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Hannah Swenson

Archdiocese of Los Angeles - Our Lady of the Angels Region

Protecting God's Children for Facilitators



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How Major Events Highlight the Need to Protect Children

By [Jan Rayburn](#)

Every day I dress with purpose. Our Senior Director of Human Resources asks each day what my outfit represents. Some are obvious, like red or pink for Valentine's Day, green on St. Patrick's Day, and, of course, red, white, and blue on Election Day and the three summer holidays. I, like others, even dress liturgically.



Feast days of Mary? I'm wearing blue. Pentecost Sunday? Red. Advent and Lent? I'm donning purple. And don't get me started on my sports teams. I can't risk accidentally sending mixed signals.

So, when my colleague, Anthony Pittelli, wrote his most recent [blog on the FIFA World Cup](#) coming to Hard Rock Stadium—renamed Miami Stadium this month—I saw the perfect opportunity. While many people will be dressing in colors according to their preferred team, I will be dressed in a black T-shirt embossed with the words, "Defend the Children."

As Anthony pointed out in his article, these mega-events can attract predators and those who seek to harm children and the vulnerable, who view major events as prime opportunities for their crimes of exploitation. The research is mixed as to whether victimization actually increases during these events, or whether there is simply a "flashlight effect."¹ This means the fluctuation in data is documented in arrest records and hotline calls, but there may not be a significant increase in actual victimization versus other environments.

This does not mean these crimes of exploitation are not happening during major events. Sexual exploitation, and specifically human sex trafficking, can occur in any environment.—both within large events and in the environments that surround our daily life. Sexual exploitation is *sex trafficking* when a person recruits a victim, using **force, fraud or coercion**, to exchange a commercial sex act for anything of value (such as money, drugs, shelter, food, etc.).

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Jan Rayburn

Jan Rayburn has lived all over the country from Iowa, Minnesota, California and now Florida. She graduated from Florida International University with multiple degrees. Jan met her husband in Florida and they have two children. Jan has worked in a variety of desktop publishing businesses, which is how she first connected with the Archdiocese of Miami. Jan began working with the Archdiocese of Miami in 1998 with multiple projects, including the launching of the Safe Environment Department in 2002/2003. This

Traffickers often recruit a victim into human sex trafficking by creating a relationship through stages of grooming. This can be really simple, like sending an online message and saying, "you're pretty, want to make some money?" Or, it can take time to cultivate the relationship through exploiting the victim's vulnerability.

The worldwide sports spectacle of the FIFA World Cup (as well as other major events), and the intense media coverage it attracts, help provide the spotlight needed to gain resources for community trafficking awareness campaigns. This increased awareness also increases policing, helps highlight well-publicized hotline numbers, and response programs. As intended, these types of programs often increase the number of victim disclosures and reported crimes.

In some states, law enforcement may warn participants heading to a major event that they may have a "zero-tolerance" policy for human trafficking as a deterrence. They may also have specific task forces or undercover sting operations to target both buyers and traffickers. These prevention strategies were implemented in the state of Florida with great success, which increased arrests and convictions of child predators and traffickers.² And that can be considered a huge "goal" (or "touchdown" if you prefer American football)!

But, that does not mean we've "won" the game, as this is an ongoing effort. Bringing awareness to adults and increasing prevention and response efforts is paramount—particularly at large events, but also within the community in general. Additionally, addressing the conversation with children and youth as well in an age-appropriate manner should occur simultaneously. It is never too early or too often to have these conversations, and they should happen frequently.

Now is a great time to start or continue the conversation with the people around you, to build on the excitement, energy, and fan frenzy of the FIFA World Cup. As a facilitator, you can help encourage participants to talk to the children in their lives about safe vs. unsafe interactions (including physical touches, but also interactions through technology). Safe adults should also teach children and youth to identify the safe adults in their lives, and how to communicate when anyone tries to cross their boundaries. We can also encourage children and youth to trust their instincts, discuss online and technology safety, and define grooming and coercion, with an emphasis on boundaries and respect. This is great information for them to be aware of with regard to the adults in their lives, but also with their peers.

This isn't a "scared straight"³ conversation. Rather, it is all about implementing boundary and safety to increase children's resistance and their resilience, which is the basis for the VIRTUS "Empowering God's Children" Program.

Moreover, reinforcing safe environment information with children and youth is an opportunity to practice our own Faith. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, it says:

*"Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings. Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being. All owe to each other this duty of respect."*⁴

In keeping with the theme of the FIFA World Cup and other major

included highlighting the VIRTUS educational programs. Having been impressed by and dedicated to that endeavor, it was in 2008 that the Safe Environment Director at the time asked Jan to come in and interview for the Safe Environment Director position. The interview went something like this: "Thanks for coming in. Here are the keys." Having felt an instant connection to the ministry since 2002, committing to it full-time was an easy transition for Jan. The connection has only intensified since and Jan's commitment (which she describes as a devotion) to the most vulnerable has grown exponentially over the years.

events, after regulation time, stoppage time, overtime, and shootouts, respecting the game and each other—no matter whose jersey you wear—is a win!

You can report suspected human trafficking directly to law enforcement or the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888, or via their website at <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/>.

Footnotes:

1 The term "flashlight effect" (or flashlighting) is primarily a descriptive phrase used across multiple fields rather than a single scientific concept. Depending on the context, it is typically attributed to the scholars, authors, or industries that popularized it: Sociology & Criminology: Scholars like the Polaris Project and sociologists often attribute this to anti-trafficking researchers. It describes a phenomenon where intense media attention and increased law enforcement "shine a light" on an issue (like human trafficking at major sporting events), creating a surge in documented reports, rather than a genuine spike in the underlying activity. Here is a link to a specific article on this term in relation to the World Cup: <https://theconversation.com/the-world-cup-and-human-trafficking-what-the-research-reveals-about-the-real-risks-at-major-sporting-events-280775>

2 Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier stated there is "zero tolerance" for human trafficking in the state. He made this remark during a press conference at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Miami Regional Operations Center, where he was joined by FDLE officials to announce historic crackdowns and prepare for the World Cup. <https://www.myfloridalegal.com/newsrelease/attorney-general-james-uthmeier-announces-historic-human-trafficking-enforcement>.

3 "Scared Straight" refers to intense, confrontational programs that can involve yelling to discourage/deter children and youth from crime by showing them the harsh and intimidating realities of prison life.

4 Found in 1738 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, https://www.vatican.va/content/catechism/en/part_three/section_one/chapter_one/article_3/i_freedom_and_responsibility.html

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1) True or False: Victimization of children and the vulnerable through human sex trafficking only occurs during large events, such as major sporting events.

A) ☐ True

B) ☐ False

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