

Education and Elders' Orders — Restoration Policy Addendum

A denominational policy template for responding to pastoral pornography use, shared as a starting framework for churches and denominations building their own process.

How to use this document: This policy was developed and adopted for real use within a denominational structure. It is shared here as a starting template, not a finished document — adapt titles, roles, timelines, and denominational specifics (e.g. "Conference President," "Education and Elders' Orders") to fit your own church's or denomination's governance structure before adopting it formally.

This policy relates to restoration from use of pornography.

We believe two things:

- That use of pornography is sin.
- That Christ has come to free us from sin by destroying the work of the Devil in our lives.

We also believe that the issue of why good men fail in this area can be complex and that Christ desires not only to forgive sin, but to heal both the causes and the effects of it in the life of the pastor.

Therefore, the emphasis of this restoration policy is on help and restoration. The goal is spiritual victory, a maturity of full Christlikeness in this area. This means that our goal is not simply avoidance, but understanding of the reasons behind the compulsion and an addressing of those reasons through development of spiritual and emotional health.

Because we desire nothing more than to help find wholeness and holiness, we encourage all pastors to put aside shame and fear, and "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16, ESV).

What Levels of Pornography Use Do We Recognize?

1. Curiosity / Experimental Use

The desire to learn about things that may not properly concern a person, but its veiled mystery invites personal searching (Dr. Barber). At this stage, pornography may be equal parts inviting and confusing. At times, the user may feel guilty, but not be habitually using pornography. Yet the temptation may return from time to time, plaguing the user with a strong, unholy curiosity.

If the user will confess at this stage, they will frequently find freedom and victory come easier than at later stages.

How might we respond?

- No suspension of license or ministry

- Encouragement to use filters and tools available
- Intentional prayer and encouragement
- 3–6 months of accountability and abstinence
- Meeting to discuss what was learned, celebrate victory, and discern next steps

2. Unwanted Use

In this stage, the user has a higher level of compulsion, but is actively fighting against sin. There may be periods of weeks or months of victory, followed by instances of sin and failure during times of particular stress or demonic assault — followed by regret and repentance. That this is unwanted may be demonstrated by the presence of tools including filters or accountability, with varying degrees of success.

Additionally, at this stage the user is willing to admit and even proactively confess (without discovery) the sin or failure in his life. He may well testify to saving grace, as his repentance is quick and sincere even after failure.

The important distinction is that the user is not making friends with pornography — he is making war with it. He is actively struggling against sin, though stumbling through occasional use. In this way, he can relate to those struggling against sin in this or other areas of their life, and can proclaim a gracious Savior who is an Advocate “if any man sin” (1 John 2:1). Yet we firmly believe that no minister of God is able to remain at this level, but is called to a victory that overcomes the world-system and its lusts.

How might we respond?

The emphasis of the restoration policy here is on help and restoration; the goal is not simply avoidance, but understanding of the reasons or triggers behind the compulsion and why the habit has power.

- 3–6 months of intense accountability and abstinence (weekly/daily contact, active reporting)
- Requirement to use tools and filters available
- 3–6 months of license probation (with continued ministry if appropriate; under advisement of Elders' Orders restoration team / lead pastor if an assistant is involved)
- 3–6 months of intentional prayer support
- 3–6 months of counseling
- Offer support or counsel to the spouse (as willing)
- Meeting to discuss what was learned, celebrate victory, and discern next steps
- Ongoing reporting requirements

3. Compulsive Use

The user is falling frequently and, in later stages, has begun to succumb to hopelessness and excuses. Periods of victory are short and rare. The user is sometimes unwilling to admit or confess, or only in the face of discovery. There may be sorrow, but whether or not it is godly sorrow is uncertain.

How might we respond?

- 12–24 months of license probation or suspension (continued ministry not recommended; under advisement of Elders' Orders restoration team)
- 12–24 months of intentional prayer support
- 12–24 months of intense accountability and abstinence (weekly/daily contact, active reporting)
- 6–12 months of required counseling
- Offer support or counsel to the spouse (as willing)
- Ongoing reporting requirements
- Re-evaluation meeting at 6, 12, and 24 months to discern next steps
- Requirement to use tools and filters available

Restoration Process

How is this restoration process enacted?

If someone has been ensnared in this sin at any level, we wish to be helpful to rescue them according to the word of the Lord. To that end, we want to provide a clear entry point and pathway forward, so that they might be encouraged to access the help and resources we provide.

The process may run like this:

- **1. Admission or confession** to the Conference President or other pastor — or, intervention in the case of discovery by others. If the confession is to another pastor, this pastor is encouraged to accompany the affected pastor to a time of admission and confession.
- **2. Meeting** with the Education and Elders' Orders restoration team.
- **3. Meetings with other affected individuals** (as necessary) to discern next steps. This may include spouses, lead pastors, church boards, and others.
- **4. Create a confidential Restoration Plan** for the individual, based on this Policy.

Confidentiality Under This Policy

There is a distinction between this Policy and a Restoration Plan. The Policy is public; individual Restoration Plans are confidential.

The names of persons in a treatment and restoration plan will be confidential even from the Executive Committee, except as disclosure is necessary and relevant for their work. The EC may approve a financial outlay for counseling without knowing names, based on the recommendation of the Conference President or Elders' Orders restoration team.

Upon the recommendation of the EEO restoration team, there may be a need for confession to a local church (see 1 Timothy 5:20). Yet, in the spirit of Matthew 18, the default is to keep the repentance and restoration to as small a group as possible, and the rest of the Restoration Plan is to be kept confidential.

Confidentiality with counselors contracted to help with counseling people under a Restoration Plan is subject to the laws of the state, and the policies of the counselor. We desire to know only two things: a) if the counselee is faithfully showing up, and b) if he or she is faithfully acting on the assignments given.

Shared by Darrell Stetler II — Victory Over Pornography, a program of NewStart Discipleship. This policy was co-authored for real denominational use and is offered here as a starting template for other churches and denominations. Adapt freely to fit your own governance structure. victoryoverpornography.com