

ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW



DRUG'S AWARENESS WEEK A PASTORAL LETTER FROM CARDINAL THOMAS J. WINNING MARKING THE BEGINNING OF DRUGS AWARENESS WEEK

My dear brothers and sisters,

The Apostles in today's gospel are petrified of being overwhelmed by the storm. We too can feel the very real fear of being overwhelmed by the many problems afflicting today's society. After Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, he challenged the disciples' faith: "Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?" Today He asks that question of us. We must also have faith that, relying on his help, all the storms will pass if we play our part.

One of the most urgent storms pounding society today is the plague of drug abuse.

Scores of our young people have died through taking illegal substances. Thousands more have ruined their health as drugs take their toll on their bodies.

Occasional cases make the pages of our newspapers, yet for many families the tragedy of drug abuse is a daily cross. Crime becomes a desperate means to try to pay for the abuser's habit and the inevitable involvement of the police and the courts causes much heartache to parents, relatives and friends.

The effects, in fact, are felt by all of us. Hospitals are busier (drug-related admissions have gone up ten fold since 1980). We feel less safe on the streets at night. Insurance premiums rise with higher crime levels.

As a Church in the heart of the world we must read the signs of the times and propose practical measures in keeping with the teaching of Christ who cared for the most vulnerable.

That is why I seek to enlist your help in playing a full and active role in National Drug Awareness Week which begins this weekend.

Communication is vital if we are to alert our children to the dangers of drugs. Parents need to talk with knowledge and authority to convince their children of the relevance of what they say.

Remember this: any one of your children is a potential victim of drug abuse - not only those from dysfunctional families. We, as a Church will do all we can to help prevent this happening, but as parents, you have a vital role to play in monitoring your children's activities and talking to them about the dangers involved.

Today, you will find a "Parents Guide" available after Mass, prepared by Scotland Against Drugs. This gives information about the real dangers we face. It will help parents to talk about the issues in an informed way with their children.

I have also arranged that every Parish have a register of all drug rehabilitation and support agencies in Scotland. Any parent who may be concerned should ask to consult this.

We are all aware that there are no easy answers to the drug problem.

Such a realisation can prompt some to call for the legalisation of certain drugs. Personally, I would have very grave reservations about this course of action.

However, even when solutions are not easy to find, we are not absolved from trying to help where we can. Loving care for individuals, support for families, understanding and patience are all hallmarks of a Christian response. The families of addicts suffer acutely as they watch a child's self-destruction over a long period of time.

During this Drug Awareness Week, and indeed every week, we should be mindful of those brothers and sisters of ours whose lives are being torn apart by drugs. Remember their parents, especially, and all who are affected by the actions of someone they love deeply yet feel unable to help. Remember those who grieve the loss of a child, a sister, a brother, or sometimes a parent because of drug abuse. Remember, too, those in statutory and voluntary agencies who do everything they can to stem this tide of evil and heal the damage.

The Church already operates various projects in your name to assist those trying to come to terms with addiction. The Red Tower project in Helensburgh has an excellent reputation for its Christian approach to drug rehabilitation and for the help it gives to those trying to give up drugs. However, we cannot simply leave it to the experts to solve the problem.

We can make a difference by offering support and understanding to those scarred by drugs.

We can make a difference by taking a fuller role in the life of our parish, perhaps offering our time and energy to providing alternatives to our young people, many of whom become involved in the deadly drugs culture through boredom and unemployment

Most importantly, we can make a difference by praying every day for those whose lives are being ruined by drugs.

All of us *can* do something. All of us *must* do something.

Yours devotedly,

@ Thomas J. Cardinal Winning,
Archbishop.

18th June, 1997