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Selected Resources

There is a great deal of material currently available concerning drug problems. The following selected resources are particularly useful for church-related group and community activity. All four provide bibliographies of additional resource materials. The first three include not only books, but films and organizations which can provide additional drug information.

*Price, Thomas E., and Wayman, Lawrence H. *Doing It: A Church Guide for Community Action on Drug Concerns*. Board of Christian Social Concerns of the United Methodist Church, 1971. 59 pages. Order from: Service Department, Board of Christian Social Concerns, 100 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002. 60c; 10-24, 55c each; 25-99, 50c each; 100 or more, 45c each (plus shipping). Order No. G T1189.

Schultz, John. *A Trip Through the Drug Scene*. Minneapolis, Corporate Communications, 1971. 82 pages. \$2.10.

Event magazine. "Drugs," Vol. 11, May 1971, pp. 2-30. American Lutheran Church Men, 422 S. 5th St., Minneapolis, Minn. 55415. 50c.

Spangler, John D. *Pastoral Care of Young Drug Users and Their Families*. Write to: Division of Christian Life and Mission, National Council of Churches, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, N.Y. 10027, 1971. 31 pages.

Two agencies which provide a comprehensive service are:

National Clearing House for Drug Abuse Information, 5454 Wisconsin Ave., Chevy Chase, Md. 20015.

National Coordinating Council on Drug Abuse Education and Information, 1211 Connecticut Ave., Suite 212, Washington, D.C. 20007.

*This is the most comprehensive and useful single resource for church groups available at this time.



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CHEMICAL COMFORTERS AND DRUG DEPENDENCY

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**Commission on Church and Society
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Division of Social Service,
Division of Youth Activity,
American Lutheran Church Men,
and the Board of the Luther League
The American Lutheran Church
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FOREWORD

To the many materials already available on drugs, drug misuse, and the control and correction of drug-related problems we have chosen to add another. We emphasize the dimension of people. We sense that it is people, not chemicals, that constitute the heart of the drug problem. People have problems with themselves, in their own identity and self-acceptance. People have problems in living with others, in relating to other people, and in meeting responsibilities expected of them. Often such people are tempted to turn to chemicals to comfort them in their anxieties, insecurities, and tensions.

This booklet will find its uses in counseling, in youth and adult discussion groups, and in encouraging informed action to cope with drug misuse. It is published cooperatively by several units of The American Lutheran Church, manifesting their mutual effort to be helpful to the congregations and members of this church in coping with a significant social question.

Dr. John R. Hanson, assistant director of the Commission on Church and Society, is the author of this booklet. The thinking, comments, and points of view of many persons have contributed to the ideas expressed by Dr. Hanson.

The Commission on Church and Society, in consultation with the Division of Social Service, the Division of Youth Activity, the American Lutheran Church Men, and the Board of the Luther League, approved publication of this booklet in order to stimulate thinking, to promote discussion, and to motivate informed action on a sensitive social question. It is not to be regarded as expressing the official policy or position of either The American Lutheran Church or any of the participating units. Its usefulness lies in the validity of its analyses and in the cogency of its reasoning.

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April 1972

Chemical Comforters and Drug Dependency

Introduction

Issues associated with drug use, the misuse of drugs, drug education, and legal controls over drugs through laws and through police and court actions, have become emotional issues. Though it is difficult to achieve a clear perspective, this booklet seeks in an analytical and reasoned way to provide a balanced perspective on a difficult issue of contemporary life and society.

Definitions are important. Following are the working definitions of three terms used throughout this booklet.

Drugs are chemical substances that change the physical or mental state of persons who use them. Drugs which primarily affect the human mind or consciousness include: (1) alcoholic beverages; (2) caffeine (in coffee, tea, cola drinks); (3) nicotine in tobacco; (4) tranquilizers; (5) barbiturates and related sedatives; (6) amphetamines and other stimulants; (7) narcotics; (8) LSD and other hallucinogens; and (9) marijuana, together with its most potent form, hashish.

Drug misuse (a term used rather than drug abuse for purposes of clarity) refers to the excessive or compulsive use of a drug to an extent that damages both a person's health and his capacity to function socially, mentally, or vocationally. Misuse of any drug has to do with its use for nonmedical or nonspecific purposes.

Drug dependency refers to the physical and mental condition of a person for whom the usual or increased doses of a drug are needed to prevent withdrawal (abstinence) symptoms.

