



CATHOLIC DIOCESE
of COLUMBUS
OFFICE of the BISHOP

Dear Reverend Fathers and School Administrators,

On March 21 - 22, the Diocese of Columbus will again participate in Safe Haven Sunday to directly address the societal and familial harms of pornography. The initiative aims to equip individuals, marriages, and families with resources and guidance to make their homes safe havens for all members of the household. Previously, we have addressed the issue of pornography and human trafficking.

Pornography, one of the leading causes of addiction, adultery, divorce, and human trafficking, creates an unsafe environment for children, producing distorted attitudes towards the body and human sexuality, with devastating effects for families and society and is closely related to the human trafficking industry. It treats individuals, not as persons to be loved and cherished, but as objects to be used for pleasure and gratification.

Each person is worthy of love and called to communion with God and neighbor. Despite our great technological connectivity, we are experiencing a pandemic of loneliness. Although desiring deeply human and personal relationships, many people, in frustration, are looking elsewhere for interaction, which is not always truly human. What do I mean? The rise of Artificial Intelligence, with all its potential benefits, to better society, carries with it ethical and moral problems, which must be addressed. This Safe Haven Sunday, it is important to examine how AI is compounding the existing problems of digital pornography, especially for young people.

In its note *Antiqua et Nova* (63) on Artificial Intelligence, the Church said: "In an increasingly isolated world, some people have turned to AI in search of deep human relationships, simple companionship, or even emotional bonds. However, while human beings are meant to experience authentic relationships, AI can only simulate them. ... if we replace relationships with God and with others with interactions with technology, we risk replacing authentic relationality with a lifeless image (cf. Ps. 106:20; Rom. 1:22-23)."

In the desire for friendship and intimacy, some people, failing to develop adequate friendships, are replacing human relationships with artificial ones, sometimes turning to chat boxes are programmed to manipulate them into engaging in explicit conversations. Programmers have used AI to generate deep fakes or realistic but false photos and videos for pornographic purposes. Young people may even think, "Well, this isn't real. What is the harm?"; they can be unaware of how such stimuli can become addictive, reducing their ability to empathize with others, numbing the conscience, and preventing them from authentic human interaction.

Together, we can address this issue by teaching those who have been entrusted to our care about pornography's effects and the proper usage of AI. This year Safe Haven Sunday will allow us the opportunity to address this emerging threat in a meaningful way. I ask for your assistance in creating awareness and sharing these resources. I will provide a recorded message that I encourage you to share throughout your parish and school websites, emails, and social media channels. I also encourage you to include in your weekend homilies and pastoral communication information about how to keep families safe from the dangers of pornography and how to have positive, healthy relationships.

Covenant Eyes provides resources to address the concerns of protecting children from pornography. You can find all of the resources available to our diocese by visiting columbuscatholic.org/safe-haven.

Grateful for your ministry and assuring you of my blessing, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Earl K. Fernandes
Bishop of Columbus