further away from the life of God. Our ability to function as a living member of the Body of Christ is impaired. Because this scenario is so widespread today, we must be concerned about the state of our parishes and families. Still, because God's initiative of grace remains at work, we must not despair. At any time, He stands ready to assist us. We must entrust ourselves to His mercy and return to the Sacrament for forgiveness and a new beginning.

Pornography harms others. It exploits other people, usually women but also men and children. To engage in pornography is to support this terrible and scarring exploitation. To participate financially in this contributes to an industry that perpetuates a grave moral evil. Slavery, including sexual slavery, is a real and growing problem today. One reason it grows is because there is a demand for it. Furthermore, after engaging in pornography, the user is more likely to look upon other people as objects. As pornography use progresses marriages can falter and collapse. This results in shame, heartbreak and misery for the spouses and for children who can carry emotional scars into adulthood and their own marriages. Children and young people who are exposed to pornography experience assaults on their human dignity and roadblocks to authentic human development. As pornography increases, so does crime. Sex offenses are 506% greater in Phoenix, Arizona areas where Sexually Oriented Businesses are located. Pornography is not harmless; it is a grave, dehumanizing evil.

In all this, pornography offends God. It misuses His gifts of freedom, the human body and love. We are the artwork of God (cf. Eph 2:10) and pornography defaces His masterpiece.

***Go not after your lusts, but keep your desires in check. (Sirach 18:30):
The Internet and modern technology.***

The volume of Internet pornography is growing exponentially. It seems to be anonymous and accessible. It can easily ensnare the unsuspecting, including children and young people. Moreover, it can be particularly addictive. The sense images and sexual gratifications they trigger leave an impression in the memory. The fantasies can be recalled and perpetuated. They tempt us to take another look. With repeated use, the viewer of pornography builds up tolerance to its effects: there is a progressive need for more stimulating images. Pornography use causes intense physical changes in the body and brain, which reinforce the disordered thoughts and behaviors. With repeated use, the obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors associated with pornography become increasingly difficult to interrupt or resist.

Internet pornography does not require the public purchase of new material. Instead, pictures can be changed and many more can be accessed. One need not go into public to obtain pornography anymore. Also disturbing now is the ready availability of these images through iPods and cell phones. Children whose parents correctly restrict computer access in private rooms of the house now may obtain images through handheld devices, away from supervision.

The culture around us that so readily provides an environment and market for these kinds of evils is a significant contributing factor to the problem of pornography and other sins. The technology itself is not evil. The problem lies in the abuse of technology and its use in evil ways. Like dynamite, it is something powerful that demands proper handling. It can be used to either serve or assault humanity.

We live in a culture that is increasingly dark and death-dealing. We can easily begin to absorb these negative influences – taking them in like a plant absorbs, through its roots, what is in the soil or “culture” in which it is planted. We become numb and we don’t even realize that we are slowly being poisoned. This problem is serious and it demands our response.

Chapter III: Responding to the Problem

What is your name? (Mark 5:9): Facing and naming the problem.

This real and serious problem demands of us a real and serious response. It is easier to turn away and pretend it does not exist, but it does exist, and we must do what we can. We should not wait for the abduction, rape or murder of a young girl or boy in our family, another ruined

marriage, a job lost, or another child's life being devastated to get us concerned about this issue. The stakes are just too high.

The first step in solving any problem is to point it out, to name it. While exorcizing the Gerasene demoniac, Jesus asked, "What is your name?" (Mark 5:9). In Semitic thought to know the name is to begin to have some power over it. We find a modern equivalent of this in the Twelve Step Spirituality of such groups as Alcoholics Anonymous. The first step in this transforming spirituality is to admit that in the face of one's addiction one is powerless. People do not address problems that they refuse to admit.

A major character weakness in heterosexual pornography use can be selfishness or narcissism. Same sex pornography can be strongly influenced by a weak male confidence, loneliness and a poor body image. Realizing these contributing factors can help a person begin to look for the ways to redirect his or her "relationships" in a more generous and healthy manner.

The evils with which we struggle often keep us bound up in silence. Particularly with something like pornography, the fear, embarrassment and shame can be intense. Someone with a deep spiritual insight into all this was St. Ignatius Loyola. He noted:

When the enemy of human nature tempts a just soul with his wiles and seductions, he earnestly desires that they be received secretly and kept secret. But if one manifests them to a confessor, or to some other spiritual person who understands his deceits and malicious designs, the evil one is very much vexed. For he knows that he cannot succeed in his evil undertaking, once his evident deceits have been revealed.

The Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius Loyola

A prerequisite for use of pornography is some sort of silence. To break this silence by speaking to another person can be frightening, but also liberating.