Drug Problems Are People Problems

A Total Cultural Problem

Our culture encourages us to believe that some chemical can answer any given need. John Schultz, a staff member in the national offices of The American Lutheran Church, wrote in *A Trip Through the Drug Scene*: "There are drugs for serenity, for tranquility, for dieting, for joy, for alertness and for gaining weight. Kids are taught to pop pills for an Excedrin headache, aspirins for cramps, and vitamins for ennui, cold capsules for the sneezes and benze-

drine for the wheezes. The average family has thirty different drugs in the medicine chest." (p. 7)

American citizens live in a chemical and drug culture. We live partly by feelings and we are bombarded by slick advertisements for products that will make us feel good. We are somewhat of a comfort cult. We tend to seek quick chemical "mood modifiers" to change our feelings.

American society affirms that it is perfectly acceptable to have one's feelings changed by prescription drugs. Our society encourages people to participate chemically.

A Problem of Life and Living

The dominant theme of this booklet is that drug problems are people problems and problems related to living.

Our national drug use/misuse problem is more than a legal or a medical issue. It is ultimately an ethical issue. It involves what we do as people on the basis of what we feel and what we believe. Christian ethics is concerned with such faith-feeling-doing. God's people in the church can best approach the drug issue as a problem of people living in relationship with themselves, other people, and the natural environment, in the framework of their relationship with God.

Many people suffer from inadequate and distorted views of themselves and their personal and social relationships. Images of one's self in relation to others and problems of personal identity come into focus. Youth and adults alike must deal with such enduring questions as: Who am I? Why am I here? Who cares? How do I meet this world? How can I be what I want to be?

Some Basic Christian Affirmations About People

1. Christian faith stresses the fundamental value and worth of each person before God and in fellowship with other human beings and all of God's creation.

2. Christians believe the biblical declaration that they have been chosen to be sons and daughters of God. God has graciously called them, young and old, to be his people and has granted dignity and significance to each person.

3. Christian values focus on personal and social relationships of love, acceptance, trust, affection, peace, joy, forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, hope, liberation, respect, honesty, concern, care, and compassion.

4. The church, as a concerned community, seeks to serve human needs and participates in striving to achieve a more just and responsible society.

5. We, as part of the people of God in Christian communities today, must communicate with as many persons as we can about the meaning of love and justice, sin and grace, judgment and reconciliation for social and personal living.

6. Christians worship a God of life. They respect, value, and participate in preserving God's gift of human life. Christians understand that the misuse of drugs can be destructive and can lead to death. They realize that drug misuse involves our sinful condition in the shape of personal and social idolatry, unbelief, greed, rebellion, alienation, sheer self-interest, hypocrisy, and deceit.

7. The church proclaims the good news of forgiveness and reconciliation achieved by Christ's victory over the powers of sin and death on our behalf. Our new life in Christ enables us to proclaim Christ's living good news of healing, liberation, hope, and wholeness for all people.

Concern About Our Current Drug Problem

Much of the information circulated about drugs today is stereotyped, hysterical, and overly moralistic. There is inadequate public knowledge of the effects of various drugs. Drug users are often seen more as criminals than as victims or as persons with an illness, a disease, or a problem of living. Only recently have many persons discovered that drug misuse is more a problem of adjustment to life's demands than a crime.

Adult Drug Usage

On a given day many adults take some or most of the following drugs: coffee, tea, aspirin, nicotine in tobacco, alcoholic beverages, tranquilizers, and pep pills. All this, together with other prescription and nonprescription drugs, is part of the adult drug culture. Adults often seek "chemical comforters" to cope with the problems and pressures of each day. Adults, like many youth, are seeking "better living through chemistry."

We usually think of drugs prescribed by a physician as intended for the treatment and prevention of disease. Such drug usage restores wholeness and good health to people. We are now more aware that many drugs have been used for a long time by a wide range of people for nonmedical reasons.

There is a qualitative difference between drugs taken for purposes of good health and those taken for a variety of nonmedical purposes. There is a qualitative difference also, for example, between using heroin or methadone illegally with the possibility of becoming addicted to such a drug and using caffeine or amphetamines legally with the possibility of becoming habituated (psychologically dependent) to such a drug. The differences are in terms of their effects upon one's life and health and upon one's capacity to participate in life's relationships and responsibilities.

All Americans are involved in our drug problem. In order to deal honestly with this ongoing problem, we all need to examine our present attitudes and opinions on the issue. We must look again at our values, biases, hopes, and fears. We need accurate information and a fair exchange of viewpoints among persons representing a variety of experiences with drugs.

Young Drug Users

Most parents and other adults were not particularly concerned with the misuse of drugs and the issue of drug addiction as long as such problems seemed confined mostly to minority groups and poor whites in ghetto areas. More recently, however, the drug misuse problem appears throughout the nation—in the suburbs and among prominent families. Parents in "middle America" often now are alarmed to discover that their sons and daughters have been exposed to a wide range of both illegal and legal drugs. Some of these youth have suffered "bad trips" or have been arrested and have received extremely severe prison sentences for drug possession and use.

