From [redacted] of The United Methodist Church, pp. 148 – 153

2081. Pornography and Sexual Violence

Throughout the Bible, themes exist that highlight the imperfect nature of humanity and the hope for redemption through our relationship as God's children held in God's loving arms. The Old Testament laws of purity invite an understanding of the body created in God's image and accountable to God through right relationship. Christ shared with us a vision of the world that confirms our vulnerability and affirms sacred personhood. Jesus Christ provides a path to a loving and protective relationship with God and with others; treating our neighbors and families with love thereby fostering healthy physical and emotional relationships. John Wesley described the path to right relationship with God toward achieving invitation into God's kingdom as a journey toward Christian perfection. We struggle mightily throughout life to move toward that vision of Christian perfection in an imperfect world.

In the midst of our imperfect world we grieve at actions of sexual exploitation and pornography. Our Social Principles declare that, "We deplore all forms of commercialization, abuse, and exploitation of sex. We call for strict global enforcement of laws prohibiting sexual exploitation of children and for adequate protection, guidance, and counseling for abused children. All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence. The Church should support the family in providing age-appropriate education regarding sexuality to children, youth, and adults."

The issue of pornography has undergone a dramatic change over the past two decades, one that shifts the definition, increases the complexity, and requires a new level of discussion. The use of violent, aggressive themes accompanying sexually explicit material has continued to increase. Television, the Internet, and emerging wireless technologies have made sexually aggressive media widely available, particularly to children and youth. Pornography is frequently relied upon as a source of information about sexuality. The church is called to lead society in articulating an ethic that affirms God's good gift of human sexuality and that protects the vulnerable from sexual violence and coercion.

Common understandings of pornography no longer serve us well. Some of us may believe pornography is a social evil because it is sexual, while others may defend pornography as a universal right to freedom of expression because it is sexual. Yet the truth is that pornography is not about sexuality; it is about violence, degradation, exploitation, and coercion.

While there is not widespread agreement on definitions, the following are suggested as the basis for dialogue:

Pornography is sexually explicit material that portrays violence, abuse, coercion, domination, humiliation, or degradation for the purpose of arousal. In addition, any sexually explicit material that depicts children is pornographic.

The impact of pornography on behavior is difficult to measure. While there is little evidence that consuming pornography causes an individual to commit a specific act of sexual aggression, several

studies suggest that such consumption is addictive and may predispose an individual to sexual offenses, and that it supports and encourages sexual offenders to continue and escalate their violent and abusive behavior. Few dispute the fact that a society that supports multibillion dollar industries promoting sexual violence as entertainment and portraying the abuse and torture of women and children in a sexual context is a society in trouble.

"Pornography, by its very nature, is an equal opportunity toxin. It damages the viewer, the performer, and the spouses and the children of the viewers and the performers. It is a distortion of power and fosters an unhealthy understanding about sex and relationships. It is more toxic the more you consume, the "harder" the variety you consume and the younger and more vulnerable the consumer. The damage is both in the area of beliefs and behaviors. The belief damage may include Pornography Distortion, Permission-Giving Beliefs and the attitudes about what constitutes a healthy sexual and emotional relationship. The behavioral damage includes psychologically unhealthy behaviors, socially inappropriate behaviors and illegal behaviors."[1]

Pornography is inextricably linked to the oppression of women. Its appeal will continue as long as sexual arousal is stimulated by images of power and domination of one person over another, most often male over female. Pornography is also fundamentally linked to racism; women of color are invariably portrayed in the most violent and degrading ways. The destructive power of pornography lies in its ability to ensure that attitudes toward sexuality will continue to be influenced by images that negate human dignity, equality, and mutuality. Pornography contributes to alienation in human relationships and distorts the sexual integrity of both women and men.

The expansion of pornography onto the Internet in recent years has made access easier for providers and consumers of pornography, and especially for adults who sexually abuse children. There is mounting evidence that pedophiles routinely use the Internet to lure children into their hands. A staggering number of chat rooms promote rape, incest, sex with children, child prostitution, and other criminal and violent behaviors.

Pornographic materials are being transmitted in cyberspace on a global scale, permitting access by both adults and children. Disclaimers warning of graphic materials on these sites have not prevented children from viewing them. Most sites offer free "previews" of graphic, obscene, and violent images and are linked to other sites. According to the United States Commission on Pornography, 12- to 17-year-old adolescents are among the largest consumers of pornography.

