

Pray for lives shattered by Ashley Madison data release

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |

Bishop Anthony B. Taylor released this statement Aug. 30 on the release of the database of Ashley Madison website users.

The effects of the recent Ashley Madison data breach are widespread and the names revealed include people of all walks of life, including members of the clergy, Church employees and volunteers in our parishes. Some of the people involved simply paid an entry fee to visit this pornographic website in a time of weakness, viewed the options and did little else. Others paid far larger fees to avail themselves of a broad range of far more troubling "services," even including arrangements for the adulterous liaisons for which this site has become notorious.

When it comes to our attention that the name of a member of the clergy or a Church employee appears on a list of this sort, our procedure is to investigate the specific nature of that person's activity on that site, including how recent and how extensive that involvement was.

In the case of the Ashley Madison data breach, much of the activity reported was several years in the past. Because the website does not require verification of email addresses, we also need to make sure that it is not a case of identity fraud, whereby the person involved was listed against their will with malicious intent or as a workplace prank. Once verified, we then make arrangements for that person to get help for whatever problems they are dealing with in their personal life. Sometimes this help can be provided without requiring a change of ministerial assignment or employment.

I ask your prayers for all whose lives have been shattered by involvement with the Ashley Madison website and by pornography in general, which is highly addictive. If you or your family have been affected personally by betrayal of this sort, I encourage you to speak with your parish priest or look for professional help rather than attempt to deal with this alone, which will only leave you feeling more isolated.

If your marriage is in trouble, I recommend you participate in Retrouvaille offered through our Office of Family Life. Call (501) 664-0340, ext. 353 or consult www.retrouvaille.org for more information. If you struggle with pornography personally, I recommend the resources available at www.IntegrityRestored.com as well as 12-step programs for those suffering from sexual addiction.

Knowing our own weakness and sinfulness, let us treat all involved with the same love and compassion that Jesus extended to sinners and those wounded by the sins of others. I imagine that for some people, publicity surrounding the Ashley Madison data breach may also open old wounds from past adulterous affairs, for which healing is still needed. Let us pray in a special way for the spouses and marriages of those whose names have been revealed. They are now dealing not only with bitter feelings of betrayal, but also with public humiliation. They need our love and support most of all.