I said: 'I will confess my offense to the Lord.' And you, Lord, have forgiven the guilt of my sin. (Psalm 32:5): The Sacrament of Penance.

Acknowledging the problem for ourselves is an important first step. As St. Ignatius noted, this can be done in the Sacrament of Penance. This sacrament is a rich source of God's strength and spiritual health. It is the normal means for us – instituted by Christ and provided by the Church – to be reconciled and receive spiritual healing. Stated simply, pornography is sinful and the Sacrament of Penance removes sin. This sacrament puts us in touch with the depth of God's merciful love. It removes what is bad. It strengthens us with what is good, with God's grace.

The fruits of this sacrament are many. The Catechism notes that it restores us to God's grace and joins us in friendship with God. It brings a spiritual resurrection drawing us into the Paschal Mystery as we die to our sinfulness and rise to new life in Christ. The Sacrament of Penance reconciles us to the Church and revitalizes the life of the repentant sinner.

For anyone struggling with pornography, the Sacrament of Reconciliation offers an infallible source of healing grace. Jesus spoke of the joy in heaven over one repentant sinner (Luke 15:10); when worthily celebrated, this sacrament causes the angels to rejoice. In this sacrament, we encounter Christ the Divine physician. When we open our wound to Him, He can begin to heal us with His grace.

Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? (Luke 14: 28): What can we do?

This pastoral letter is offered as part of a comprehensive effort within the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph to make progress in the battle against pornography and its destructive effects in individuals, our families, and our society. The tactic we are taking is only secondarily one of legislative advocacy against the purveyors of pornography. The injustice against the actors or participants in pornographic media deserves to be addressed and corrected. I encourage and support those who – in accord with their office and competence – succeed in turning back this plague. We know this demon is “legion,” and still we persevere in hope.

Our effort and my purpose in writing is primarily to help us all grow spiritually stronger in our fight against pornography. We must help each other in a way of discipleship that is grounded in chastity and that purity of heart which helps us see God.

We are contending not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world. (Eph 6:12.): Develop a plan to stay strong.

We have spoken about the first and necessary step in our spiritual battle against the lies and entanglements of pornography. Sincere repentance turns our sight again toward God and the Sacrament of Reconciliation renews within us the grace and life of Christ.

In order to persevere we must develop a plan to “stay sober” and avoid the intoxication of pornography. We will not succeed if we think we can easily put aside the temptations to use pornography. We must avoid the occasions of sin, that is, anything that leads us toward it. What are our particular weaknesses in regard to these attractions? In honesty and

humility we must often run from them like we would run from a wild animal against which we had no sufficient defense.

We are more vulnerable to secret sins: 1) when we are alone or with certain people; 2) when the materials are available; and 3) when we have time on our hands.

Avoiding a secretive or enticing environment. We must be careful and plan out what we do when we are in private. Away from others we must be on our guard, mindful of our weakness. Can we invite someone to monitor our computer? Random monitoring is a practice in many business offices. Sometimes the danger of this keeps people from some instances of viewing pornography. The engagement of an accountability partner who receives a report of websites we have visited may help us stay honest in this regard. At home, a computer should be located in the open rather than in a private room.

Similarly, we must avoid situations where the company of certain people might unduly pressure us to partake in the use of materials, such as pornographic videos or magazines. We must try to cultivate healthy and supportive friendships. As we get stronger, we can try to lead our associates into activities that are not so degrading to human dignity.

Eliminating pornographic materials. We must remove any pornography that is readily available. Eliminate your access as quickly as possible. Destroy the videos, throw out the photos and magazines, cancel the problematic cable or satellite channels.

Because we have grown to depend on computers, this is harder when dealing with Internet pornography. We can first remove computer bookmarks that provide easy access. Use a filter. If you knew that eating certain foods or taking certain drugs to which you are allergic would kill you, you would scrupulously avoid these things. If getting rid of the computer is the only way to assure your chastity – your sexual sobriety – such measures may be necessary for the life of your soul.

If the television in your hotel room is a danger, don't even turn it on. Bring reading or work to do. Go to the exercise room. Talk to a friend, or your spouse or children on the phone. Persons who are "problem drinkers" and have been through treatment programs know that they must never take a drink again, and they stay away from the bar.

At home, more and more families are using blocking devices on their television sets, or using the TV only occasionally to watch a family-friendly movie or a sports event together.

Being good stewards of our time. Idle time may be the occasion for our use of pornography. We learned the truism, "The idle mind is the devil's playground." We don't want to become frenetic in our activity. There is value in taking time for rest and relaxation, but we must be good stewards of our time. Nearly a generation ago I heard someone describe

television as “company without commitment.” We should use our time to constructively do things that are part of the direction we want for our life, that express and strengthen our commitments to others.

