

Catholic Bishops Welcome Extra Funding In Anti-Drugs Campaign

"The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference welcomes the Prime Minister's latest announcement of funding for education and diversion programs in the fight against illicit drug use.

"The Bishops highlight the lack of a sense of purpose and meaning in life as the basic cause of the drug problem. It is in such a climate that drug-taking becomes attractive. Unless this basic cause is addressed, the drug problem will remain and grow. The whole of Australian society must be concerned with the basic messages being given to the young about the meaning of human life.

"The Catholic Church at different levels can play a major role in the fight against drugs. Helping to shape public policy, educating its own people and the wider community, allocating more of its resources to rehabilitation and counselling programs, supporting ecumenical and community initiatives are just some ways the Church can respond to the Gospel in the face of one of the great social problems of modern times.

"Young people are often in the best position to help and influence for good other young people who may be caught up in the drug scene or tempted towards it. Young People and the Future, the 1998 report coming from the Bishops' consultation with young people, identified drug and alcohol abuse as being one of the major issues facing the younger generation.

"The Bishops recognise that:

- The drug problem is having a destructive influence on Australia's population, especially among the young, is causing great heart-ache to many families and is a major cause of death and social disorder.
- The drug problem is a highly complex one and there is no single or simple solution. For this reason governments and the community should be open to a range of strategies in attempting to assist victims and in setting up preventive measures.
- Spiritual values need to be offered to people who are searching for deeper meaning in life and those who are depressed, in such a way that they will not be tempted to take solace in drugs. Faith communities and individuals should appreciate what they have to offer to others in need.
- Education is vitally important in the fight against illicit drug use. Hopefully, the success of the anti-smoking campaign in changing public opinion will be a model for anti-drug education. Schools obviously have a key role in educating their students against drugs. The widespread acceptance of drug-taking by society must be challenged.
- The illicit drug problem needs to be viewed more as a health and sociological issue than simply as a matter of crime. Alternative measures to imprisonment should be welcomed, with a strong emphasis on rehabilitation. Greater opportunities for treatment should be provided for drug-affected prison inmates.
- Organised crime is deriving huge profits from illicit drug use at the expense of countless victims. Such criminal activity must be vigorously prosecuted.

- There are still long waiting lists for people seeking detoxification and other treatment programs. Greatly increased funding is needed in these areas.
- A greater awareness is needed in the community of the human dignity of the people caught in the spiral of drug addiction. Too often such people are viewed by others as simply a threat to their lives and property.
- A wholesome family life provides important protection in safeguarding young people from the perils of the drug scene. This is not a judgement on families suffering through drug abuse, but a call for support for families at all levels.
- Unemployment contributes substantially to the drug problem and success in tackling unemployment will reduce the incidence of drug dependence.
- Governments, churches and the community as a whole have a special duty of care towards their most vulnerable citizens."