

# Pandemic feeds an epidemic

The CyberPsychology & Behavior Journal has reported that “93 percent of young men under the age of 18 have seen porn, along with 62 percent of young women of the same age.” That was in 2008 and, sadly, other statistics suggest those numbers are even higher now.



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Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a rapid change that influenced individuals, families and communities in a myriad of ways. Confronted with mental stressors across the

board — financial, health, political, employment and educational — in an unprecedented manner, addictive behaviors flourished and, especially, pornography.

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic March 11, 2020. By March 17, a leading purveyor of online pornography, Pornhub, recorded an 11.6 percent increase in use globally. In countries and jurisdictions where the company opened up its services and made them free, usage increased between 4 to 24 percent. This same observation was made concerning the U.S., with a 31.5 percent increase at 3 a.m. and 26.4 percent at 1 p.m.

What does this have to do with our children? When I provide presentations on pornography and social media, the common refrain from parents is that it is “Not My Kid.” But the stats paint a different story:

- 91 percent of teens use mobile phones to go online;
- 92 percent of teens age 13-17 go online daily;
- 89 percent of youth admit to receiving sexual solicitation in chat rooms;
- 20 percent of teens have sent or posted nude or seminude photographs or videos of themselves;

The prime consumers of pornography in the United States are those aged 12-17.

Pornography addiction has become such a problem that Virginia in 2016 became one of 17 states that declared this issue a public health crisis. And our children are the target audience. The statistics can be overwhelming, but frankly, the real question is, “What can we do?”

One of my favorite Scripture quotes is from Romans 5:20, “Where sin abounds, grace all the more.” There are practical steps that all parents can and should take. For parents, I encourage you to:

**Educate:** First yourself, then your family. A great start is the National Center on Sexual Exploitation at [endsexualexploitation.org](http://endsexualexploitation.org).

**Communicate:** Speak to your kids and let them know the dangers and potential impacts on their health, relationships, potential job opportunities, etc. Always, of course, in an age-appropriate manner. Remember, people are mysteries meant to be revealed, not exposed, and too much info too early is just as detrimental as none at all.

**Develop a Contract for Devices:** Manage expectations from the very beginning and write out exactly what is expected. Remember the second Golden Rule: Whoever has the gold makes the rules. If you are paying for it, you always have a right to view what is on it. See a sample contract at [arlingtondiocese.org/child-protection/additional-resources](http://arlingtondiocese.org/child-protection/additional-resources).

**Trust but Verify:** For your youngest children, it is very likely that they did not go searching but porn found them, and maybe for the older kids, the expectations were never communicated. Consequently, that first conversation is so important to keep the doors of communication and healing open.

**Model:** Good for the goose, good for the gander. Our brains do not care about our age and/or maturity. Porn is porn.

There are also fantastic Catholic counselors among us who work tirelessly to heal the wounds of pornography and thus are putting our culture back together — one person at a time.

We need to also remember that showing children pornography is abuse and a crime in Virginia. Since April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, it is time that we stop reacting and become proactive. Wouldn't it be better to attempt to prevent the wounds before they happen? Let's work together and protect our kids from a future of brokenness and heartache.

Deacon Silva is director of the diocesan Office of Child Protection.

# Feeling downright biblical

I recall sitting in religion class in my Catholic elementary school hearing lovely Bible stories about the beatitudes, the Ten Commandments, and the heroes of the Old and New Testaments. I remember the big events, the ones about which



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movies are made: Noah and the epic flood; earthquakes; flaming bushes; pestilence

and plague; and locusts.

At that age, these biblical events seemed, well, pretty unlikely.

Scanning the headlines of the past couple years — wildfires sweeping Australia; earthquakes around the globe; devastating floods and mudslides; erupting volcanoes on small island nations; a lengthy, deadly, global pandemic; and now the coming of the cicadas — I can't help but wonder what this all means. All these biblical events seem to be hitting at the same time. I don't recall that happening in the Bible.

So, what do we do with this?

## GET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER.

Sure, we all contemplate the fragility of our existence. This might be a healthy reminder to buoy our prayer life, embrace the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, make a plan for being a better person.

With our mostly virtual existence this past year, there are so many more resources online to help with that. Check out the Know Your Faith section of this issue or skim through our website — [catholicherald.com](http://catholicherald.com). Look for commentary and podcasts from Bishop Michael F. Burbidge. See what parishes are doing to focus on the faith life.

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Are we numb to these biblical events? How do we or should we respond? Do we read the latest newspaper column, send a donation, or stop and say a prayer? We might be grateful we are not affected, even blessed, but does it prompt us to any action, or have we reached the saturation point with all the sadness we see?

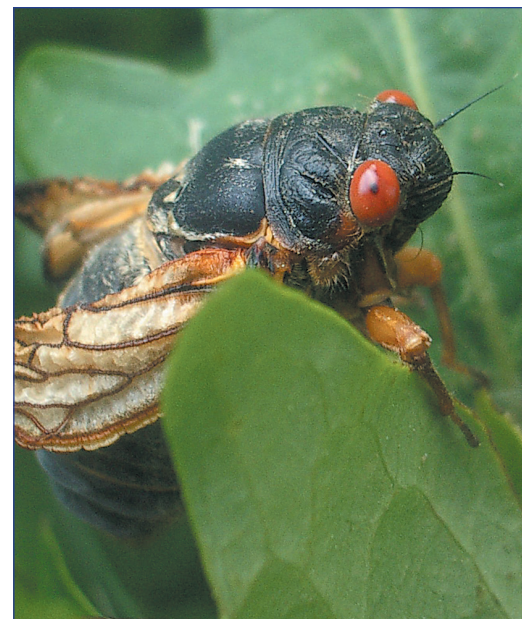
The *Catholic Herald* has and continues to highlight ways people can help through financial support, volunteering or spreading the word about local initiatives. Check out diocesan Catholic Charities ([ccda.net](http://ccda.net)), inquire at your parish and poke around our website for more connections.

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT.

The pandemic has merged work, school and home life into a game of beat the clock. Telework and quarantine have been both blessing and challenge. The one thing we can hope is that this will refocus our efforts to identify what's most important.

The daily or weekly church time and access to the sacraments that we pretty much took for granted, now seem a gift we might never think of the same way again.

Distancing from family members outside our pod has felt cruel and disheartening.



HYUNGWON KANG | REUTERS VIA CNS

A newly emerged adult cicada dries its wings on a tree in Arlington in May 2004. Starting this month across much of the eastern United States, the cicadas will emerge from their 17 years underground.

Sitting at a ball game elbow to elbow with friends on a hot summer day must be more than a memory. Hopefully, it's a sticky opportunity awaiting us, if not this summer, then next.

When things turn biblical, remember the lessons the Bible and our Catholic faith have taught us.

We needn't look far for sustenance through prayer; for community through service; and for prioritizing through life's sometimes hard lessons.

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