R-47
To request that the General Synod Council assist congregations to form affinity groups across the RCA to talk together about starting non-profit organizations that will serve others.
(ADOPTED)

PORNOGRAPHY AND THE INTERNET

Pornography is not new. Sit down at your computer and you have at your fingertips over 1.3 million porn websites. As of 2003, the number of pornographic web pages topped 260 million and was steadily growing: 32 million individuals (71 percent male, and 29 percent female) have visited Internet porn websites; 25 million Americans spend between one and ten hours per week visiting Internet porn websites, and an additional 4.7 million Americans spend over eleven hours per week visiting Internet porn sites. Ninety percent of kids between the ages of eight and sixteen have viewed pornography on the Internet. Seventy percent of online teens have accessed pornography on the Internet accidentally.

The word “pornography” comes from two Greek words, porne (a harlot) and graphein (to write). When these words are combined, pornography in the Greek means “the writing of the harlot.” It is interesting to note that in Greek, the word for fornication and pornography is the same word. The only difference between the words is the context in which they are used; with fornication it refers to an act and with pornography it is something that is written. The venue in which it occurs—be it an act, or deed, in writing, or in thought—is not important; they are really all the same.


It has been twenty years since a report on pornography has been adopted by General Synod. The Internet has revolutionized how people can access pornography and this new availability has heightened ethical concerns.

It is very sad but true that something that has so much potential for good can and is being used in such sinful and destructive ways. However, this is a frightening reality with the Internet and pornography.

In 1995, Time magazine broke one of the first big stories on “cyberspace.” In that piece, Philip Elmer Dewitt described “the new allure of online porn.” He wrote, “Pornography is different on the computer network. You can obtain it in the privacy of your home—without having to walk into a seedy bookstore or movie house. You can explore different aspects of your sexuality without exposing yourself to communicable disease or public ridicule.”

Pornography was once thought to be a problem only of men. However, more recent studies show millions of women and children are now involved, especially since the Internet has become so available. “Dirty Little Secret,” an article in the September/October 2007 issue of Today’s Christian Woman, reported: “[O]ne out of every six women including
Christians struggle with an addiction to pornography. That is 17 percent of the population. More than 80 percent of women with this addiction take it offline. The article goes on to say that “women, far more than men, are likely to act out their behaviors in real life, such as having multiple partners, casual sex, or affairs.

A Christianity Today Leadership Survey in December 2001 revealed that 51 percent of pastors say cyber-porn is a possible temptation, 37 percent say it is a current struggle, and four in ten pastors have visited a porn site. Other sources, including AFA (American Family Association) Journal, Promise Keepers, and Focus on the Family, report similar statistics regarding pastors and others in church leadership.

In an interview with Dr. James Dobson, serial killer Ted Bundy stated: “I’ve lived in prison for a long time now, and I’ve met a lot of men who were motivated to commit violence. Without exception, every one of them was deeply involved in pornography—deeply consumed by the addiction.” This is most true in criminal acts involving children. The Internet has proven a useful tool for pedophiles and sexual predators as they distribute child pornography, engage in sexually explicit conversations with children, and seek victims in chat rooms. “How Pornography Harms Children,” an article posted on protectkids.com, states: “[I]n a study of convicted child molesters, 77 percent of those who molested boys and 87 percent of those who molested girls admitted to the habitual use of pornography in the commission of their crimes.”

Experts in the field say that Internet affordability, accessibility, and anonymity are feeding a new psychological disorder called “cybersex addiction.” Pornography is the major component of this addiction. Dr. Mark Schwartz of the Masters and Johnson Institute says, “For some people, the route to compulsive use of the Internet for sexual satisfaction is fast and short.” He goes on to say, “Sex on the Net is like heroin, it grabs them and takes over their lives. And it’s very difficult to treat because the people affected don’t want to give it up.” Dr. Jennifer Schneider states: “Even when cybersex addicts and their partners sought treatment, they often concealed their real problem and therapists often failed to ask questions that would disclose it. As a result, the diagnosis of cybersex addiction is often missed.” Some research of behavioral addiction such as cybersex and pornography suggests that they cause changes in the brain that result in the release of “endogenous opioids,” similar to the release of endorphins, which results in perpetuating the behavior. Dr. Al Cooper, a staff psychologist at Stanford University and the author of Sex and the Internet: A Guidebook for Clinicians, has conducted one of the largest and most detailed surveys of online sex. He calls the Net “[I]n a study of convicted child molesters, 77 percent of those who molested boys and 87 percent of those who molested girls admitted to the habitual use of pornography in the commission of their crimes.”

Pornography is an industry (some prefer the term “criminal enterprise”) that is growing rapidly. Whatever it is called, it is becoming more and more pervasive in all of society. It now has its own lobbyists who work aggressively with politicians and judges to liberalize laws and rulings relating to pornography. It is also very profitable. According to Jan LaRue of Concerned Women for America, pornography production worldwide takes in about $56 billion per year. In the U.S. alone it garners $10 to $14 billion annually.

Despair is not the appropriate Christian response. “[F]or the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). We need to see the kingdom victorious and not fall into the tragic abyss described by John Piper in Christianity Today:

[W]hat seemed so tragic to George Verwer—as it does to me—is that so many (young) people are being lost to the cause of Christ’s mission because they are not taught how to deal with the guilt of sexual failure. The problem is not just how not to fail. The prob-
The Internet is here to stay and it has a growing role in the lives of our families. It will be a challenge to protect the entire family, parents and children, from the dangers that the Internet makes so easily available. Jim Burns, Ph.D., gives the following tips:

1. Educate yourself and your kids about the Internet.
2. Select an Internet Service Provider (ISP) that offers server-board filtering.
3. Purchase and install porn blocking software.
4. Set family standards on Internet usage and post them near the computer.
5. Report suggestive messages or pornographic email to your ISP.

Burns has a more detailed description of these tips under the heading “How to Keep the Internet Safe, Educational, and Fun” on the Home Word website: www.homeword.com.

In the 1978 report on pornography to General Synod, there is an excellent discussion of how sex is a gift from God. Other past reports on pornography contain a lot of the information that was available at the time they were written. They also made many excellent recommendations. However, there is no way they could anticipate the tremendous effects that the Internet would have on society as a whole and especially on the spread of the evil of pornography. At this time, we must question how aggressive the church has been in implementing the past recommendations. Some information regarding pornography is available, but most in the church are not aware that it exists and prefer to ignore the problems pornography is responsible for both in the church and in society. With all the information that is available, the church remains silent. It must, at a minimum, inform and educate its members. “Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin” (James 4:17).

Endnotes