



DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG

Office of the Bishop

March 3, 2019

Dear Friends:

Pornography is not a topic most adults are comfortable speaking about — especially the case when it comes to parents addressing it with their children. Regrettably, it is the topic that's become increasingly necessary to address in our digital age. Too many parents, grandparents, and guardians think that internet-based pornography is beyond the interest of their children. Statistics tells another story, and we must be informed on this matter.

First exposure to internet pornography is often during the elementary school years and often occurs by accident. Picture this: your child typed in the wrong word on social media, your nephew clicked the wrong YouTube video, or your godchild's friend showed him his first sexually explicit image on Instagram. When parents and guardians haven't created an environment where it's safe and welcome to talk about uncomfortable topics, children will often hide these experiences out of shame and embarrassment.

As your Bishop, I am passionate about the domestic church and I want all homes to be safe. It is my sacred duty to protect the children in the Diocese of St. Petersburg from pornography, and it is my holy responsibility to guide and equip individuals and parents with forming children to live virtuous and holy lives online and offline. Pornography creates an impediment to obtaining deep and lasting relationships with Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is to be the center of our very lives, homes, and vocations. Pornography is a bondage and a fake. It is a mockery of true and holy intimacy that is celebrated through the Sacramental life of the Church.

To provide you with tools you need to overcome pornography and to make your home a safe-haven for children and adults — one free of pornography — I have asked all parishes in the Diocese of St. Petersburg to celebrate Safe-Haven Sunday the weekend of March 3rd. Within the context of Mass, parishes in our diocese will provide teaching and resources that will support and protect individuals, marriages, and families in making all homes a safe-haven.

This awareness day is inspired by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' formal statement *Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography*, where 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."

By celebrating this awareness day with the theme *Equipping the Family, Safeguarding Children*, we as a community are saying we want holy, healthy, and safe homes, free of pornography and other online threats that deprive the home of its role as a safe-haven. To help marriages and families, many parishes this weekend will provide each home with a book prepared by our partner, Covenant Eyes, *Equipped: Smart Catholic Parenting in a Sexualized Culture*. Even if your parish is unable to provide a copy of this book, parishioners of every parish can participate in a free, unique seven-day text-to-opt-in program: *The Equipped 7-Day Challenge*. This Challenge provides seven days of emailed practical tips any caring adult can take to create safer digital environments for themselves and our young people. We encourage you to take advantage of these resources and ask that you take the steps suggested to ensure safety and joy for you, your loved ones, and the greater community.

Pornography doesn't need to be fought alone. It is my hope that the resources provided to you on this Safe-Haven Sunday will both encourage and teach all individuals and families dealing with the effects of pornography that loving support is available. It is worth battling pornography for wholeness and purity for you, your spouse, your children, and the future of everyone in our diocese.

Through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth, intercessors of the home, and St. Michael, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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Most Reverend Gregory Parkes
Bishop of St. Petersburg