

Bringing light to destruction of pornography addiction

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



At 9 years old, Mark Ives first saw pornography at his uncle's gas station, a book an employee brought. He fits in with today's demographic — children on average are exposed to porn around the age of 7.

For the next 44 years, he dealt with the painful reality of pornography addiction, something he hid from his wife and the world. It took honesty with himself, in his marriage and most importantly with God to move forward. Part of his recovery included founding the Protecting Families and Children from Pornography ministry in 2013 with his wife Mary, traveling monthly to bring books and materials about the dangers of pornography to parishes throughout the state. They attend and volunteer at St. Joseph Church and St. Peter Church in Pine Bluff.

According to the Barna Group's 2015 study "The Porn Phenomenon," one in three Americans seek out pornography at least once a month, with 6 percent daily. And it's not hard to uncover. The study also stated almost half of young adults said they come across porn at least once a week, with 71 percent saying once a month and 50 percent of teens coming across it once a month, regardless of whether they seek it out. In religion, 57 percent of pastors and 64 percent of youth pastors admit they struggled with porn in the past or currently.

"We kind of help Satan out by keeping our mouth quiet, keeping it in the dark and keeping it personal." Mark Ives of Pine Bluff, founder with his wife of the Protecting Families and Children from Pornography ministry

For practicing Christian males, ages 13 to 24, 41 percent use pornography. Thirteen percent of Christian women seek it out.

A 2018 Gallup poll revealed 43 percent of Americans think pornography is morally acceptable.

“Pornography is the modern-day leprosy. It is something that, as most priests have told me in the confessional, it’s the elephant in the room, it’s the biggest thing that’s confessed most of the time and it’s most shameful. That’s where we’re at,” Mark Ives said. “We kind of help Satan out by keeping our mouth quiet, keeping it in the dark and keeping it personal.”

SCIENCE OF THE ADDICTION

Reclaim Sexual Health (reclaimsexualhealth.com) a program of Elizabeth Ministry International based in Wisconsin, outlined the steps that can lead to a pornography addiction, starting with a young person’s natural curiosity. After initial discovery and recreational use, it leads the brain to trigger “neurochemicals like dopamine, norepinephrine and endorphins, producing a ‘rush’ or a ‘high,’” the website stated.

Coupled with masturbation, it can become addictive quickly and a person’s brain is rewired to pornography dependency.

Dr. George Simon, a clinical psychologist in Little Rock who attends Christ the King Church in Little Rock, said porn addicts often suffer with social interactions.

“I’ve known folks with porn addiction who are on that computer most of the time at work. They spend so much time there that everything else falls by the wayside,” he said.

Simon pointed out that 94 percent of internet traffic is porn related.

“It’s a huge problem. It’s not just a problem for the user. But these are not really victimless crimes because outside of the animated stuff, there’s a victim there in the making of these films,” he said.

Father Jason Tyler, pastor at St. Joseph Church in Fayetteville, said he has seen an uptick in pornography addiction with those he ministers.

“I think it’s more and more accessible,” he said. “It used to be for someone to get addicted in that way to pornography, they had to go to some kind of shady place, the back of a bookstore and hope no one saw them go and buy it,” he said. “Now you can carry a smartphone in your pocket that gives you access to many things, destructive things ultimately.”

‘BAD STUFF’

A cradle Catholic, Mark Ives, 59, said his pornography addiction was on and off throughout his formative years and at 18 he realized “this was bad stuff; I kind of got away from it.”

Then came the age of the internet. At the popular porn site Pornhub, 80 percent of visits come from smartphones and tablets, with more than 100 million daily visits.

At the height of his addiction as an adult, Ives said he was looking at pornography more than once a week and for many hours at a time.

“There was a rock bottom when I had to tell my wife that I was looking at pornography all these years when she thought I was a saint,” he said.

Mary Ives, who has been married to Mark for 36 years, said realizing this was brought into her marriage was a painful reality.

“Even today I have hurt feelings from it because I was 100 percent in. I loved him; you get through it, but it’s painful,” she said.

What helped save their marriage is Ives’ commitment to confession.

“I was constantly going to the confessional. That sanctifying grace is real ... it gives your soul what you need to reject it. You may fall again, but the victory is in the striving,” he said.

Despite the strides, Ives is aware if he ever looked at porn again, “I would be right back where I was. It’s something you have to live with.”

And part of that recovery and healing has been distributing materials to parishes, Charismatic events, Arkansas Catholic Men’s conferences, diocesan youth events, campus ministries and marriage preparation with the diocesan Family Life Office. They also participate in the national White Ribbon Against Pornography Week, which sheds a light on the addiction.

“The bottom line here is over 56 percent of divorced marriages, one of the spouses was looking at pornography,” he said.

According to the Barna study, teens and young adults ranked the immorality of 11 behaviors, with viewing pornographic images, reading erotic or pornographic content and watching sexually explicit movie or TV scenes as 9, 10 and 11. Pornography was rated less immoral than concepts including not recycling, overeating and stealing.

Mary Ives said once at a college campus, a couple told her, “‘We love porn that’s how we have sex.’ I was very straight forward with him, ‘You’re not having sex together; you’re having sex with everyone you’re watching.’”

The Ives have visited more than 80 churches in the Diocese of Little Rock, giving out about 1,000 of the “Bought with a Price” booklets annually, by Bishop Emeritus Paul S. Loverde. The past two years, he was given a grant through Catholic Arkansas Sharing Appeal (CASA). He has also recommended and sometimes given out the children’s books “Good Pictures Bad Pictures” (6 to 12 years old) and the junior edition (3 to 5), through protectyoungminds.org or Amazon.com.

For the most part, the materials have been accepted by parishes, as he has Bishop Anthony B. Taylor’s blessing on this ministry. But some are hesitant to put the materials out, which he understands.

“As long as we’re silent about it, as long as we keep the shame in, we’re going to be in the same boat 10 years from now.”

Mark Ives said there is hope.

“You don’t want to go out there and advertise you’re a porn addict. You really need to find someone you can trust because you do need help. My help was my wife; first God, because we rely heavy on him for everything,” he said.

PASTORAL RESPONSE

According to fightthenewdrug.org, 15 states since 2016 have declared pornography a public health crisis.

Dioceses throughout the country have implemented different programs to shed a light on pornography addiction.

The Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kan., has housed the My House ministry since a task force began in 2004 under Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann, co-chair of the Religious Alliance Against Pornography. Today the ministry shares videos, print resources, internet presentations, provides 12-step support groups and training.

Father Tyler said it is something that should be discussed more in the Church, particularly because it is “so hard on families.”

“There was a time when alcoholism was seen as only a moral failing, and we didn’t understand the addiction science behind it ... in some ways that might be where we are with pornography addiction, where we don’t understand completely yet the way in which it inhibits the person’s power to know what they’re doing,” he said.

He explained that no one should be embarrassed enough to avoid confession, “I’ve heard it all before,” and he typically recommends counseling coupled with the sacramental help of confession.

“Religious people in general can find themselves more ashamed by any addiction, but especially a porn addiction. I think maybe because they understand how dangerous it is or they’ve suddenly come to realize their weakness in a particular way,” Father Tyler said. “One of the things to understand though while some bad choices may have started them on this road, there’s nothing we can do that’s beyond God’s mercy.”