

**Lutheran Church of Australia:
Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions**

THE USE OF DRUGS

Adopted by the Commission, December 1979

God's Gift of Drugs

1. God the creator of all mankind has given to men and women the good gift of the human body and with it the added and unique dignity of being a person. Such gifts should therefore be accepted with joy and gratefulness and with praise to God.
2. Such gifts bring with them freedom and responsibility (1 Cor 3:23).
There is the freedom to use and develop them under God to the fullest extent and to enjoy all their possibility.
There is the responsibility to God for the use and development and enjoyment of these gifts because they imply the honouring of a trust and an accountability to him who created them.
3. Therefore God demands of each of us that we honour this trust by doing all in our power to respect the dignity and value of our body and person, and to use them responsibly by nurturing and developing them and all their functions and potential to the best of our knowledge and ability, and to combat these desires and abstain from those actions that harm, damage and even destroy them, so that we may enjoy a maximum of physical and mental health (Rom 8:5,6; Gal 5:20,21; 1 Pet 4:3,8).
4. This is an especially serious responsibility because these gifts represent a human being as individual and person and reflect his/her nature, temperament and being. Through them people express themselves, their thoughts and actions, their pain and pleasures, their joy and sadness, their love and hate, their good and evil deeds, indeed their total relationship to God and their fellowman, to society, to the world in which they live, and to all the gifts and pleasures this world has to offer (2 Cor 5:10).
5. All this is presupposition for a Christian evaluation and consideration of drug abuse and drug addiction.
6. Drugs, too, are a good gift to humanity from God the creator and as such also imply freedom and responsibility in their use, inasmuch as they are not in themselves evil. When used responsibly they can be a valuable aid to bodily and mental health and with thanks to God.

Human Abuse of Drugs

7. Their abuse and the attendant harm and even destruction they cause to a human being's physical and mental health point to a serious disorder that has entered God's creation and the social structures. Human beings are the cause of this disorder because

of the wilful abuse of their freedom and their rebellion against God and their refusal to act responsibly under God in obedience to God's declared will.

This refusal and rebellion is the basic sin of all people, and the cause of their abuse and irresponsible use of God's gifts.

8. This disorder has far-reaching consequences which reflect sinful attitudes in human society and which, in turn, are accompanied by social disruption and damage to the mental and physical health of the individual.
There is the inability to cope with crises and problems, the search for freedom from real or supposed worries, pressures and dangers. There is the inability to cope with boredom and the lack of real challenges in everyday life. There is a frequent feeling of hopelessness and senselessness in life. There is the protest against attitudes and convictions in society or against parental control. There is the search for excitement or for a utopia. There is ignorance and the lack of necessary information about the destructive consequences of drug abuse. And there is the unscrupulous greed for money on the part of those who seek to profit from this situation at the expense of those who see no way out of this lostness.
9. The irresponsible use of drugs must therefore be seen in the context of this larger disorder and of the rupture of human fellowship with God and its consequences, and hence as a symptom of that severed relationship and of people's selfish self-assertion against God and their fellowman.

The Call of the Church

10. The church is called to face with realism the causes of drug abuse and addiction, and to accept the fact that both adults and youth are involved, and that the whole of human society must accept responsibility and blame for this widespread evil.
The church calls on all who govern, legislate and police the laws of our country, to do all in their power to combat the abuse of drugs in the interest of the health and welfare of the individual and of society.
The church should show love, concern and sympathy, encourage addicts to seek all available clinical and social aid, and offer help in the rehabilitation of victims and in their re-establishment as accepted members in the church, in the family, at work, and in society at large.
11. Above all, the church is called to offer the totally new dimension of the healing and saving power of the gospel.
It is called to show that the abuse of God's gifts is sin and a dishonouring of the sacred responsibility the Creator has placed upon each individual in regard to his/her physical and mental health.
It has to offer the forgiveness of God in Christ through faith and show that for those who become members of the people of God by the power of the Holy Spirit there is new meaning and personal fulfilment and a new ability to meet fears and pressures. It has to tell them of the comfort of the gospel which proclaims that a person's total self is redeemed, body, soul and mind, and that by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection our bodies are even now temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6: 19,20).
12. The church is called to show that in the power of that Spirit, by faith, people are given a new freedom, the freedom from guilt. This is the freedom for God, for all other people, for the gifts of God's creation, and for the society in which they live.

This is the freedom of love for God and his will for us, a freedom to give ourselves in love for others and to receive love in return, and the freedom to use God's gifts rightly, reverently and responsibly, to the glory of God and for the well-being of our society and the individual.

