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The temperate way

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to study its legal and social implications. We suggest that particular attention be given to the insistence in the Charter that 'children and adolescents have the right to grow up in an environment protected from the negative consequences of alcohol consumption, and to the extent possible, from the promotion of alcoholic beverages'. Implementation of this declaration is of special urgency in Ireland, where the phenomenon of underage drinking is of the greatest concern. While fully recognising that personal motivation is of primary importance in the practice of temperance, it is nonetheless true that the young should be given as much legal and social support as is humanly possible. Were such support to be given here in Ireland, a generation of young people which is already very vulnerable would have a much better chance of choosing 'the temperate way'.

The challenge to practise and encourage temperance is there for all of us. We must have no illusions about the immense pain caused by excessive drinking in the past and in the present. Looking to the future, we urge Irish men and women of all persuasions to find credible ways of protecting our young people from habits of dependence on alcohol. In many circles it has become accepted as a mainstay of social life. Although legislation can help, it cannot take the place of human awareness and of human responsibility. Parents need to talk openly about these issues, listening to what their children have to say, alerting the younger ones, in good time, to the dangers of alcohol abuse, the seductive power of advertising and the peer pressure that must inevitably come.

Schools have an important role to play in promoting discussion on the question of addiction. The advantage the school enjoys, in dealing with large numbers, is the capacity to create a common appreciation of the issues involved. If the school can increase understanding, heighten motivation and engender a positive attitude towards temperance, the efforts of the individual pupil will be encouraged and advanced. The question of attitude is of the utmost importance. Our culture of over-dependence on alcohol will never be challenged unless attitudes change. Even the changing of attitudes, important though it is, will not be sufficient in itself. Opportunities need to be provided within local communities for healthy recreational activity. Those who create such opportunities and involve themselves in youth work and sport do a great service, not merely to the young but to our country as a whole. In addition to all this, the Church needs to commit itself anew to communicating the human wisdom of temperance in the use of alcohol. At parish level it needs to endorse the value of abstinence from alcohol and the spiritual basis for it, which we find in Christ's own way of costly love and as exemplified in the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association.

awareness and responsibility

Schools have an important role to play in promoting discussion on the question of addiction.

It is our hope that this centenary year of the Pioneers, which coincides with the final year of preparation for Jubilee 2000, may be an occasion of fresh reflection on the place of alcohol in our culture. We express our gratitude to those who have given creative witness in this field. We pray that the Spirit of God may guide all of us towards practical wisdom in this whole area. If we are to overcome this shadow side of our Irish heritage, we need creative and Christian responses to confront this old challenge in new circumstances.

creative and Christian responses

The Temperate Way

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‘Proverbially, Ireland is a land that combines the smile and the tear.’ So said Pope Pius XII in 1956, addressing a group of Garda Síochána, who were also Pioneers. He went on to lament the fact that, as a result of intemperance, more tears were shed in Irish homes than ought to have been the case. Many of us are only too well aware from painful, personal experience that the Pope’s observation was true. Like every gift of God, alcohol is good. It has its place at times of celebration and relaxation. However, it is also a drug that can be devastating in its consequences. What comes to us as gift can be a curse for some, unless it is wisely used.

gift or curse

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The Ireland of 1999 is very different from that of 1956. It is a more complex place: less unified in its culture; less certain of its religious roots. We are all rightly proud of the many positive changes of these decades, ranging from success in such fields as the economy and the arts to the confidence of a new generation aware of its European horizons. But among the various shadow sides of this new Ireland is the need to face our complacency over alcohol and its increasingly dominant place in our social life.

facing complacency

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The occasion for this message is a happy one – the centenary of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association, which came into being in the last days of 1898. It was founded by Fr James Cullen SJ together with a group of lay people, and the good it has done over the last century amply demonstrates what a far-sighted initiative it was. The strength of the Pioneers lies in their willingness to deprive themselves of a legitimate pleasure for the good of others, linking this sacrifice to the saving work of Christ himself.

This spirituality of generosity and self-denial touched a deep chord in the hearts of people. In the twenty years between the foundation of the movement and the end of the First World War, 200,000 Irish men and women became Pioneers. This centenary year of the Association gives us an opportunity to express our appreciation and gratitude to the many people who have undertaken the challenging commitment of Pioneer membership. One of the fruits of that commitment is the happiness enjoyed

centenary of the Pioneers

A spirituality of generosity and self-denial…

by thousands of families that might otherwise have been caught up in the turmoil of addiction. Not all our families, of course, are free of such turmoil. Alcohol continues to be the drug that is most abused in Ireland. For that reason alone the witness of the Pioneers is still very relevant. It takes its specifically Christian place beside other such commendable groups as AA, Al Anon, Alateen and the many helping agencies that confront the problems of alcoholism.

It is not always realised that alcohol is *the* major dependency problem, not only in Ireland but also in Europe. Families suffer from the consequences of alcohol abuse more than from all other drug problems combined. Against this background we wish to draw attention to the 1995 Alcohol Charter adopted by the European Region of the World Health Organisation. It is a charter that merits careful consideration. We strongly recommend that the State authorities, North and South, set up a task force

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alcohol charter