

Porn again

The XXXChurch is bringing its mission of fighting porn addiction to Las Vegas

Richard Abowitz

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Yet another small enterprise moves from the Midwest to Vegas. "We launched in 2002 at the Adult Entertainment Expo in Vegas, and we have come back every year for that one porn show, but now I have decided to move the headquarters to Las Vegas," says Craig Gross, head of the XXXChurch, which, despite launching in Vegas, has been based in Michigan. The church ministers to people addicted to porn, largely by attending porn conventions and handing out literature.

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Gross has not only come to where people need his ministry; he also, like entrepreneurs in the private sector, sees unique opportunity for expansion in Vegas. He hopes to use the move to grow his enterprise into new areas. On this topic, he sounds like a porn actress dreaming of a mainstream role:

"The Las Vegas move has a lot less to do with porn than people think," he explains. "While the last seven years have been based on the porn side of conventions, the move to Vegas is about expanding that into other conventions. The problem I have with church is that you build a building and wait for people to come to you. In Las Vegas we bring the church to people where they are at. There is no other town like Las Vegas, where there is a different convention




each week, and we can be at the builder convention, the electronic convention, the fashion-show convention or you name it."

Unlike other Vegas Christian activists focused on adult entertainment, such as Heather Veitch, a former topless dancer who reaches out to strippers, or the former prostitute behind Hookers for Jesus, Gross never watched much porn growing up. "Had I grown up today that would be different. It is very different than when I grew up, thanks to the Internet."

Instead, Gross discovered the pervasiveness of porn among the younger generation as a youth pastor, and decided to take on pornography as his mission. “Young people are all exposed to this through the Internet,” he says. “Porn is not what you are going to find in a healthy sexual relationship. This hurts people. It is a very selfish thing that only pleases you, and it is more damaging than that because it becomes young people’s sexual education. You watch that, and men go back to the video and ignore their wives, because their wives won’t do a certain activity or don’t look a certain way.

“This is a porn generation. I never wanted to be labeled the porn guy, but I could not run from it.”

While the XXXChurch may be coming to Vegas to reach out to electricians and builders, Gross knows he can always fall back on the steady presence of the world’s oldest profession in Vegas to support his ministry: “Yeah, we are moving to Vegas to branch out, and I don’t want porn to define me. But when my parents worry about when I am going to get a real job, well, I feel like I have pretty good job security, because this issue is not going away. Even expanding it still comes down to preventing people from making bad choices, which in Vegas often involves the sex industry.”

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