

David and Mitsue Wolfenberger's Blessed Marriage Project and Pure Mind Online

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David and Mitsue Wolfenberger

BARRYTOWN, NY - In 2013 David and Mitsue Wolfenberger, from Bellingham, in the Pacific Northwest, approached John Williams with the idea of developing marriage enrichment retreats where couples would come for a long weekend to share time together in the company of other couples with the expressed purpose of strengthening their marriage and their relationship with God.

Not long after, John asked fellow classmate Josie Hauer Ed.D. to join him in developing the format for the retreat. They recruited and trained three younger Unification couples - Christoph and Lena Yasutake, Richard and Mari Curry, and Leighton and Crescentia DeGoede - and with an initial \$100,000 donation from the Wolfenbergers, the Blessed Marriage Project was born. Later on, UTS alumna, Kate Pugnoli joined the staff, and most recently, Nancy Jubb came on board.

In May, 2014 the first Energize! retreat was held in Lakeville, Connecticut. Five more have followed since, with participants so enthusiastic that some of the retreat's alumni have already returned for another one. The next retreat is scheduled for October 28-30, in Portsmouth, NH.



The whole pornography problem touches a million different issues--how we view sexuality and how we teach about it to our kids, for example, and how much we feel free to admit our weaknesses to each other, how much we believe in God's unconditional love." John Williams, *PureMindOnline*

More recently, however, John's work within Blessed Marriage Project (BMP) has taken an unexpectedly sharp turn into an area where nearly everyone - most often male - who ever touched a keyboard has veered. Some only occasionally, some repeatedly, into the internet world of pornography.

In April, 2015, at the BMP retreat being held in Seattle, Pastor Kevin Thompson of the Bay Area Family Church talked about his work in counseling Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) members with their pornography "problem." In describing his work to the staff and guests at the retreat, which included David and Mitsue, Pastor Thompson referred to the onslaught of online pornography use as an "epidemic."

Soon after, John quit his "day job" and devoted himself full-time to developing a pornography awareness and recovery website, bolstered by another grant from David and Mitsue. He utilized his experience as a marriage counselor - John holds a Master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy - and his eight years of working with prison inmates where addiction was a constant topic.

"I set up an online resource that members all over the world could access," said John. "I made it a faith-friendly kind of niche website; the same as the Mormons and all the other different denominations have to help their members.

"I thought if people could access it anonymously, it would help overcome the barrier of secrecy and shame in our church, which prevents so many from getting any help."

Since then, a media professional, Cheryl Roth, has reinvented Pure Mind Online to be more user-friendly and attractive. It features a blog, forums, and features for strugglers, spouses, parents, and helpers.

The biggest problem in fighting the pull of online pornography is the fact it is only a click away on a cell phone or computer, something almost every adolescent in America has readily available to them. Even more sinister is that it is highly addictive, especially for young people whose brains are still developing and are more open to various forms of stimulation.

“It’s the perfect drug,” said John. “It’s free, it’s hard to notice that it’s doing any harm and it’s also hard to avoid. Also, it leaves no trace; there is no smell or needle tracks on your arm.”



Outward appearances, however, belie the destructiveness of what this “drug” does to the brain, which is much the same as heroin or cocaine. The more one takes the more one needs to get back to the same “high” the user felt the first time. The user finds that almost impossible to do, so more - and varied, often perverse - stimulation is needed to reach the same “high.”

That is what happens to the individual user, but the overall effect of addictive porn viewing is more widespread, and just as destructive for everyone who is a part of the user’s world. Like all forms of addiction that share similar traits, what may start as benign curiosity can quickly become a problem the user is unable to control without outside intervention.

“The whole pornography problem touches a million different issues--how we view sexuality and how we teach about it to our kids, for example, and how much we feel free to admit our weaknesses to each other, how much we believe in God’s unconditional love,” John pointed out.

“It touches the whole (FFWPU) matching/marriage blessing process. People are now pre-screened for this and the person isn’t really eligible for marriage if they don’t solve the problem. Many marriages have broken up over this. It’s really an epidemic.

“In some Northeast churches, for example, they took a poll that people responded to anonymously, and they found that two-thirds of the men admitted they have some porn struggle, and 20% said it was a difficult, ongoing issue. Among church-going Christians, it’s worse.

“In other words, religion is not protecting people from this. One-in-three young Christian men admit daily use, and two-out-of-three Christian men report that they look at it at least once a month; and even many Christian women admit using it.”

To help combat this ongoing problem the staff of Pure Mind Online (PMO) has expanded from one - John - to include Andrew Love, David Young and others on a part-time basis. Pure Mind has also joined with other groups such as Fight the New Drug (FTND) and Covenant Eyes in its efforts to expose the enormous problem and to find ways to counteract it.

FTND has an online recovery program, and specializes in mass marketing, with billboards in communities that state: “Porn Kills Love, Fight For Love.” Covenant Eyes distributes accountability software that sends an alert to a trusted person if you venture onto porn sites.

The next step for John and Pure Mind is to raise enough funds to sponsor a national conference on pornography next year in Las Vegas, at the International Peace Education Center (IPEC). People from Europe and Asia will also be invited to attend.

“We want to finally blow this whole thing open,” said John. “We want it to be educational and inspirational, but also solution-oriented.” Ten years ago John tried alerting parents and others to the danger of pornography, but, “there was so little interest that I stopped doing it.” He no longer has that problem.

“There are now huge numbers of men supporting each other to help them overcome their habit,” noted

John, "because they are freaked out by the effects, especially sexual dysfunction. They are all giving each other peer-to-peer counseling and challenging each other to abstain for 30 days, 90 days. If you go on YouTube you can find people talking to each other, encouraging each other because they've experienced their lives being ruined by pornography."

"What we've learned is the best way to overcome the problem is by doing what is called 'recovery mentoring.' A mentor is someone who has some history of struggle with porn and who helps the person stay on track, like a personal trainer. The Wolfenbergers helped sponsor about 14 individuals and couples that are now going through this rigorous training to become a 'recovery mentor,' and we hope to have graduates to use by the end of the year."

Pastor Andrew Love of the New Hope Family Church, is developing a humorous presentation that he will perform for members at various churches around the country; he will also be visiting London, Korea and Japan sometime in the near future to drum up interest in tackling this problem and sponsoring future conferences.

Anyone interested in getting more information or help in combatting the problem of online pornography viewing can begin by finding answers at [Pure Mind Online: What We Offer](#)