



Living in the shadows

By Sherri Brown, Communication, GBC

Published March 16, 2006



Kelly DurhamIndex

As Darrell Davidson* scrolled through his email messages at his church office, he was shocked to see a pornographic site pop up. He immediately deleted it.

A week later a similar site popped up. This time Davidson, senior pastor of a large Georgia Baptist church, didn't delete the site immediately.

That was the beginning.

Day after day, he found more and more improper sites on his email. He found out later that once someone opens a pornographic Web site from an email address, that address is recorded and sold worldwide to other sites.

As more and more sites appeared, sometimes he deleted them. Sometimes he looked at them.

Signs

Pornography wasn't something the 50-year-old pastor had ever thought much about. He never sought it; he never paid for it. But he began looking at it more and more.

"You know it's wrong, but it would be 7 p.m. at the office and no one was there and I'd go [to the sites]. I struggled with it. I would go two or three weeks without looking at it. I'd confess it to God and promise never to do it again," he said.

But he always went back.

Davidson was exhibiting classic signs of a sexual addiction, according to Patrick Carnes, author of *In the Shadows of the Net*, and an expert on sex addictions, including Internet pornography.

According to Carnes, signs of an Internet addiction include preoccupation; loss of control; promises to stop; consequences, and shame.

The consequences for Davidson came just months after looking at the first site. A staff member went through his computer history and found the pornographic sites. He shared the information with deacons and other church members.

"I admit I lied to him when he first called and asked me about it," Davidson said. But the next day he confessed to his wife and then called the chairman of the deacon board

and admitted it to him.

“It could have been handled in a much more discreet way, but the deacon chair wanted to tell the vice-chair and other officers and then they had to tell all the deacons. You know how secretive that is,” he said.

In the end, Davidson resigned from his church, but he also went looking for help.

“I was aggressive in finding help,” Davidson said. He spent three weeks at Samford University at a minister’s sabbatical program. While there he also went to counseling with his wife through Good Samaritan Counseling in Birmingham.

Then the couple attended the Ministry to Ministers foundation.

“That was one of the most helpful things we experienced. It’s a weeklong seminar for ministers and wives who have gone through forced termination. They bring in psychiatrists and we share our story with a small group of ministers and their wives. It was very practical and down to earth,” Davidson said.

Being susceptible

While Davidson readily admits that what he did was “nothing but sin,” the therapy he did later made him realize why he was so susceptible to the sin of pornography.

“I learned that I thought I had to do it all. We’d had some stressful issues we dealt with at the church for several years. I felt a deep responsibility for everything; I was responsible for keeping everybody happy. As a result, I was very popular. But I allowed myself to be isolated.

“I didn’t take time off. Staff relationships were distant; my kids were gone; my wife and I weren’t having bad times, but we’d lost the spark. I later discovered that the person on that screen was the only thing in my life that didn’t want anything from me. I don’t want to excuse this, it was just plain sin, but this was a part of what hooked me.”

Help available

Internet pornography is just one of many issues that affects ministers. The Georgia Baptist Convention offers help for ministers in crisis through church-minister relations.

When a pastor in crisis calls, Danny Watters, specialist with GBC Church-Minister Relations, sets up a restoration team of a ministry resource consultant or associational missionary, two staff members from GBC and a close friend of the minister.

- **58 % of the world’s email is spam mail**
- **18 % of spam mail contains adult content**
- **25 % of adult pornography sites hinder the user from leaving the site**
- **70 million different individuals view at least one adult website each week**
- **2,000 % increase of online pornography between 1998 and 2003**
- **80 % of children using email receive pornographic spam daily**

Source: Focus on the Family

“We meet about every 30 days to evaluate where they are and what they need to be doing. We also provide counseling and if they are terminated from a church, we try to help them through their transitional period,” Watters said.

Church-Minister Relations also works with ministers with drug and alcohol addictions, marriage problems and other crises.

back to being a pastor. It might mean they'll work in a different area of ministry, but restoration is the goal," Watters said.

For pastors who are feeling stress, but are not in a crisis yet, Watters recommends they take some time off.

"If they need a time of reflection, we can assist them in finding a place of rest for a week," Watters said. "We'll get them help. We're concerned about these men."

** Names have been changed.*

Resources available:

- **GBC Church-Minister Relations provides a variety of services for ministers in crisis. For information, see the website www.gabaptist.org. The website includes a list of recommended counselors across the state. Ministers may also call (800) RING-GBC.**
- **LifeWay Christian Resources and Pure Online offer an Internet-based recovery program for sexual addiction and pornography that provides anonymity along with a call to accountability. The Web site is www.pureonline.com.**
- **LifeWay Christian Resources also provides a counseling hotline for pastors. It's a confidential number to talk with a counselor about issues in his life. Call (888) 789-1911.**
- **Ministering to Ministers provides a five-day intensive retreat that includes counseling. The program is designed for ministers in conflict or ministers who have experienced forced termination. The conferences are held at various locations including Samford University, Birmingham, Ala. and Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tenn. Charles Chandler, founder of MTM, is a former pastor and president of the Illinois state convention. For information, call (804) 320-6463 or visit the Web site at www.mtmfoundation.org.**
- **Marble Retreat Center also offers a program for church staff members in crisis. The intensive retreat style program is modeled after a psychotherapy center at The Mayo Clinic. For information, call toll-free (888) 216-2725 or visit the Web site at www.marbleretreat.org.**

This article was published in the March 16, 2006 issue of *The Christian Index*, a publication of the Georgia Baptist Convention, and is used by permission.