

Assemblies of God Tackles Problem Of Porn Addiction Among Ministers

The denomination says it will embrace guidelines to deal with the 'dramatic increase' of ministers lured by pornography

Pornography and sexual addiction among ministers is a volatile issue faced by evangelical and liberal denominations alike. "The problem is no better in Pentecostal churches," says Steve Gallagher, founder of Pure Life Ministries.

A national survey reveals a somber statistic: About 20 percent of all ministers are involved in the behavior. The Assemblies of God (AG) is tackling the

issue through an eight-member committee chaired by Almon M. Bartholomew, a member of its executive presbytery.

"We are developing a policy on how to deal with ministers who have fallen prey to pornography such as on the Internet," Bartholomew told Charisma. "Both preventive and corrective measures are being recommended."

Levels of rehabilitation and restoration will also be proposed, another AG official reported. The committee's report was presented to the denomination's executive presbytery for discussion and possible further action during business meetings in September. General Superintendent Thomas E. Trask chairs the 17-member body.

"Our moral discipline problem among ordained ministers has not shown any increase as a fellowship," Trask told Charisma. "But any percent is too much. We want to warn and forewarn our ministers."

The executive presbytery will act upon the committee's findings and recommendations during 2001. A discipline policy will differentiate between clergy who dabble a few times in pornography and those who are habitual abusers. "We want to restore and discipline fairly," Trask said. "We believe in restoration and help."

At a July meeting in Springfield, Mo., Richard D. Dobbins, a Christian psychologist and the

president of Emerge Ministries, addressed 193 AG leaders about dealing with sexual problems in the ministry.

"There has been a dramatic increase of ministers involved with pornography since cyberporn was introduced," Dobbins said, noting that pornographic material has even been discovered on church computers.

Emerge Ministries has helped hundreds of ministers from all denominations find deliverance through intense biblical-based counseling and the power of the Holy Spirit. Addiction to cyberporn can take hold in a matter of hours or days, Dobbins said. But rehabilitation from habitual pornography takes six to 18 months, just to get free.

"The battle is to stay free," he pointed out. Dobbins is a realist who doesn't mince words about dealing with sex.

"The church needs to be more transparent on this issue," he said. "Addiction to pornography and masturbation is increasingly common among Christian males in our society. Once a person is addicted,

marriage will not cure this problem. A person addicted to pornography faces a more complex recovery than an adulterer."

Dobbins believes the divine purposes of human sexuality are for creation of the marriage bond, reproduction, and recreation of the husband and wife.

"The church tends to deal with sexual issues by ignoring them, denying them and repressing them," he said. "Only 10 percent of Christian couples talk about their sex life."

Gallagher told AG chaplains at a conference in August how his sexual addiction burned out of control for 20 years.

"Lustful living is hellish living," he said. "Jesus set me free."

On the verge of suicide, he experienced the delivering power of Jesus Christ while working as a deputy for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's office. After leaving the department he attended an AG Bible school and founded Pure Life Ministries with his wife, Kathy.

"I learned that overcoming sexual sin was a process of maturing as a Christian," he said. "Godly contentment quenches the fire of lust."

He has talked openly on 48 Hours, The Oprah Winfrey Show, Focus on the Family and The 700 Club about how God delivered him.

Gallagher believes that the church today suffers from a partylike atmosphere.

“We’ve lost our hunger for holiness,” he said. “How come we don’t hear the word sanctification anymore?”

Pure Life provides resource materials, sponsors support groups and offers a 12-week program of weekly telephone-counseling sessions called Overcomers-At-Home. It also operates a live-in program that lasts from six to 12 months and has ministered to more than 500 men.