



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC27 Toward Preventing Alcoholism and Alcohol Misuse (1977T566)

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The Unique Task of the Church

The question might fairly be asked as to the reason for particular attention in the church to the problems associated with alcohol misuse, when there are so many government, quasi-government, and private agencies focusing on this problem.

We begin to answer this question by asking another: What unique gifts has the church to offer persons, families, and communities where alcohol misuse causes harm?

Uniquely the church is that body of people assigned to consciously carry forward (in all times and places) the gospel of Jesus Christ, his ministry of teaching and healing, and his straightforward commendation of the good, and reproof of evil.

The gospel is a call to be united with Christ who gives abundant life. While life has been called, "the indefinable force...the most valuable and constant of all that we possess," it is the staggering claim of the church that it comes from, resides in, and returns to Christ as Lord. This gospel is for all who sit in "darkness," in emptiness, in the spiritual voice which is at the bottom of so much self-destruction and destruction of others. Other agencies may reflect this gospel, may speak it, but it is the unique work of the church to consciously share it everywhere.

It is the unique work of the church, also, to teach Christ and to provide channels of healing, motivated by his love. This teaching and healing is with his authority and assumes that the defence of innocence is vital, along with forgiveness of sins and the joys of community. The teaching and healing are the occasion of the Christian fellowship, and the fellowship is the milieu of the teaching and healing. The teaching and healing community, while often failing

in actuality, is always potential in the church and is a unique gift (a ministry) that can and should be activated on behalf of “all sorts and conditions” of people with intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical problems.

The church is especially fitted and called to the responsibility of being the accepting, loving and redeeming community in which sick and overwhelmed people may find restoration to health. Within the sacred community of the church such people may learn that of themselves, in isolation, they are powerless to face successfully the many problems of a confusing and a dangerous world.

The church is constituted and founded upon the fact that it is, indeed, the body of Christ of which we are all the living members. What strength a person may acquire to face his problems courageously comes, therefore, not from his “inner resources” (alone), but from a power outside himself through his membership in a body of which Christ is the head. This fundamental Christian teaching has been appropriated successfully by the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous and is undoubtedly the basis of the success of A.A.

The church, therefore, through its clergy and laity, is committed to the concern for social problems such as alcoholism—a commitment that it cannot evade or take lightly. It is the privilege of the church to witness to the world that God’s purpose for man is to share the eternal life of God. This is the meaning of heaven.

The church, moreover, has the tradition and responsibility, to expose the roots of evil. It will strive to use its influence to bring about the ordering of society in such a way that justice and human welfare are consciously pursued as social priorities. The philosophy of the church is not “what will be, will be,” and the tradition of the United Church, certainly has never been to withdraw into sanctified enclaves away from the “world.” Rather, the future is open, and the future of legislation, political groupings and economic structures, is open to change based on God’s call for justice and love. This is prophecy, and while the church may not have a corner on God’s prophetic truth, it nevertheless remains the case that a servant church, which desires faithfulness and obedience to God, will strive to fulfil a prophetic role.

In practical terms this has meant that the church in the present, as in the past, seeks to set the problem of alcohol misuse in the broad context of causation related to profiteering and political chicanery, as well as to causes arising in individual personality, family or work place.

The uniqueness, then, that the church brings to the issue of alcohol misuse may be summed up as the preaching of Christ who gives abundant life, the presence under stress, and the

responsibility to denounce commercial exploitation, political self-interest, and public hypocrisy related to alcohol.

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