



**The United Church  
of Canada  
General Council**

# **GC28 The Use and Misuse of Drugs (1980U753)**

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## **Theological Approach**

### **Dependency**

God through incarnation in Jesus Christ has affirmed that in our humanity we should “have life and have it abundantly”-that we are created in God’s image. Nurtured by Christ’s spirit and strengthened by God’s means of grace, we are given confidence to cope with the complexities of living. In this way we develop a healthy dependency upon our own inner resources and also upon loving and supportive human relationships. When confidence in God, others and ourselves is seriously eroded we tend to become susceptible to pressures and substances that interfere with the development of our wholeness.

Without the reality of God and the help of warm relationships, unhealthy dependency continues, becoming a self-perpetuating vicious cycle.

Solutions to such dependency do not lie in tampering with the external conditions, but rather in helping people to discover or re-discover the confidence which has been promised by God’s grace and which is reinforced in Christian community.

### **Exploitation**

If we understand that exploitation is a process by which humans are taken advantage of, thereby suffering loss or hurt so that others may gain, then the link between dependency

and exploitation becomes evident.

Exploitation occurs when the condition of dependency is played upon in order to offer substances and styles of living which appear to satisfy the needs of that dependency. This is most evident in current advertising campaigns-ranging all the way from breath conditioners to the use of alcohol-promising escape from discomfort.

In addition, exploitation takes advantage of the innocence of youth and of others who have not been exposed to addictive chemical use and its effects. In this instance, those who use dependency as a means to control others for political, social, or economic gain, exploit normal curiosity and the need for adventure and new experiences so as to introduce people, especially the young, to chemically-induced experiences (or promise of them) as a response to those needs.

The use or manipulation of people for personal advantage, contradicts the affirmation which Christ gave to our humanity as those who are made in God's image. Exploitation is thus a violence of God-given human worth and dignity and, as such, can be described as an act of violence.

Exploitation involves the collaboration of both the exploiter and those being exploited. Any intervention made in this relationship must be directed at both parties and the interaction between them. Focus on one part of that system is likely to prove ineffective. Assistance to individuals to regain self-confidence and the skills of inter-dependency must go hand-in-hand with challenges to institutions, systems and agencies which tend to feed and reinforce the dependent state: brewers, distillers and drug firms who are primarily motivated by excessive profits; governments using drug and alcohol revenues to help meet budgets; advertisers using lifestyle and avoidance of discomfort themes; physicians dispensing drugs to treat symptoms rather than causes.

Our faith promises us wholeness and, it is just that wholeness which must be sought for and found by the person exposed to such dependency and exploitation. The strategies, programs and policies we recommend in this report are geared to that search.

## **A Statement of Concern**

Many substances are addictive when ingested by humans. Some are illegal, some are available only on prescription; others are legal and may be acquired without any special permit or approval.

These represent very different comfort chemicals widely used by our society, and are substances being misused with harmful and damaging results.

## Recommendations

The Division of Mission in Canada has adopted the following recommendations and proposes that General Council endorse them:

- A. i) THAT we re-affirm the oft-expressed concern of the United Church about this problem of alcohol and drug abuse and consider it to be the responsibility of all church members, regardless of their personal practices related to the use of alcohol and other drugs.
- ii) THAT education of the church and public around the issues of dependency and exploitation and alternatives to the use of chemical comfort be a priority for all of the church, with adequate budget allocation.
- iii) THAT we protest to the appropriate government and regulatory bodies the exploitative advertising of alcohol and over-the-counter drugs.
- B. THAT we continue with the implementation of the recommendation of the 27th General Council with respect to alcohol including the provision of adequate staff and funding.
- C. i) THAT we express concern to the government about the inequities and inconsistencies in the courts' handling of marijuana offences.
- ii) THAT we urge the government to remove gross inequities in the legislative justice system.
- iii) THAT we urge the government to use extreme caution regarding changes to legislation that might be interpreted as a relaxation of control of marijuana.

- D. THAT we study licit drug use (over-the-counter and by prescription) especially with respect to dependency, exploitation and alternatives.
- E. THAT we confirm that the responsibility for work in connection with addictive substances (alcohol and other drugs) rests with the Health and Social Services Unit of the Division of Mission in Canada.

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