The federal government, in the name of "national security," a number of state and local governments, and many concerned citizens have declared war on drug misuse. The problem remains that it is a struggle conceived in fear and aimed particularly at youth. Adult misuse or overuse of drugs is often overlooked in this battle against the misuse of drugs. Many adults fail to recognize the judgment on the society they have shaped which is being expressed by young people who seek an escape from alienation by experimenting with "chemical comforters."

The Most Misused Drugs: (1) Alcohol and (2) Nicotine

The most widely used and misused drugs in the United States, legally and illegally, are (1) beverage alcohol and (2) nicotine in tobacco products. Marijuana, which receives much public atten-

tion, ranks far below alcohol and nicotine in terms of drug use and misuse. More Americans use nicotine than any other potentially dangerous drug. Alcohol is a close second with about 95 million users. There are no reliable estimates on marijuana use in our country. We have well over 9 million citizens who misuse alcohol and who are physically dependent on it. They are often called alcoholics. We may have perhaps several hundred thousand narcotics addicts. Available medical evidence indicates that marijuana is not physically addictive, although further research, more precisely discriminating as to the nature and potency of marijuana, especially in the form of hashish, may challenge this present understanding.

Problems of People and Drugs

Some Core Thoughts for Reflection

Our attention should immediately be directed to open discussion of some of the following drug-related problems affecting people.

1. Often there is a communication gap between youth and adults on drug problems. Many young people have more factual knowledge about drugs than have their parents. Many fearful, confused, and manipulated parents need to discover a rational and positive attitude toward factual information related to drug misuse. Many congregations can and should participate in providing adequate community drug misuse education.

2. Drug misuse manifests itself as a symptom of widespread anxiety, discontent, and confusion that afflicts many people of all ages in our society.

3. The drug issue among youth affirms the social acceptance of drugs that began as children watching slick TV drug commercials and observing the activity around the family medicine cabinet. Youth inherited the drug problem. They did not create it.

4. Drug misuse is a current national issue for several reasons, including: (a) sensationalizing of the issue by some persons in the communications media (press, radio, TV, films) and by some drug law enforcement officials, (b) harsh drug laws that label users largely as criminals, and (c) the easy availability of drugs that can be purchased without a prescription. Other misused drugs are taken from family medicine cabinets or are secured by forging prescriptions, stealing, or buying drugs illegally from others.

5. Many adults, including charming senior citizens and respected civic, church, and national leaders are habituated (psychologically

dependent) to nicotine, alcohol, coffee, and tranquilizers. People can also become habituated to television viewing, particular foods, driving powerful vehicles, and the like.

6. Present research has shed little light on the roots of drug misuse. It is still difficult accurately to describe a "drug user" in nonjudgmental terms. Further, reliable drug misuse information for persons vocationally concerned with drug users is still not readily available in many communities.

7. Governmental public policy over the years has sought to build up fear against drug misuse. Unfortunately this policy has sometimes been pursued without careful regard to honesty or facts, especially concerning marijuana. Both the benefits and the dangers of certain drugs have been exaggerated in recent times.

8. Every drug user should realize that he cannot be sure what he is swallowing, sniffing, or shooting into his body. The experimental drug user must face this kind of question: How do you know that the drug you plan to take is what you think it is?

Puzzling Discussion Questions

Why do people use drugs? What purposes are served by drugs in a user's life? How may we use drugs wisely? Who controls drug usage in our society? Why are legal but often dangerous drugs such as amphetamines, barbiturates, and tranquilizers so readily available in our communities? What are the social implications of the new drugs that are being developed? How can we live well and take fewer drugs? Why is there so much emphasis on consumer spending in our nation?

Why Do People Use Drugs for Nonmedical Purposes?

A person decides or chooses to use drugs. For many it seems to be an adequate choice at the time. Key questions involved with such drug use are: When? Where? With whom? For what? Reasons for using or misusing drugs are complex, varied, and multiple. They include attempts to: (1) seek release from internal and external pressures and tensions; (2) overcome feelings of anxiety, depression, boredom, emptiness, powerlessness, and frustration; (3) modify behavior in order to be happy, to feel good, to have fun, to experience pleasure, to attain ecstasy; (4) intensify sensations; (5) heighten emotions; (6) achieve status; (7) seek enlightenment; (8) handle tension; (9) search for euphoria; (10) "expand consciousness"; (11) pursue truth, beauty, goodness, and meaning in life; (12) manipulate moods; and (13) produce special experiences seemingly not available by other means.