Knowing our weaknesses. We may begin to awaken our desire for explicit pornography even by the use of (increasingly revealing and suggestive) television shows, reality TV, or immodest advertisements, magazines not generally regarded as erotic (e.g., in the case of fetish), novels with explicit scenes that we know play to our attractions. Being honest about our individual weaknesses in these areas will help us avoid the “occasions of sin,” – remote or near occasions – that may cause our downfall. To succeed in this battle we have to calculate our strengths and weaknesses and realize how we can account for both. Don’t try to fight the battle “inside the fortress;” engage the enemy before he breaches your defenses. Learn to see the danger coming before it gets too close or too strong.

You must, therefore, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5: 48): **Develop a plan to grow holy as a disciple.**

The Beatitudes and the rest of Christ’s *Sermon on the Mount* express a model for conscientious and faithful discipleship. It is not enough to remove the bad. We must bring in the good. If we do not replace the bad with something good it can more easily return (Cf. Luke 11:24-26). Through repentance and Sacramental Reconciliation we move out of darkness into the light but we need a program for staying in the light. The particulars of this program will include some essential elements.

Commitment to daily prayer. The real core of this prayer must be a growing expression of our relationship to God our Father, to Jesus Christ who redeems us, and to the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us and helps us to be more like Christ in the world. We need to hear God’s affirmation of us – our innate goodness and dignity – so we can begin to love others in a similar way. This is more than just saying prayers, as important as that is. It is grounding our selves in God. It is opening our hearts and letting Him speak His word of love, mercy, comfort and challenge to us. Our Catholic tradition is tremendously rich with many types of prayer. Just a few are Eucharistic Adoration, *Lectio Divina* (prayerfully reading the Sacred Scriptures), meditation, contemplation, and devotional prayers including the Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet and the Stations of the Cross. Our rich and varied tradition exists to help us grow more deeply in the life of God.

Meditation, vivid reflection on the mysteries, life and activity of Christ, and the use of religious pictures, statues, etc., provide positive images in the sense imagination and memory. These can begin to supplant images and visual fantasies that are occasions of sin for us.

Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. For us as Catholics the Mass and the worthy reception of the Eucharist are the font from which we draw our spiritual strength and the highest expression of our worship and thanks to God. Here Jesus literally makes a gift of Himself to us. Here we enter into the hour of His sacrifice. To share in the Eucharist every Sunday and holy day of obligation strengthens us, and keeps us in the communion of the Church. Participating in Mass more often and receiving communion, provided we have not alienated our self from God by serious sin, can be of inestimable help to us to stay in the light.

Daily Examination of Conscience and Frequent Confession. No one can hope to seriously grow in the spiritual life without the constant repentance to which Christ calls us. Particularly when we are trying to break the habits of destructive sins, a brief recollection of our day in which we renew our sorrow for our sins and track our progress prepares us for a worthy celebration of Confession. The saints tell us to keep our daily examination of conscience cursory so as not to rekindle the passion of our sins. Satan's new temptations and occasional discouragement will come. But we must persevere in hope despite our setbacks. An honest, integral, and humble Confession monthly or more often, to the same confessor if possible, will do us tremendous good if we persevere and do not lose heart.

Like going to the doctor, receiving Reconciliation is both curative and preventive. It is curative because it removes sin and it is preventive because it strengthens us and allows us to stay healthy. Even if we are not guilty of any mortal sin, this sacrament strengthens us and helps us to keep running smoothly. I can testify to the great importance of frequent confession in my own spiritual journey. It is one valuable way I also try to stay close to Christ and keep the mystery of divine mercy and reconciliation alive in my own life.

Utilize good Spiritual Reading. Another means of support is through study. As God's word to us the Bible is life giving and irreplaceable. Our tradition is rich in spiritual classics, especially the biographies of the saints or their own writings. Reading the encyclicals of the Popes and other magisterial teachings will help us in our understanding of revealed truth. The catechetical talks by Pope John Paul II, sometimes collectively referred to as the *Theology of the Body*, provide a positive and substantive understanding of human sexuality.

Awareness of the Presence of God. Making a faith-filled dedication of our self and our efforts to God each day – a morning offering – and renewing our awareness of His presence and love in the midst of our daily activities will help to sanctify all the everyday actions we undertake. Using devotional items or sacramentals, such as a blessed medal or scapular can be a source of grace and remind us of our relationship with God and as members of His Body the Church. Keeping a religious medal, holy card or

icon on or near the screen of your computer, or on top of the television, can help us be aware of our commitment to live a new life in Christ.

Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.
(2 Corinthians 6:2): **Grow strong in the exercise of the virtues.**

Developing a plan for growing in holiness will be more complete as we begin to generously exercise an apostolic Christian love. We must go “beyond our self,” reaching out to others out of love for Christ. This active charity expressed in an unselfish and generous love is the antidote to pornography and other sexually-expressed symptoms of selfishness.

Temperance in the exercise of our sexual appetites, necessary for succeeding against the lures of pornography, can be strengthened when we exercise temperance in the use of food and drink. The more we learn to strengthen our will by occasionally denying ourselves licit enjoyments, the more we will likely succeed in the temperance which supports chastity. When we do this out of a motive of love of Christ, this “discipline” becomes “discipleship.” It is a kind of spiritual conditioning that strengthens us for other challenges that will come.

Modesty is decency and discretion in the way we dress, act and speak. It protects the mystery of persons and their love. Living the habit of modesty in dress can help to foil the voyeuristic tendencies that are part of pornography. A renewed commitment to modesty helps us combat the injustice of pornography which undermines the dignity of the person. “Custody of the eyes” means we turn away from those gazes that are intended for our gratification and curiosity. This age-old practice can help us avoid occasions of sin that otherwise lead us to exploit others.

Purity is one of the most wonderful characteristics of the love and light of Jesus Christ. Exposed to Christ’s purity we are purified. Those who are in love seek to express their gift of self with an undivided heart and in a way that cares for the total well-being of the other. The exploitative use of others through pornography is a contradiction of this purity which characterizes God’s love and must be the model for our love. As we reflect on our natural exercise of purity in the relationships we have with our children, our parents and siblings, we will begin to increase our capacity to love other persons as well with a pure and undivided heart.

Chastity, as we have described at length above, can be exercised in positive ways. It means treating others with the respect due them in accord with their human dignity and worth – something that comes from God Himself. Chastity is the responsible use of our affective life in the way that is most appropriate in light of our relationship. Allowing our self to be sexually gratified by someone we do not know in any way – which happens in pornography – is the epitome of unchastity. Determining to

relate to each person in the way that best accords with their dignity and the nature of our relationship is a positive exercise of chastity. Exercising chastity – consciously loving people in this deeply respectful way – actually strengthens us against acts of unchastity.

What are we saying? One way to successfully turn away the temptation of pornography is to “build up” the virtues of Temperance, Modesty, Purity and Chastity. The final cause – the ultimate goal – of all the virtues is charity which must express itself in the generous gift of self.

A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter; he who finds one finds a treasure.
(Sirach 6:14): **Developing a support system.**

People who have overcome addictions will insist you will not do so by yourself. Admitting the issue, examining oneself, daily prayer, and seeking forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance are all good, important and holy steps. A knowledgeable Spiritual Director can help us develop and keep the plan of life that we have suggested above.

However, if you or someone you know has reached the point of an addiction or even just a compulsion, more help may be necessary. It is important to develop a support system. This system may involve counseling with a competent professional. It may involve a support group. Our diocese already offers one such support group for men and we hope to establish another for women. The National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families sponsors a phone line for those who struggle with pornography and for those who try to help them. Another practice becoming more popular today is that of an accountability group. A number of individuals will gather on a regular basis to share struggles and successes. They give each other permission to probe, ask questions and to challenge fellow members.

There are some additional resources for those struggling with Internet pornography. One is to purchase a computer filter and have a friend download and secure it with a password not to be shared with you. Another is an accountability service that will send a report of every site you visit online to two accountability friends. This can be used in conjunction with a filter.

The company we keep can hurt or help us in our efforts. The purpose of any friendship is for people to lift each other up, not to drag each other down. If friends lead us into sin, they are not true friends and it is necessary to find those who would be true friends.

Our support system does not just stop with professionals and friends. There is a whole other category of a different set of professionals and friends. We call them the saints. These holy men and women inspire us by their heroic lives, give us an example to be imitated and help us by their

constant intercession. The Blessed Virgin Mary shows us what it means to be faithful to God in purity of heart. She is our Mother Most Pure, Mother Most Chaste, Mother Inviolable, Mother undefiled and with her prayers helps us to follow her Son in truth.

St. Joseph is similarly invoked as Chaste and Just. As patrons of our Diocese I constantly ask for their assistance and guidance and now I ask for their help for all those struggling with pornography.

St. Maria Goretti (1890-1902), and St. Charles Lwanga (d. 1886), are but two examples of young people who were martyred rather than give in to sexual impurity. Other saints are known for their conversion from a sinful life. They are models for us of what is possible when we give ourselves over to Christ's transforming grace. May the faithfulness and chastity of these heavenly friends lead us to greater fidelity and chastity according to our state in life.

