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## Sermon on sex

### Rightly ordered priorities usher in great experience, pastor says

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Sex is not a new topic for Granger Community Church, the 5,000-member so-called megachurch across from SuperTarget. In fact, the Rev. Mark Beeson can offer exact numbers. In the last 400 weekends, sex has been the topic 15 times.

Beginning Feb. 25 and 26 and lasting through March, Granger Community is again tackling the not-often-discussed-in-church subject with a five-part sermon series titled "Pure Sex." This time, however, its sex talk has garnered mega attention, including a spot on national news -- all thanks, it seems, to the billboards that advertise the series.

The ads show two pairs of feet peeking out from beneath a sheet. The only accompanying text is a Web site: [www.mylamesexlife.com](http://www.mylamesexlife.com). The four billboards are scattered throughout the area.

Beeson says they had a few calls from people who took issue with the strategy and the topic.

"(But) if you want to communicate in this culture, you have to use images; you have to use relevant arts," Beeson says.

He adds that they have not had any negative feedback from their ministry's target (the church



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has long worked to attract the "unchurched"). As for questioning the topic, he thinks it's counterintuitive.

"I am surprised, quite honestly, that the topic is questioned in a world where so many suffer so much heartache, sadness and betrayal because of inappropriate sexual activity. I mean, God invented sex. It seems to me that we should talk about it," he says.

Myamesexlife.com, which got about 10,000 visits in its first two weeks, takes viewers through a quick video. The film features still shots of young, attractive people. Pop-up text says that sex shouldn't make a person feel empty or alone, that it's supposed to be fun.

Then the church's home page appears, offering more information about "Pure Sex." The site states that "Sex wasn't invented in a dark alley behind a porn shop" and that "God wants you to have GREAT SEX."

Undoubtedly, some of those who pointed and clicked may have thought the naked feet were a prelude to something risqué. However, the series' first installment was anything but explicit, despite the fact that its title, "The Greatest Sex You'll Ever Have," sounds like something that would grace the cover of "Cosmopolitan."

In fact, Beeson recommended that kids from sixth grade on up should stay for the program while those younger could attend the children's service. (He did, however, leave the final decision up to their parents.) The sermon was certainly PG, although it did not shy away from the topic of desire and temptation.

Services at Granger Community take place in a cavernous room complete with jumbo video screens. The church boasts an impressive band that's amped up and plays in a contemporary style. At last weekend's service, it covered the current hits "Stickwitu" by the Pussycat Dolls

and "Stay With You" by John Legend.

The evening began with a short film, which opened with a shot of a woman's toes, freshly painted red, playing with a dresser handle. The camera pulls back to show she is seated on the floor, leaning back against a bed, acting coy. She is on the phone with a man who is at work. The two flirt, plan a date.

The punchline is that they are not having an affair, as the audience assumes, but are actually married. As the giggles subsided, Beeson took center stage. He launched the night with a big question.

"How do I handle desire?"

Beeson introduced the discussion by explaining where he himself was coming from. He said he is a man whose greatest desire is to serve the Lord and that fact would guide the entire topic of sex.

Beeson offered a number of statistics on teen pregnancy, unwed mothers, first-date sex and older singles who seemed to have given up on marriage.

"Sexual appetite -- how do we handle that? ...

"What Scripture says is we should order our desires, order and prioritize," Beeson said.

Of his own priorities, Beeson left no doubt. Loving God is No. 1. He went on to quote Matthew: "Seek first the kingdom of God." Any desire that usurps or interferes with that is temptation.

As an example, he described the guy who should start a savings account but is derailed by the sale on golf balls.

Beeson then discussed the three stages of sinking into sin and the four ways to break free of

temptation. (One suggestion was "Gouge Your Eye Out." Matthew said if your eye causes lust, gouge it out. In 2006, Beeson said, this might mean throwing out your computer to free yourself from pornography.)

Never afraid to make things personal, Beeson shared one of his battles with temptation. His story began with an old photo filling the jumbo screen, a picture of him and his wife, Sheila (then his fiancé), in matching baby blue polyester '70s attire. He described a moment, several months before the wedding, when he reached for her hand at the movies and accidentally grabbed her thigh.

"Time froze. Time just stopped. I experienced a chemical bath in my brain," Beeson said.

"It was good that I had already decided what my greatest desire was. My greatest desire was to live a life pleasing to God. ... I wanted to be a man Sheila respected."

The tempted hand went no farther.

All of this led up to the big finale, the answer to the session's title.

"The greatest sex you'll ever have," according to Beeson, is "rightly ordered sex."

(Which is probably not what people were thinking when they first saw those bare feet.)

The reverend, in other words, was not exactly butting his way into people's bedrooms. His guide to great sex seemed to be all about getting the soul in line. It was far less concerned with the body.

Much of the crowd exiting last weekend's service reacted positively to the program and Beeson's sermon. They were far from shocked.

"I'm so used to them being radical and off the

wall that it didn't really surprise me," longtime member Katie Mroczek said. The 24-year-old has been married three years.

"I think he handled it really well. ... I didn't know what route he was going to take with it, but it was very tasteful," her husband, Brad, said.

Singles seemed to find the message helpful as well.

"I think it was interesting how he attached life lessons along with it as opposed to just sticking with sex," commented 26-year-old David Troyer, also a member of the church. "As far as ordering our lives in an honorable way, I think I took more from that than when he was talking specifically about sex."

Beeson is used to hearing criticisms about his church -- that it is only entertainment or too concerned with making church attractive to the masses. (The five services that took place on Feb. 25 and Feb. 26 drew a combined total of 7,300 people.)

"What we want to do is make every service tremendously helpful. ... We call every series an on-ramp. People need ways to access the ministry," he says. Earlier this year, for example, they had a series on money.

As for sex, he has no doubts about it being a viable topic for Granger Community.

"What we have is an entire culture immersed, bathed, in sexual images, and we must address the issue. Hollywood will set the agenda, or church will set the agenda," Beeson says.

"I like the movies, but I don't want to form my sex life based on (them)."

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## 'Pure Sex' series

**"The Language of Lust,"** March 4-5

**"Straight Talk for Men and Women,"** March 11-12

**"What Happens in Vegas WON'T Stay in Vegas,"** March 18-19

**"Porn: What's the Big Deal?"** March 25-26

Every weekend there are five identical services, Saturday at 5:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. and Sunday at 8:45 a.m., 10:15 a.m. and 11:45 a.m. Granger Community Church is at 630 University Drive E., Granger. For more information call (574) 243-3500 or visit

[www.gccwired.com](http://www.gccwired.com).



**The service began with a short film starring church members. In it, a woman with a wedding ring is seen speaking seductively on the phone to a man. In the end, the crowd is surprised to discover that the flirty couple is married.**

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**At Saturday's 5:30 p.m. service, about 1,900 people experience the music and sermon live on Granger Community Church's jumbo screens and stage.. Altogether, about 7,300 attended the opening of the "Pure Sex" series on Feb. 25 and 26.**

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**Faith Stevens, a volunteer vocalist for Granger Community Church, sings an upbeat tune. The band also played two current hits of the day, “Stay With You” by John Legend and “Stickwitu” by the Pussycat Dolls, which matched the night’s theme.**

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**Granger Community Church worship leader Dan Vukmirovich opens the service with Christian rock.**

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Tribune Photos/JANAR STEWART