

Ask Fr James

What is the Catholic Church's view on the wasting of tax payers money on needle program and safe injection sites?

Since the introduction of the syringe and needle exchange and safe injection sites programs to help those addicted to the use and abuse of illicit substance, advocates have sought to demonstrate the positive, moral and economic advantage of these programs. They argue that they are safe and effective measures for combating the threats to public health while opponents of the programs assert that syringe and needle exchanges condone or promote substance abuse. Many Catholic Christians are divided in opinion on this matter. Some wonder about the morality of the program and look to the church and her doctrine to help them make up their mind.

The church have always believed that with proper standards for treatment, more individuals can have access to evidence based therapies to treat addiction and to lessen the transmission of infectious diseases. This has been the philosophy of Catholic Hospitals and Catholic health care ministry. Drug addiction is a worldwide epidemic. Treatment for addiction lacks consistency and a standard of care worldwide. More people die daily due to drug overdoses than in motor vehicle fatalities. Addiction effects all ages, genders, ethnicity, and financial classes. According to Statistics Canada, ten (10) people die every day from drug overdose.

Pope Francis recently is pushing Catholics to expand their parish church's mission statements and our understanding of church. He asked Catholics; "What kind of church do you dream of?" To quote Pope Francis directly; he said;

"I see clearly, that the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. And you have to start from the ground up... let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent. God accompanies persons, and we must accompany them, starting from their situation. It is necessary to accompany them with mercy. When that happens, the Holy Spirit inspires the priest to say the right thing."

This above statement of the Pope has been interpreted to mean that meant that the Pope metaphorically is wishing that Catholics expand their understanding of their calling beyond Church attendance and spiritual care to the reality of the people on the streets. The epidemic of opiate and heroin dependence which is an addiction is a place to start. Addiction is a disease and does not show racial preference, it affects all financial classes, and is affecting individuals regardless of age. Pope Francis is thus calling on all Catholics to be open to seeing the church as a field hospital; a place for engaging the wounded world. That the church's engagement with a wounded world has profound ramifications for the mission and ministry of healing. This is in line with the gospels call on us to be mindful of the poor and downtrodden in our society (Matthew 25:34-40; Luke 4:18). God can sometimes seem elusive in this hardest hit people of the inner-city neighbourhoods, but our kind consideration become for them an ecclesiastical presence and Christ's presence at streets. The church has always made the poor a priority--a mission that has been very challenging in most fronts, as in this case.

You may email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he will answer them in our Sunday Bulletins.