

Philosophy of Ministry: Alcohol & Drugs

Assemblies of God U.S. Missions
Compassionate Missionary Council

Background

The four-fold mission of the Assemblies of God values the demonstration of compassion as an integral part of our fourth reason for being. This is lived out in our core values to proclaim Jesus; to invest in the next generation; to plant churches; to resource our constituency; and to pray.

The consumption of alcohol and other addictive substances has been ingrained in society since Biblical times, with numerous Biblical references attesting to the evils of drunkenness. While Christians may vary in their individual interpretations of certain scriptures, impacting the decision to use alcohol in moderation or to use medicinal drugs under the supervision of a physician, the reality all can agree on is that abuse of these substances creates havoc in the life of the individual affected and his or her family. In addition, substance abuse negatively affects society at large in the form of increased crime, the need for treatment programs, and increased need for government services such as food stamps or foster care. For these and other reasons, the Assemblies of God promotes abstinence from alcohol use, as detailed in the position paper adopted by the General Presbytery on August 6, 1985.

However, in a secularized society that increasingly accepts social drinking and even recreational drug use, there is great likelihood that new Christians may be dealing with abuse issues when they come to faith, or that the church will engage with families impacted by the negative effects of alcohol and drugs, particularly if the church touches these families through other ministries (a food pantry, for example). This situation calls for a compassionate response from the church, consistent with the fourth reason for being, as individuals and families strive to build a new life in Christ while simultaneously dealing with the effects of earlier choices.

Ministry Context

While exact data are hard to obtain due to subjective responses, much research indicates that faith-based, holistic solutions, acknowledging dependence on a higher power and the support of others who are on the same journey, offer the best success rates for recovery from addictions. The U.S. Missions Division of the Assemblies of God includes the Teen Challenge ministry, with centers for men, women, teen boys, and teen girls, offering Christ-centered solutions to life-controlling addictions. Other faith-based ministries operate in various communities throughout the United States. Some ministries have developed curriculum that can be accessed by other groups and used for ministry in the local church. Teen Challenge, for example, offers basic and advanced studies for new Christians and small group settings, in addition to “Living Free” support group recovery curriculum. It is imperative that churches be aware of the resources available in their communities and partner with law enforcement agencies, family and legal services, and medical providers. Not only do such partnerships provide the opportunity to speak faith-based solutions into community approaches to the problem of addiction, but they also educate church staff to make appropriate recommendations to individuals needing help.

In addition to community partnership for treatment and recovery solutions, it is equally important that churches offer persons struggling with addictions or in recovery the opportunity to interact in the overall life of the church. While participation in support or recovery groups is important, these individuals also need to build affirming relationships and use their gifts and talents in a faith setting, in order to mature in their faith and avoid becoming entangled in their old lifestyle again.

As vital as recovery programs are, prevention is equally important. Recognizing that school-aged children and teens often face real or perceived pressure to experiment with alcohol and drugs, several ministries have developed school programs such as the Teen Challenge “Stay Sharp” presentation. Youth Alive offers the “7 Project” which includes a school assembly component on substance abuse. Community partnerships and connections aid in prevention work, building relationships with school officials to show concern and gain access to present the assembly programs.

The U.S. Missions Research & Resource office seeks to connect field personnel and local churches with suggestions and resources for community partnership both in prevention and recovery, particularly working with church members and faith community leaders who are themselves working as “salt and light” in law enforcement, medical, teaching, and other supportive professions. U.S. Missions also seeks to incorporate the knowledge and experience of Teen Challenge staff and missionaries, Youth Alive missionaries, and other trusted ministries, into “best practice” recommendations and training for churches as they welcome persons struggling with and recovering from addictions into the life of the church.