

A Compassionate Response: A Statement on Opioids

(Prepared by The Task Force of Province III of the Episcopal Church)

Opioid use disorder, like other substance use disorders, profoundly affects the mind, body, and spirit. Scientific research shows that addiction is a disease that originates in the brain - not a moral or spiritual failing. Much like other treatable diseases, many factors contribute to addiction, and the disease affects the whole family. Some factors include behavior, environment, and genetics. Recovery benefits from a variety of support, including medical care, counseling, and faith communities. Often the last line of defense in communities, faith communities now have an important call to foster space for conversation, prevention, education, care, healing, recovery, prayer, and advocacy. Faith communities also have an ongoing responsibility to examine and address problematic contextual factors such as joblessness, trauma, injury, family stability, educational offerings, community resources, and crime.

Faith communities offer a place for modeling life-giving relationship with persons facing the disease of addiction by considering their outreach interactions, pastoral response, and language. Certain practices and ways of avoiding persons who are facing addiction express not only cultural stigma, they actively discriminate against a person with a treatable disease. Sometimes our language labels a person as an “addict” rather than seeing them in a more dignified way as a person facing addiction. Faith communities offer open space for worship, healing, interaction with God and God’s people, safety, and prayer. This helps to break down the secrecy and shame around addicted members of family and community groups that leads to discrimination, and may discourage a person from seeking assistance toward their recovery goals.

Recovery is a life-long process requiring commitment. Addiction, as a chronic illness, requires appropriate resources for recovery. There are many pathways to recovery. For some persons, residential inpatient treatment works best. For others, medication-assisted treatment (<https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment>) offers a pathway toward health. For still others, twelve step groups provide a pathway to recovery and community. There are recovery support institutions and virtual recovery communities. Many discover that a combination of pathways works best for their recovery journey. As new pathways are created, we celebrate new possibilities for persons seeking healing. Faith communities, depending on their gifts, abilities, and facilities, take on various roles of ongoing support for persons in recovery and their families.

Addiction is a daily struggle. It affects entire families, and children are especially at risk during this crisis. Faith communities can offer belonging, community connection, listening, prayer, comfort, care, worship opportunities, and other resources to persons in households where addiction has caused great pain and damage. Children, parents, grandparents, siblings and spouses require care and support that is open-hearted and free from moralizing judgement.

For the Victims of Addiction

O blessed Lord, you ministered to all who came to you: Look with compassion upon all who through addiction have lost their health and freedom. Restore to them the assurance of your unfailing mercy; remove from them the fears that beset them; strengthen them in the work of their recovery; and to those who care for them, give patient understanding and persevering love. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer of The Episcopal Church, page 831)

Learn more here:

<http://www.provisionsforthejourney.org/>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help>