

Pulled Quote: “As your bishop, and as a spiritual father, I want every home to be safe and every family to be free from the sinful encroachment of pornography. The family is the domestic church, and the home is that sanctuary where Christ abides in our midst as a member of every family.” –Bishop John Folda

Headline: Safe Haven Sunday

Two years ago, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a formal statement called “Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography.” In that document, my brother bishops and I explain: “The use of pornography by anyone in the home deprives the home of its role as a *safe haven* and has negative effects throughout a family’s life and across generations.”

You might recall that I promised an initiative from the Diocese of Fargo to assist families in their own efforts to address the crisis of pornography. To that end, on the weekend of March 2–3, our parishes have been invited to observe “Safe Haven Sunday.” The Office of Marriage and Family Life and many of our local pastors are offering teaching and resources that help individuals and families to make their homes safe havens.

I use the word “crisis” deliberately, because the infiltration of pornography into daily life has become widespread. Here are a few facts. In recent studies 68% of men and 18% of women said they used pornography *at least* once every week. Another 17% of men and 30% of women said they used pornography 1–2 times per month. Most alarmingly, the effects of pornography are not limited to adults. Studies also indicate that 93% of boys and 62% of girls were exposed to pornography before the age of 18. Most experts say that first exposure now comes at a much earlier age, between 8 and 10, and can leave a long-lasting imprint on the developing brain of a child. Finally, 56% of divorces now involve one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic websites. These are just a few of the statistics that should wake us up to a growing problem in our highly networked world.

While pornography once was restricted to the seedy underworld of our society, it has now gone mainstream. It is readily available on nearly all personal computers, tablets, phones, and even regular television. Pornography is winked at as a harmless diversion, but nothing could be further from the truth. It undermines our view of human love and sexuality, and seduces us to look at other persons as objects rather than as sons and daughters created and loved by God. Honest social scientists are increasingly concerned about the effects of pornography, especially on young people, but also on marriage and family life.

Why is the Church so involved in this issue? Some might suggest that we have problems and failings of our own to address, and that is certainly true. However, the pastors of the Church, from the Pope on down, have a grave responsibility for the spiritual and moral lives of the faithful and for the integrity of our homes and families. The rapid spread of pornography is causing a serious moral crisis in our families, and it is our responsibility to address it. As your bishop, and as a spiritual father, I want every home to be safe and every family to be free from the sinful encroachment of pornography. The family is the domestic church, and the home is that sanctuary where Christ abides in our midst as a member of every family. It is my hope that the observance of Safe Haven Sunday will bring some concrete assistance to families as they try to secure their own homes from the corrupting influence of pornography.

If we learned that our homes were affected by a hazardous substance, like natural gas, carbon monoxide, black mold, or something that could cause serious health risks and even death to ourselves and our children, would we not immediately do everything necessary to address the problem? Of course we would. I would suggest that the presence of pornography in our homes is even more dangerous, because it can cause moral sickness and even spiritual death in those who use it. Pornography is contrary to God’s law, and we should do all we can to protect ourselves and our loved ones from its effects.

There are many practical steps we can take to avoid or eliminate the presence of pornography, but we should not forget the spiritual side of this battle. Attending Mass as a family is one sure way to place ourselves and our homes under God’s protection. Receiving the Holy Eucharist and even participating in

Eucharistic adoration can shield us from the attraction of pornography. Regular and unashamed participation in the sacrament of Reconciliation—as a family if possible—is also a beautiful way to bring our sins to Christ for healing, and to eliminate the poison of pornography from our lives. Prayer to our Blessed Mother Mary, for instance praying the Rosary as a family, will also help us to grow in purity and freedom from the snares of pornography.

The good news is that we do not fight this battle alone. We can always turn to the mercy and tender love of Jesus in this struggle. We have the solidarity of our Church family to assist us along the way. I sincerely hope that the faithful of our diocese will take advantage of the materials made available for the upcoming Safe Haven Sunday. Inquire in your own parish or through the Office of Marriage and Family Life of the Diocese of Fargo. Let us not take the safety of our homes and loved ones for granted. Let us do everything possible to create a safe haven where all can enjoy wholesome happiness and spiritual well-being.