Those portrayed in Internet pornographic images are typically women, especially women of color. Female bodies are treated as objects and commodities, and female body parts are dismembered and magnified for pornographic effect and cyber-sexual consumption. The global nature of the Internet and its lack of regulation enables such materials that may be legal in one country to be accessed in a country

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[1] Layden, Dr. Mary Anne, Co-Director, Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program, Center for Cognitive Therapy University of Pennsylvania, Testimony, The Science Behind Pornography Addiction, US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation Web site, (expert witness testimony), http://commerce.senate.gov/hearings/witnesslist.cfm?id=1343 (18 May 2005).

where they may be illegal. National boundaries are easily crossed, and there is no international code of conduct to monitor pornographic material.

Care should be taken that children and youth are protected from pornographic materials. The supervision and love of Christian parents and other caring adults, supported by the extended church family, are the primary source of sex education. A comprehensive approach to sex education offers an additional basis for countering pornography. Children, youth, and adults need opportunities to discuss sexuality and learn from quality sex education materials in families, churches and schools. An alternative message to pornography, contained in carefully prepared age-appropriate sex education materials that are both factual and explicit and portray caring, mutually consenting relationships between married adults, is needed. Materials should be measured by the intentions expressed and the goals served, not by the degree of explicitness of sexual imagery. If we fail to provide such materials, accompanied by parental and adult supervision, we risk reliance of children and youth on pornography as the primary source of information about sexuality.

We support laws that protect women and children and incarcerate those who are purveyors in the "industry" that instigates and expands child and adult pornography activities.

Addiction to adult pornography affects marital relationships, familial relationships, and may lead to criminal behavior. The addict must be treated with the best practices toward complete and total recovery and rehabilitation to ensure the best chance at future healthy relationships. Where rehabilitation and recovery fail we stand ready to support the spouses and families of addicts with love and care.

Addiction to child pornography is a deviant and criminal behavior that must be addressed through rehabilitation and legal means. We deplore the use of the criminal justice system to address addiction; however, when the pornography addict resorts to criminal behavior that harms or hurts another person, especially children, or should rehabilitation not succeed, we support legal means by which the addict is held accountable and monitored by the legal system so as to protect the addict and the victims from future harm.

The United Methodist Church is already on record naming sexual violence and abuse as sins and pledging to work for their eradication ("Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse," 2000 [redacted] ; "Violence Against Women and Children," 2008 [redacted]) and stating that "children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse" (Social Principles, ¶ 162C).

Understanding pornography to portray violence, abuse and humiliation in a sexual setting, and understanding any sexually explicit depiction of children to be pornographic, we affirm that The United Methodist Church is opposed to pornography. We further affirm our commitment to quality sex education. To address pornography at its root causes we encourage United Methodists to join in:

1. action toward developing effective societal and governmental policies that eradicate child pornography, adult exploitation and enslavement;
2. education to encourage healthy relationships and behaviors;

3. compassion and encouragement for rehabilitation and recovery of addicts, their families, and victims;
4. sensible laws that focus on a restorative justice model; and encourage incarcerated persons to pursue rehabilitation and recovery.

We call upon The United Methodist Church, its general agencies, annual conferences and local churches, to:

1. educate congregations about the issue of pornography, especially Internet pornography, and enact strict oversight of church-owned computers;
2. seek strategies to reduce the proliferation of pornography;
3. work to break the link between sex and violence;
4. monitor and limit access by children and youth to pornography and sexually explicit material;
5. participate in efforts to ban child pornography and protect child victims;
6. promote the use of United Methodist and other quality sex education materials that help children and youth gain an understanding of and respect for mutually affirming sexuality;
7. provide educational sessions for parents on minimizing the risk to children from Internet usage. Encourage parents to establish rules for teenagers and children; encourage parents to utilize screening technology;
8. call for social responsibility in all media, including the Internet and in all public libraries, and work with local, national, and international groups that advocate for global media monitoring of images of women, men and children; and
9. participate in ecumenical and/or community efforts that study and address the issue of pornography.

ADOPTED 1988
REVISED AND ADOPTED 2000
REVISED AND READOPTED 2008
RESOLUTION #42, 2004 BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS
RESOLUTION #36, 2000 BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS

See Social Principles, ¶ 161G.