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## Highlighting porn's steep price Sermon tackles Goliath-size problem



At Granger Community Church, Craig Gross delivers a sermon titled "Porn: What's the Big Deal?" Gross is the co-founder of XXXchurch, an anti-porn ministry. Tribune Photos/SU ANDERSON



A Bible in one hand, Gross addresses the congregation on the dangers of pornography. Porn, he says, leads down a "dead-end

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About five years ago, a young man named Mike Foster got a message from God.

It was one word, very clear.

"Pornography."

Not one to ignore such a call, Foster recruited his friend Craig Gross, and this pair of young preachers set out to start an anti-porn ministry. Their efforts have earned national media attention and a good deal of praise, as well as a heap of criticism.

At churches around the country, they're known as the guys who host "porn Sunday." They hope their Web site [www.xxxchurch.com](http://www.xxxchurch.com) will attract visitors looking for something else. They attend porn conventions, not to picket outside, but to sit at a booth and hand out Bibles. This weekend, Gross came to Granger Community Church, where his message and methods were welcomed by the Rev. Mark Beeson.

GCC is a 5,000 member church that plays contemporary music, has jumbo video screens and uses elements of pop culture to get its message across. "Porn: What's the Big Deal?" was the final sermon in the five-part "Pure Sex" series at GCC.

When Beeson launched the series, he said sex was a neglected topic in church. Pornography, he believes, is another. It's challenging of the church to address current issues, he says, because in today's world they're changing all the time.

With the Internet providing a 24-hour pipeline of pornography into the home, however, the time for discussion is here.

"Jesus said you can't put new wine in old wineskins. New

### Internet porn stats

Number of pornographic Web sites: 4.2 million (12 percent of all Web sites)

- U.S. adults who regularly visit pornographic Web sites: 40 million
  - Breakdown of male/female visitors to pornographic sites: 72 percent, male; 28 percent, female
  - 8- to 16-year-olds who have viewed porn online: 90 percent
- Source: Family Safe Media

street." ministry is needed to address new issues," he says. Of course, not everyone agrees. Recently, Gross and Foster ordered Bibles with the words "Jesus Loves Porn Stars" on the cover.

The publisher refused to print them.

Some see the two men as inspired and cutting-edge crusaders. Others see them as sensational or worse. (Their Web site features a page full of passionate hate mail.)

According to Beeson, that's what happens when you lift your head above the crowd. Jesus, too, was criticized for sitting down with unpopular groups of people, such as tax collectors. He took His share of heat.

"We will face increasing difficulty as we communicate to people who are in the grasp of virtual reality and we try to tell them that real relationships with real people ultimately matter more," Beeson says. Sex, he says, is easier than love. They have to show people that love is better.

When Gross takes the stage at GCC, his tone is conversational. The power of pornography, he tells the congregation, is without question.

It's a \$13-billion-a-year industry. Sixty percent of Web site visits are related to pornography. After Paris Hilton's sex tape went public, she rocketed to superstardom.

When women see that happen, they sense porn's power, he says. This is not a problem just for men.

"It's so accepted in our culture as mainstream, and yet, it's so difficult to talk about. It's a conversation we need to have today ... before porn takes you places you never thought you'd go," Gross says. People go bankrupt, get fired, destroy their marriages, lose their families over porn, he says.

Gross's discussion hits the issue across the spectrum. He questions the innocence of a magazine such as "Maxim," which he calls "porn with training wheels." He tells a story about Bill, a corrections officer, married for 16 years, who was sentenced to five years in prison for distributing child pornography.

Gross ministered to Bill. He even picked up Bill and drove him to jail.

The guy with the Maxim, Gross suggests, is on the same road as Bill -- and it's a road that goes nowhere.

Recently, Gross had a debate with porn star Ron Jeremy at Northeastern University. Jeremy got wild cheers. Gross got booed. "Sure, those college kids might not end up in jail (like Bill), but they'll end up somewhere on that dead-end street," he says.

Gross and Foster have come up with at least one way to fight technology with technology. Their Web site features free "accountability" software, which goes a step further than a filter. Installed on a computer, it makes a list of questionable sites visited and e-mails it to a

chosen partner, someone who will help keep tabs.

"Yeah, it will change things. ... Decide today that it's worth it to make these small sacrifices," Gross says.

Gross ends with a video clip of Michelle, an adult film star. She's young. She went to a Christian high school. He is interviewing her at a porn convention.

"I know it's wrong, but I still do it. Money says a lot. ... I still believe in God and I believe he's (ticked) off at me, but he still loves me," she says. Michelle says she'll stop someday when she has enough money.

Gross says it's a familiar refrain. I'll stop when I'm married, when I graduate, when I get the job. Don't think that way, he warns, or porn will take you places you never thought you'd go.

"God's not ticked off at (Michelle)," Gross says. "He just has a better plan for her."

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