



NEW HAMPSHIRE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Joint Statement on Substance Use Disorder and Recovery

The New Hampshire Council of Churches is an ecumenical Christian body of nine diverse denominations, including Protestant, Unitarian Universalist and Orthodox traditions. We recognize that many of our churches either already engage in their own recovery ministries, partner with outside recovery groups, or desire to begin ministering to people with Substance Use Disorder. We also recognize here are also many churches that have not yet found paths to serving those with Substance Use Disorder, and we also seek ways to help them find meaningful and effective ways to do so.

The Council affirms with secular health authorities that Substance Use Disorder is a “chronic, and treatable condition.” This condition has physical, mental and spiritual dimensions.

We affirm that one of the greatest barriers to treatment is stigma. We further recognize that churches have contributed to the stigmatization of people with Substance Use Disorder. Therefore we commit to the eradication of this stigma in our churches.

So, we commit to supporting churches in openly preaching, praying and studying on Substance Use Disorder in a Biblical and theological light. Through recovery ministry, we commit ourselves more deeply as followers of Jesus Christ in his healing ministry (John 4:46-54).

When we do this, we recognize that Substance Use Disorder is present within each person and that we do not minister to an outside other but we minister alongside people facing the same struggles as ourselves. The Scriptures recognize that the internal spiritual struggle is in every person, giving no room for stigmatization or personal pride (Romans 7).

We affirm that only God’s grace can resolve our interior spiritual struggles. We support methods of addressing Substance Use Disorder that are rooted in grace and transformation. We reject inhumane methods that are limited to a model of criminal justice and punishment.

We affirm that we see God’s transforming and healing grace in strategies that draw on harm reduction methods and in Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT). We encourage churches to partner with agencies using these strategies, including for-profit agencies.

We affirm that God’s grace meets us where we are. Grace encompasses all kinds of people in their diversity. Transformational recovery ministries are not an opportunity for proselytizing, that is coercive actions that make our care conditional upon entrance or membership into a church or organization. While we recognize that conversion experiences sometimes accompany recovery, God’s healing grace is not conditional on human categories or expectations.

We affirm that recovery ministries ought to serve all people equitably and leave no room for discrimination, especially when serving “those most vulnerable in this crisis—young people, people of color, people who identify among LBGTQIA+, people who have been in prison or jail, military veterans, and people from other groups that are disproportionately affected by this crisis” (2020 Minneapolis Area Synod Assembly, ELCA, Resolution on the Addiction Crisis).

Adopted by the Board of Directors on *Thursday, December 17, 2020*.