Defining the Problem of Drug Abuse

13. We live in a society in which it is current orthodox medical practice to use drugs for the relief of pain and for the management of many illnesses. There are many different groups of drugs with many different actions. Most of these are prescribed medically, with little or no demand by the individual for self-medication. However, there are groups of drugs which individuals choose to use because of the effects they produce. These include sedatives, stimulating drugs, pain relievers, hallucinogens, opiates, alcohol and tobacco. These, of course, vary in their effects and toxicity on the human body.
14. A drug is any substance that, when taken in the living organism, may modify one or more of its functions. Drug abuse is persistent or sporadic, excessive drug use or use inconsistent with or unrelated to acceptable medical practice. Drug dependence is a state of psychic or physical dependence, or both, on a drug arising in a person following administration of that drug on a periodic or continuous basis. Physical dependence is characterized by a tense, physical disturbance when the administration of the drug is stopped. Psychological dependence is a mental state characterized by the intense desire to administer the drug on a continuous or periodic basis to obtain pleasure or to avoid discomfort, real or imagined. It is a manifestation of the individual's reaction to the effects of a specific drug and varies with individuals as well as with the drug.
15. A recent estimate in terms of the number of persons involved in the non-medical use of drugs shows that, in western society, for each person affected by opiates there are about ten affected by sedatives or stimulants, and about 100 affected by alcohol.
16. We live in a society where it is customary to drink alcoholic drinks, and where social drinking is approved because of the release it permits to an individual. It is used in religious ritual, at ceremonies marking birth, marriage, death, celebrations in everyday life. It reduces tensions and helps people to mix easily in society. Used in moderation, its undoubted social usefulness is not accompanied by any serious ill effects. However, alcohol which is a boon to many is a scourge to other members of our society as some people find it difficult to take alcohol in moderation and develop an addiction to it, with serious physical and mental consequences. Increasing consumption of alcohol increases the likelihood of experiencing health and other problems, even in those who may not be regarded as suffering from alcoholism. The effect of alcohol is dose related, although it is marginally influenced by other factors, eg when taken with meals.
17. Excessive use of alcohol leads to alcoholism and this has been described as a condition characterised by the repeated drinking of alcoholic beverages to an extent that exceeds the customary dietary use or ordinary compliance with drinking customs of the community and that interfere with the drinker's health, interpersonal relations, and economic life. What is excessive use is difficult to define. There is a personal limit to the intake of alcohol above which there is a significant likelihood of harm.

The lowest level at which risk commences is currently uncertain. Some authorities state that for the average adult there is risk of damage with a daily intake of 40 grams of alcohol or less. An average glass of beer, glass of wine, or serve of spirits contains about ten grams of alcohol. Certainly, people who imbibe 100 grams of alcohol on a daily average are running a high risk of danger.

Causes of Drug Abuse

18. Drug abuse is the result of a complex interaction between the action of the drug involved, the person who uses the drug, and the environment or society in which the user lives. Some drugs produce effects which are more attractive to one user than they are to another. Where a drug is freely available and cheap, the incidence of its use and abuse is greater. The attitude of society also has an influence, as some ethnic groups have a low incidence of alcoholism, while other ethnic groups have a high incidence.
19. While the significance of hereditary factors in alcoholism and drug abuse is generally unclear, in some cases the predisposition is related to early childhood influences. The causes are subtle, as cases occur in stable families. There are varying degrees of predisposition to drug abuse and alcoholism and in some persons this predisposition will manifest itself in early life, while in others it is delayed until middle age. Here the end result will also be effected by current stresses the individual is experiencing. Other factors which influence drug abuse include a lack of awareness of the danger of drugs, the stresses of life and the effects of advertising.

Treatment of Those Who Use Drugs Excessively

20. The proverb, 'Prevention is better than cure', has special significance in the case of drug abuse. There is at present no lasting cure for those who become physically dependent. However, continued abstinence from the drug can achieve such recovery that the individual concerned may again take his place in society. However, the complex nature of drug dependence and the great personality differences of the people concerned keep the proportion of successes low. But with further research, appropriate treatment facilities, and sympathetic understanding by all sections of the community, substantial improvement in the success rate could be made. The idea that there is a best method of treatment for drug dependence assumes a uniformity of that condition which in reality does not exist. Therefore treatment programs must be flexible to provide for the variation in people and in the effects of the drugs they have used.
21. The aim of treatment must be to prevent the use of drugs by individuals and to rehabilitate them. In the acute stages, treatment methods include detoxication and the efforts to obtain the individual's acceptance of the need for abstinence. Individuals need to be motivated to replace the drug with a more personality-satisfying substitute. These aims are not readily or quickly achieved, because treatment is arduous and time-consuming, expensive, and frequently disappointing. In many cases, drug users continue taking the drug because of the relief it gives them. It is, therefore, not uncommon for relapses to occur, but it is important that the likelihood of relapse be accepted or anticipated, and that relapse should not be taken as a sign of failure. Relapses should not debar the individual from further treatment, since there is much evidence to suggest that progress toward recovery is still being made if the interval between relapses is extended. It is essential that those persons who might reasonably

be expected to mature out of their dependence be given active support for an indefinite period until this is actually accomplished.

Treatment of Alcoholism

22. Alcoholism, for its part, is best considered a chronic condition, requiring lifelong care. For many, total abstinence is recommended. The setting of limited goals lessens discouragement in the therapist, the family, and the alcohol-dependent person. Considerable support must be provided for therapists. This includes the creation of and maintenance of an encouraging environment, good working conditions, and competent administration. Very often those closest to the alcoholic-dependent person require as much support as the person with the drinking problem, sometimes even more. When a spouse or a member of the family seeks guidance, it usually comes as a shock to learn that the family has an integral part to play in the recovery process. The dependent person who enjoys the understanding cooperation of an aware and sympathetic family has a much better chance of recovery. It is necessary to learn to accept alcoholism as a condition which may only be arrested, never cured.
23. Limit setting (eg only so many glasses a day, not before noon, only in company) and confronting those in the pre-alcoholism stage of drinking with their problem and the danger ahead can be helpful. Punitive measures have been relatively ineffective for those suffering from alcoholism, and there is a limit to what can be achieved by restrictions alone, for excessive restrictions are unlikely to be maintained, would lack community support, and are therefore better avoided. Prohibition is not an alternative, even though it must be granted that the continuing use of alcohol will always be associated with some level of problems.

Summary

24. Drugs, including alcohol, are valuable substances, but their misuse has serious consequences for the individual and society. Each society will have to decide the extent of the availability of these substances. Every effort should be made to maintain stability for the individual, the family unit, and the community.