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Bothell church sponsors anti-pornography weekend

By Erik Lacitis
Seattle Times staff reporter

It was a church event billed as "Porn and Pastries," and some 300 women, mostly in their 20s and 30s, paid \$10 each to attend.

But there were no naked images at the EastLake Community Church in Bothell on Friday night; the baring came when some of those attending told about their private lives.

They were here, in many cases, because of what happens when a woman finds out her spouse or boyfriend has been secretly spending a lot of time looking at porn on the Internet, often while espousing Christian values.

Type in "xxx" on a Google search, and 348 million results come up in 0.05 seconds.

"Porn and Pastries" was part of an anti-porn weekend at the church that included "Porn and Pancakes" for guys and "Porn and Parents" on Saturday, and a "Porn Sunday" today.

It is put on by a national group called xxxchurch.com, founded in 2002 by Craig Gross, 32, who recently moved to Las Vegas from Grand Rapids, Mich.

Vegas is Sin City, after all.

Gross is a former youth pastor who looks very much the part of a rock band's lead singer: skinny, with a cool hairstyle, and taking to the stage in jeans and sneakers. He says he got the idea for the xxxchurch from his youth-ministry days, and hearing about teens and online porn viewing.

Now, he says, his anti-porn site gets 300,000 to 700,000 visitors a month, depending on the publicity it gets.

Porn and Pastries was the first women-only event that the xxxchurch had done, as it stages more than 100 anti-porn gatherings a year, said Gross.

It seemed appropriate that Porn and Pastries — a wide selection of treats were available — was held at EastLake Community Church.



DONNY PAULING

From left, Steve Glisan, Ann Glisan, Shellie Warren and Craig Gross address the "Porn and Pastries" audience Friday.

It draws a young crowd of 2,500 for weekend services at a converted industrial warehouse that looks more like a nightclub than a traditional church. Its 23,000-square-foot auditorium has a stage with a drum set already in place for the rock music that's played, along with three overhead 10- by 20-foot TV screens and a booming sound system.

Among those attending Friday's event was a 31-year-old Seattle woman whose husband told her a year ago, after five years of marriage, that he was looking at porn.

The woman asked several times that her name not be printed. This is not something you want bandied around the neighborhood.

Presumably her husband could have used the "delete browsing history" tool on his computer — although, she said, a woman just has a sense that the man in her life is spending time on those Web sites. The husband decided it was the Christian thing to do to tell his wife.

"Eww, gross," was her reaction, the woman said. "Us women, we don't understand it, although I'm not surprised. I know many men look at porn. But that gives them unrealistic expectations. People in those movies are all done up, look great, and say 'yes' to everything."

She said she's talked with women friends about men looking at porn, and the women universally have the same reaction: "What's wrong with me? Why does he have to look at something else?"

That's why, she said, their home computer now has software that monitors its Web history. If a porn site is detected, a report is sent to the wife, as well as to a friend who's helping them out.

"There is no privacy when you're married," she said.

The women at EastLake got to hear from Gross; from a couple whose husband had had multiple affairs that he said were prompted by porn viewing; and from a woman who said she had had 14 partners and four abortions and now had been celibate for two years.

No sex before marriage is something that EastLake Pastor Ryan Meeks, 30, said "will make a marriage better."

He said he and his wife, Michelle, did have sex before getting married 10 years ago, and that caused problems.

"We were addicted to the illicitness, taboo thing," he said. "We had to train ourselves that it didn't have to be wrong in order to be good."

Another woman attending the event was Heidi Green, 39, of Kirkland.

She's divorced and said that men she dates know fairly quickly that she doesn't believe in sex without marriage.

Asked how many men decide they'll date someone else, Green said, "Probably 90 percent."

If anything, the church events illustrated what has been historically Seattle's split personality about such matters.

This weekend was an anti-porn weekend.

On Oct. 24 and 25, The Stranger is sponsoring "Hump!", advertised as "Seattle's biggest, best and ONLY amateur and locally produced porn festival."

Some years ago, the late local historian Bill Speidel said about this town: "See, Seattle has always had a split personality — the swingers and the Christs. I don't think many people know that the first industry in this town was a whorehouse run by Mother Damnable."

Erik Lacitis: 206-464-2237

or elacitis@seattletimes.com

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