

Priest starts a Twitter group to break the chains to pornography

Not too long after he was ordained on June 1, Father Cassidy Stinson was told by an older priest that if he sees a young person coming to him for confession, chances are they will be going to talk to him about pornography.



Father Cassidy
Stinson

“In the first month of my priesthood, it became even more clear to me that this problem was something that a lot of people were struggling with in all sorts of different ways,” said Father Stinson, 27, a priest of the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia.

Father Stinson, who as a seminarian cofounded the Alberione Project, an initiative dedicated to forming future priests in effective media evangelization, decided to use his social media skills to help people, including practicing Catholics, who struggle with pornography. On July 27, he began the #BreakTheChains prayer campaign on Twitter, writing that he was tired of seeing “so many souls caught in shame and isolation and despair.”

Twitter handles

Follow Father Cassidy Stinson on Twitter [@TheHappyPriest](#).
Follow the prayer movement at [#BreakTheChains](#) on Twitter.

That original Twitter thread sparked a social media movement where hundreds of people have been posting prayer intentions and pictures of themselves holding rosaries and breviaries under the #BreakTheChains hashtag. The Knights of Columbus' official account retweeted Father Stinson's original thread with a call to action: "Knights, time to #BreakTheChains."

Father Stinson, who is in his first assignment as a parochial vicar at St. Bede Catholic Church in Williamsburg, Virginia, described his vision for #BreakTheChains in an interview with Our Sunday Visitor. He hopes that this unique prayer movement, born on Twitter, will cross over into real-life communities and transcend "Catholic Twitter."

Our Sunday Visitor: Where did the inspiration for #BreakTheChains come from?

Father Cassidy Stinson: I kept encountering over and over again the fact that pornography was something that people were really struggling with. I took that to prayer, and I kept having this sense that we could do more, that there is a great need for us to pray for other people who are struggling with this. So for me, the desire was not just to help and encourage people in their individual struggles, but to take the next step of encouraging people to pray for others who are going through the same thing, even to pray for people who are in the industry, because, in a lot of ways, they're the ones who are the most wrapped up in that sin.

OSV: In your short time as a priest, in what ways has it become apparent to you just how pervasive pornography is?

Father Stinson: It wasn't so much any one thing as it was just noticing over and over again that this is something that is at the root of so many relationship problems and personal

struggles. For a lot of people at the beginning of their faith life, this is often something that they have to go through a conversion to break free from. So when you bring up the topic, as I did in that original Twitter thread, everyone immediately seemed to chime in, saying, “Hey, this is something I’ve suffered from silently for so long, and it’s a real struggle for me.”

OSV: What was your original goal for #BreakTheChains?

Father Stinson: I think one of the biggest things I wanted to do was just create a vehicle and a community for people to pray for others who are struggling, whether openly or silently, with any kind of wounds attached to pornography. We’re talking about people who have had spouses struggle with this, people who have gone through the addiction themselves and still carry the wounds, and people who are still currently struggling with it. Whatever form that was, I wanted to create a way for people to talk about it, to pray for each other and to support each other.

OSV: Are you surprised with how the campaign has resonated?

Father Stinson: I was and I wasn’t. I was aware of how deeply rooted it was as a pattern of sin that a lot of people struggle with, so I wasn’t surprised with how many people identified with it. I think what I was surprised about more than anything was how willing people were so early on to share and to be open about it.

Finding Freedom from Pornography



Pornography addiction is a growing epidemic in America today. It is an addiction that can have the same effect on the brain as cocaine, is widely available, and has a devastating effect on relationships, families, and marriages. [In this pamphlet](#) you can help men and women learn that they can recover, and seven effective steps they can begin taking to be free from pornography.

Also, I felt like this was something God was encouraging me to do, so on some level, I feel like we should never be surprised if God asks us to do something and it pays off. It's not about me. It's about the people who are all uniting their prayers for this cause, and that's the most encouraging thing for me, to be able to log on everyday, to look at that hashtag and see rosaries, breviaries and all kinds of different ways in which people are praying. The incredible diversity of the responses is amazing.

OSV: Was there ever an idea that this would be a novena of sorts?

Father Stinson: Not exactly. The original idea was (that) I wanted to make a public commitment to praying for this one thing, and then just see how many people wanted to join in. The original impulse was that we need to pray for this, we need to pray together, and then let the Lord do what he wants to do with it.

OSV: A pornography website disparaged #BreakTheChains. What do you think of that?

Father Stinson: I was kind of delighted, because this shows the impact that this movement has already had outside of the Catholic social media bubble. It's very exciting for me to see that people are noticing this on the outside. And I've seen that happen in positive ways, too. A Lutheran seminarian on the hashtag was talking about what he had seen, and he said, "Hey, let's make this an ecumenical thing."

OSV: What can people do to "break the chains" of pornography in their lives?

Father Stinson: If you're struggling with it as a pattern in your life, then look very concretely and realistically at the times and places where you're struggling with it. What does the habit look like? Once you've identified that, you can start to make concrete changes and put up boundaries for yourself to help avoid it. That may be as simple as during certain times of the day and in certain circumstances, you put the device somewhere else.

Alongside that human dimension, make sure there is some kind of prayer in your life as well. One of the important things that needs to happen is to let God into that wound, and very often we're turning to any kind of quick pleasure, like pornography, because there is some kind of wound or loneliness there.

OSV: What is next for #BreakTheChains?

Father Stinson: I'm not really sure. My commitment is to take this at least up through the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary on Oct. 7, so that will be a full six weeks of prayer. I'll be suggesting a different intention for every week.

I'm just open to see what the Lord wants to do with it. If nothing, then I think all the prayers and such that have already happened will be more than worth it. If he wants to do something more, then I'm open to seeing where that goes. I'm just very willing to let the Lord take it where he wants to.

This is his work, not mine.

Brian Fraga is contributing editor for Our Sunday Visitor.

Online video series

STRIVE: A “21-Day Detox from Porn” is an online video series for men who wish to break free from an addiction to pornography. The series, which launched March 27, is written and hosted by Matt Fradd, an anti-pornography crusader and Catholic apologist, and directed by Chris Cope of Cardinal Studios. Participants sign up at strive21.com to receive access to daily videos, in which Fradd takes viewers on a step-by-step process of ridding their lives of pornography.