Lutheran chaplain Max Metcalf, writing in *Lutheran Social Welfare*, suggests that some people use drugs as "an escape from a society that makes adolescence so prolonged and adulthood so uncertain." Perhaps the majority of American drug users are experimenters. They want to see, taste, and feel what it is like to take certain drugs. They desire to alter consciousness occasionally for social, recreational, and group identification purposes. Such persons may use drugs in order to gain what they want and think they need but what they feel they are unable to get in other ways.

Some young people use illegal drugs in an attempt to strike back at the hypocrisies, deceptions, lies, and injustices they have seen in adults they have known. Youth may use drugs in rebellion against parental or other authority or against parental indifference. Together with many of the reasons for drug use noted above, youth may take drugs for purposes of curiosity, exploration, peer group acceptability, and self-identification.

Many adults have difficulty in understanding why young people experiment with drugs. However, it seems that adults would be wise to listen to youth as they relate some of the reasons they take drugs. "Youth culture" drug experimentation often favors life styles emphasizing cooperation more than competition; community over individualism; and a sharing of wealth and resources among all the peoples of the world. The "drug culture" of young people claims to protest against materialism and a consumer culture which seems to encourage selfishness and vanity. Many young drug users claim that they experiment with drugs in order to seek self-knowledge; to find personal meaning and worth; and to express the values of conscience, love, and human community as more significant than one's productivity and financial achievement.

Involvement and Action

Needed Public Policy Measures

We need factual public education on the drug issue. Citizens need reliable data on which to build answers to such key questions as: (1) In what ways do present drug laws reinforce or restrain illegal drug use?; (2) What drug use penalties are unjust? Why?; (3) Are public drug policies more sensitive to drug users and society or to particular interest groups and lobbies?; (4) What are the effects of current legal policies on scientific knowledge about drugs?; (5) What are the genuine attitudes and values of persons and groups shaping public policy on drug information as over against the understanding of the drug problem by many other

citizens?; (6) What is being done and what can be done about rehabilitating persons addicted to drugs?; and (7) What efforts are being made and what measures are necessary to improve our national public policies concerning drug misuse?

Guidelines for Church and Community Drug Education Programs

1. Community drug information and education efforts must involve cooperation among private and public, local, county, state, regional, and federal organizations and agencies.

2. Participants should include: educators; physicians, nurses, and other medical professionals; pharmacists; lawyers; judges; law enforcement officers; church leaders and members; social service agency staff persons; former drug users-and-addicts; former alcoholics; youth, senior citizens; business and industrial spokesmen; civic leaders; community service group leaders; public officials; and members of the communications media (press, radio, TV, films).

3. Drug misuse education programs will be useful to the extent that they are factual and accurate; informative and nonrepressive; rational and nonmoralistic; adequate and interesting. They must combine factual material with personal emotional involvement and investment.

Additional Ways Churches Can Help

Recently, a North Conway Institute Conference of clergy and laymen involved in helping people deal with alcohol and drug problems responded to the theme—"How can the church help"—by suggesting that concerned adults and youth together:

—Review present drug laws and work to change them where they are unjust;

—Make creative use of communication media (radio, TV, films, newspapers, magazines) in critically evaluating current drug advertising and promotion;

—Give particular attention to the values of marriage-family relationships while seeking to understand alternative life styles; and

—Assume "an advocate role on behalf of the public, examining the practices of various groups that may contribute to the problem, including industry, legislative bodies, and administrative agencies."

Other church-related efforts can:

—Offer new life, reasons to live, and hope to alienated people by communicating in word and in deed those views that enhance and promote the God-given value of human life and the human body;

—Help church members and others to become well-informed about genuine drug problems;

—Work with other groups to establish fair and humane drug laws;

—Support efforts that focus on prosecuting illegal drug "pushers" and those who traffic in illegal distribution of dangerous drugs;

—Act with others to change conditions that degrade and dehumanize fellow human beings such as poverty, racism, unemployment, underemployment, wars, inadequate education, starvation, intolerance, and bigotry.

Members of Christ's body, the church, should discover anew and witness to Christian values that give to life a vibrant meaning. Christians should celebrate God's good creation (Genesis 1:31) by enjoying loving human relationships, wholesome companionship, music, the arts, lifelong education, meaningful work, rest, self-discipline, and the like. As members of Christ's body we of the church should demonstrate by how we live personally and in our communities that things which some people are trying to do through misuse of chemicals can be done in other more satisfactory ways. Healthy relationships accept moods, feelings, doubts, and anxieties as part of the givens of human life, a part that God's Spirit can heal and make new for those who accept God's promises.