Let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people. (1 Chron 19:13): Take action.

There is much at stake here. This is a problem that calls for action from all of us: individually and as the Church.

To those who struggle with pornography – Do not give up! This may be an occasional problem, an outright addiction or a problem somewhere in between. Wherever you may be, be honest with yourself. Seek the Sacrament of Penance. Find another trustworthy and dependable person to assist and support you.

Examine your life and see what disposes you to this behavior. Get a computer filter and an accountability system. Professional counseling is another important help. The support group sponsored by our Diocese functions as a landing pad to help people in the healing process. Persevere and don't lose heart!

To parents – Your role in the lives of your children is irreplaceable. Your task is twofold: to protect and to equip. There are many things you can do to protect your children. You have locks on the doors of your home to protect them from unwanted strangers. Your computers are unlocked doors to your children unless you establish some securities.

- Keep the computer in a public part of the house.

- Equip your Internet program with a password so your children cannot access the Internet unless you log on.

- Get a computer filter.

- Be proactive. Do not assume such things only happen in other families.
- Before allowing your child to spend the night at a friend's house, ask the parents if they have a filter on their computer.

This problem is much larger than the Internet. In addition to published pornography, there are chat rooms, iPods and camera cell phones. These can easily be misused and become a means of exposing children and young people to pornography.

Blogs pose another problem. If your child has a blog, visit it often. See to it that no addresses, phone numbers or other types of personally identifying information are listed nor any lewd or suggestive materials. Some blog sites can be set so that only chosen friends may access the site. Protection is the first important step.

The second step is also important: Equip your children to deal with a world where so much pornography is so easily available. To keep filters and other security measures on your computer is necessary, but eventually your children will be around an unfiltered computer. Will they at that point be sufficiently educated and morally strong to resist this evil?

At appropriate moments parents have the responsibility to teach their children about the beauties of our God-given sexuality and the truth of sexual morality. This calls for study of the Church's teaching, and right living on the part of the parents. It must be admitted that the widespread use of artificial contraceptives has had a devastating and systemic effect on the family and the culture. Parents who have not yet come to grips with the responsible use of their own married sexuality will find it more difficult to communicate effectively to their children about the right ordering of these vital human powers – powers which have their most significant expression in lifelong love directed toward the procreation of life.

Pray together as a family. Go to Mass and to Confession together. Have meals together. Set rules and regulations about the use of the phone, TV, video games, and the Internet. Parents, teach your children about the blessedness of pure, chaste love, and help them find good reading.

You cannot keep them from all of the dangers they will eventually face, but you can equip them to deal with such dangers.

To pastors, priests and deacons – You serve on the front line with the People of God. People need your moral leadership and guidance. Do not be afraid to speak out on this topic. Use modesty and prudence, but do not fail to remind all of us of the dangers to our soul this evil represents. Teach the Church's truth about sexual morality and responsibility with clarity and encouragement. Speak about the beauty of chastity to which we are called.

Do so for the good of your people; to support those working to live chastity as well as those who are in difficulty.

Catholics can and should work with other Christians and other people of good will in raising awareness, providing education and sharing resources that both address this issue and offer a positive proactive approach.

As ministers of the Sacrament of Penance, priests are in a unique position to help people who struggle with this problem and to offer them hope and healing. Study and reflect on this weighty pastoral challenge so you may better serve those who seek your help. Provide many opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Preach on the necessity of this Sacrament.

Unfortunately, this issue afflicts clergy of many Christian traditions, including our own. If you struggle with this, please get help not only for the sake of yourself but for those whom you serve in Jesus' name.

To teachers, administrators and parish staff – Each of you in a unique way are valued members of the Church's team and the Church needs your help in fighting this evil. By your chosen work you have a role to play in building up the Body of Christ. Teachers, please be willing to teach and share good moral values and do not be afraid to have discussions with parents, encouraging them in their responsibilities as parents.

School administrators, you are in a unique place to provide guidance and education first to your faculty and then to your school community. Consider having an in-service day dedicated to this topic. Make sure school computer labs are adequately protected.

Youth ministers are specially positioned to help young people who may open up to you. Familiarize yourself with the available resources for help, and assist young people in turning to their parents and family members who have a unique responsibility to form their children in these matters.

To those in the communications media –You are stewards of powerful developments of communication and technology. These developments can be used to build up humanity and human solidarity. They can also isolate people, drag them down and lead them into a way of living that is less human. Please use these developments of communication and technology to edify the public.
