

# Internet Pornography – the New Crack Cocaine

By Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan, *People of God* November 2014

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Over 100 priests participated in the Annual Priest Convocation held in Taos from October 6 to October 9, 2014. It was wonderful to be with all of the priests and to pray together and to hear a very interesting series of talks by Dr. Peter Kleponis on the subject of pornography addiction. Dr. Kleponis is a leading Catholic expert in the effort to help people who are addicted to pornography.

Pornography is the depiction of erotic behavior intended to cause sexual excitement. It is using others for one's own sexual pleasure. Those depicted in pornography are indeed unhappy people and Dr. Kleponis said that porn stars are usually dead by the age of 37. They get caught up in drugs and alcohol and lose their jobs.

Pornography is a significant problem for a large number of men. The priests hearing confession often have to deal with this problem trying to help men become free of the difficulty. Internet porn is the new crack cocaine in terms of the addictive power of it. Dr. Kleponis said it has become so popular because of the availability, affordability and can be anonymous.

Pornography plays a big role in over half of all divorces according to the experts. It is not harmless adult entertainment. It is degrading and sinful. It hurts young men's ability to communicate with women in a healthy way. It often hurts husbands in their relationships with their wives.

It is indeed an addictive substance, similar to drugs and alcohol, and should be avoided. It fosters selfishness and narcissism. It leads men to use women. It is disrespectful to everyone involved and can harm future relationships. It is a grave sin that affects one's relationship with God.

There is a physical side to the addiction as well as an emotional side to the addiction. With regard to the physical side, it has an effect on brain. With regard to the emotional side of pornography, it produces selfishness and loneliness; also shame and despair.

In order to become free of the addiction, certainly confession and admission of the sin is important. It is also important to pray for God's help in overcoming this problem. For those who are seriously addicted it may be necessary to take advantage of counseling programs that are available.

Just as there are programs for alcoholics, such as Alcoholics Anonymous with its twelve steps for recovery, there are also support groups to help men and women who are caught up in pornography.

I think it is important for fathers to talk frankly to their sons about the dangers of pornography. The average age boys become exposed to pornography is 11 or 12 years old. This, of course, is the problem of the Internet and the availability of these sinful images on the computer.

The convocation was valuable for the priests in helping them to understand better the causes of pornography and how the priests can help people who are addicted to it. It is very important for priests and deacons to address the issue of pornography with couples preparing for marriage.

The Convocation of Priests is a great opportunity to grow spiritually and to connect with brother priests from around the archdiocese. We thank God for our priests and ask the Lord to help us be effective in promoting virtue and decent living.