



## SESSION G

### Drug and Alcohol Use and Abuse

#### RATIONALE/GOAL

All of us have a relationship to addictive substances, whether we use them or not. Many of us (perhaps most of us) have been affected one way or another by alcohol and drug misuse. Many of the people we work with in our JVC placements suffer as a result of substance abuse, their own or the addictions of people close to them. Alcoholism and drug addictions are pervasive problems in our society and they affect each one of us.

#### OPENING PRAYER:

*Creator God, help us to look at ourselves and at one another as honestly and lovingly as you look at us. Give us the courage to see and acknowledge both the pain and the joy of being human. Help us to reach out to those in our lives whose freedom is limited by addictions.*

#### PROCESS:

- I. Begin by taking some quiet time (perhaps ten minutes) to reflect individually on your use of drugs and alcohol. Jot down some notes as you consider the following questions:
  - A. What is my first memory of alcohol and/or drugs? What was my first experience of drinking and/or using drugs?
  - B. How did I feel about it at the time? As I look back on those experiences, how do I feel about them now?
  - C. What was my experience of alcohol and/or drug use in my family?
  - D. To what extent was alcohol/drug use part of my life prior to JVC?
  - E. To what extent is alcohol/drug use a part of my life now?
  - F. How do I feel about my use of alcohol/drugs in my life now?
  - G. What other forms of addiction have I experienced (food, sex, work, relationships, etc.)?
- II. Spend some time sharing your answers with the group. Let each person speak without interruption, before each person gives feedback or asks questions.
- III. Read and reflect on the enclosed letter Bill Zuelke wrote to the 1992-93 JVs. In light of your discussion, his thoughts, and the JVC values, develop a community alcohol policy. How do you and your community want to live out the values in relation to the use of alcohol in your community? How will you hold each other accountable?
- IV. Schedule a time for your community to attend an open 12-step meeting together (AA, Al-Anon, or a similar meeting). Afterwards, take time to share your experience of this meeting.

**CLOSING:**

Please take a few moments to reflect on your discussion this evening. Recite this prayer aloud. It is a longer version of the Serenity Prayer traditionally used in Alcoholics Anonymous and some other 12-step programs.

*God, Grant me the Serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change  
The courage to change the things I can  
And the wisdom to know the difference-  
Living one day at a time  
Enjoying one moment at a time  
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;  
Taking, as he did, this sinful world as it is  
Not as I would have it  
Trusting that He will make all things right  
If I surrender to His will;  
That I may be reasonably happy in this life  
And supremely happy with Him forever.*

## Alcohol Use and Abuse

These thoughts on alcohol use were taken from a letter written to the 1992-93 JVs by Bill Zuelke, who specializes in drug and alcohol counseling at the University of Portland.

Dear JVs:

The alcohol industry spends **12 billion dollars** each year to make sure you know that alcohol is a great social and personal asset for status and community. That comes to approximately 48 dollars spent to convince **you** that alcohol is a necessary part of your life. Have you been convinced? Our society as a whole watches individuals, families, and entire communities and cultures become profoundly disabled and indeed destroyed through the use of alcohol. These two conflicting realities stand side by side seemingly unchallenged and unquestioned. Perhaps your work as a volunteer has opened your eyes and heart to this great lie, or perhaps you are still able to separate the reality of alcohol's destructiveness and your own use patterns. Much the same could be said for drug use.

Many subjects are taboo in our culture. We do not talk about the homeless, it is too uncomfortable. We do not talk about our obligation to sustain all peoples' dignity and worth, it makes us too uneasy. We do not talk about spirituality, it is too divisive. My guess is that in your communities, dedicated to social justice, based on community values, and grounded in Ignatian spirituality these are all topics of conversation, and spirited conversation at that. Well, how about the taboo subject of alcohol and drug use? It is impolite at best to discuss or reflect on our alcohol and drug use as individuals and communities. It is clearly counter-cultural to openly discuss the role alcohol or other drugs has played in your life and will play in the life of your community. Can you handle it, or is it too uncomfortable?

Can I push you one step further? St. Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians (see below) talks about our freedom and our opportunity to live in solidarity with our more fragile brothers and sisters. Although the discussion is about meat sacrificed to idols it is easily translated to alcohol or other drugs. You have the freedom and the knowledge to drink alcoholic beverages responsibly. You may personally feel comfortable using drugs. You also have the opportunity to not use in solidarity with those who are destroyed by alcohol and other drugs. As Paul says, "Only be careful that you do not make use of this freedom in a way that proves a pitfall for the weak" (verse 9). And again, "That is why, since food can be the occasion of my sister's or brother's downfall, I shall never eat meat again in case I am the cause of my sister's or brother's downfall" (verse 13). Perhaps your community could pray and reflect upon this passage and see if it calls or challenges you to a new stance regarding alcohol and other drugs.

Thanks for your attention to this letter. I hope you can experience it as a challenge that motivates rather than frightens or intimidates, that expands your freedom rather than creating boundaries in your life. Blessings to you and your fine ministry.

Sincerely, in Christ, *Bill Zuelke*

*Now concerning food, offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge."  
"Knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. If any of us imagine that we know something,  
we do not yet know as we ought to know. But if we love God, we are known by God.*

*Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence"  
and that "there is no God but one." For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or  
on earth -- as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords" --yet for us there is one God,  
the Creator, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
through whom are all things and through whom we exist.*

*However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through being hitherto accustomed  
to idols, eat food as really offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.  
And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother and sister for whom  
Christ died. Thus, sinning against them and wounding their conscience when it is weak,  
you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of my brother or sister's falling, I  
will never eat meat, lest I cause them to fall.*

1 Cor. 8: 10-13

