

Total Number of Pages: 4
Suggested Title: Prevention of the Use and Effects of Pornography Within the Church
Discipline Paragraph or Resolution Number, if applicable: New Resolution
General Church Budget Implications: None
Global Implications: Yes

Add new resolution

Prevention of the Use of and Effects of Pornography Within the Church

“We affirm that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. . . . We reject all sexual expressions that damage the humanity God has given us as birthright” (Social Principles, ¶ 161*F, H*).

For nearly two decades, the global people called United Methodist have strengthened our understanding and practice of sexual ethics. We have adopted policies and procedures to guide behavior and address brokenness. We have trained, educated, and surveyed lay and clergy leaders of our denomination, conferences, and our congregations. We have spent significant resources in addressing the brokenness from sexual misconduct, from healing individuals and congregations to holding the Church accountable through legal proceedings.

As a resource to the Church, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women takes very seriously its role to alert our leaders, conferences, and congregations of developments in our societies that call us to intensified concern and action. One such concern today is the expansion of the use of pornography, and its appearance in church programs, through the use of church computers and technology, or on church property.

Definition of Pornography

While definitions may vary, the 2016 *Book of Resolutions* offers the following:

“Pornography is sexually explicit material intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal that often portrays violence, abuse, coercion, domination, humiliation, or degradation. In addition, any sexually explicit material that depicts children is pornographic.” (2016 *Book of Resolutions*, “Pornography and Sexual Violence,” p. 126.)

The global expansion of wireless Internet and telecommunications provides limitless availability to pornography. Schools, businesses, and governments are struggling with the use of pornography by employees or students with the organization's equipment.

The National Center for Sexual Exploitation published these troubling indicators in 2017 in the United States:

- 93% of boys and 62% of girls see pornography during adolescence;
- 64% of 13-24 year olds actively seek out pornography each week or more often;
- 88% of the scenes from 50 of the most popular pornographic videos contained physical violence, and 49% contained verbal aggression;
- 46 separate studies report that exposure to pornography increases risk of committing sexual offenses and enabling rape myths;
- Girls aged 14-19 who view pornography are at a higher risk of becoming victim to sexual harassment and assault;
- Viewing pornography creates negative body images for women and more critical attitudes in men of their sexual partner;
- Women viewing pornography are more likely to be susceptible to believing rape myths;
- Marital rape is more likely when a partner has been viewing pornography;
- Probability of divorce doubles when a partner has viewed pornography.

(National Center on Sexual Exploitation, "Pornography and Public Health: Research Summary,"

[http://endsexualexploitation.org/wp-content/uploads/NCOSE_Pornography-PublicHealth_ResearchSummary_8-](http://endsexualexploitation.org/wp-content/uploads/NCOSE_Pornography-PublicHealth_ResearchSummary_8-2_17_FINAL-with-logo.pdf)

[2_17_FINAL-with-logo.pdf](http://endsexualexploitation.org/wp-content/uploads/NCOSE_Pornography-PublicHealth_ResearchSummary_8-2_17_FINAL-with-logo.pdf), August 2, 2017). The use of pornography continues to increase as it becomes more accessible (via the Internet, for example), and allows more immediate, realistic, and anonymous sexual contact and gratification (through chat rooms, real-time videos). Research shows it is not an "innocent activity." It is harmful and is generally addictive. Persons who are addicted to pornography are physiologically altered, as is their perspective, relationships with parishioners and family, and their perceptions of girls and women. Persons who are addicted to pornography must be held accountable for the impact of their behavior, yet they also need prayer, care, and therapy. Those laity and clergy in ministerial roles within our churches, conferences, and agencies are just as susceptible to pornography addiction as anyone else.

In the *Harmfulness of Pornography*, Robert Brannon shares the following, now confirmed in social science research:

- a majority of people in the US believe that some “pornography” (such as eroticized rape scenes) influences some men toward real-life sexual aggression;
- young male viewers of pornography become more likely to believe “all women want to be raped”; and
- women are portrayed as stereotypical bodies and sex objects.

Pornography in the Church

A disturbing trend in the Church is the use of pornography by clergy and lay employees and volunteers, even using computers and other equipment owned by or housed within churches and church-related organizations. We are aware of reports of adults sharing pornographic materials with children and youth during church activities, camps, or programs. But beyond being saddened, shocked, and dismayed by these reports, how do we raise awareness among congregational, conference, agency, school or cabinet leaders, and what do we do to identify, stop, prevent, and then heal from recurrence in our communities of faith?

The United Methodist Church declares that the use of pornography in church programs, on church premises or with church property by persons in ministerial roles (lay and clergy) is a form of sexual misconduct, a chargeable offense for laity and clergy in The United Methodist Church.

The General Conference recommends and urges the following actions:

1. that cabinets and boards of ordained ministry include these issues and ministry concerns in sexual ethics training for candidates, appointed pastors, local pastors, and retired pastors;
2. that bishops, cabinets, and chancellors should lead in updating the sexual ethics policies and procedures of conferences and congregations to include use of pornography as a form of sexual misconduct;
3. that laity in positions of leadership in conferences, congregations, agencies, and schools should receive updated training on issues of sexual ethics, including current trends and ways to help persons addicted to pornography;
4. that congregational, annual conference, and agency leaders should receive training on the issues of pornography, especially Internet pornography, and should enact strict oversight of church-owned computers and technology, including periodic technology audits.

5. that seminaries and boards of ordained ministries should provide training to help clergy and lay professionals-in-training avoid addictive or harmful behaviors and to minister effectively with persons addicted to pornography by including issues of sexual misconduct, including pornography, in ethics and ministries courses and training for all students; and

Resources: The Social Principles, ¶ 161F, H, and Q; United Methodist website on sexual ethics, www.umsexualethics.org; Resolution on “Pornography and Sexual Violence,” 2016 *Book of Resolutions*, and Resolutions on “Pornography” and “Sexual Misconduct Within Ministerial Relationships,” 2008 *Book of Resolutions*.

See Social Principles, ¶ 161F and 161Q.

Date: 7/31/2019

Signature of the Petitioner:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dawn Wiggins Hare". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

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