

Free edition for  
**TEMPERANCE  
SUNDAY**

LENT 2009

# PIONEER



A JESUIT PUBLICATION

WWW.PIONEERTOTAL.IE

the  
**Future**  
*starts*  
**today**  
*not*  
**tomorrow**

Pope John Paul II





## Fr Joe Dargan S.J.

Chairman of the PTAA

Welcome to this special edition of the Pioneer

I have experienced first hand the pain, suffering and total loss of self respect caused by alcohol and substance abuse. I have seen lives destroyed and families split as they struggled to control the devastation and havoc as a result of such abuse. The quality of so many peoples' lives is deeply affected either directly or indirectly. I can still hear a 90-year-old man, with tears running down his cheeks, saying to a sixty-year-old person: "I hate seeing you ruin your life".

I hate seeing us as a nation ruining so many lives because of alcohol and substance abuse. Alcohol related problems such as healthcare, crime, accidents and absenteeism costs the state €3 billion a year. And this at a time when we are facing a grave economic crisis!

The present world-wide economic crisis forces us to question the meaning of life and ask ourselves questions about how we live – including our relationship with alcohol and drugs. Many groups – Government, Health Care Executive, voluntary bodies such as AA, Barnardos, the various churches – are endeavouring to deal with this problem and challenge from their own particular standpoint. The Pioneers are part of this response. Using prayer, abstinence and reparation as their means they deeply desire, as we look to the future in a spirit of hope based on Gospel values, that respect for the dignity of the human person and God's gift of alcohol will bring about a better quality of life for all.

Over the past year the Pioneer Association has been looking at its purpose and place in modern Irish Society. As part of this process we have reaffirmed our mission to address the problems in society caused by excess alcohol consumption and drug abuse.

We are challenged to turn this crisis into an opportunity. There is a deep spiritual vacuum in many parts of our society which has relied on material possessions and pleasure as the goal of existence. On today, Temperance Sunday, we are calling on people to be more aware of their own relationship with alcohol, and to make a personal commitment to abstain from alcohol over the Lenten period, or to reduce their consumption.

The future will only be different in so far as the present is different.



## Mary Wallace TD

Minister for Health Promotion and Food Safety

There is a social acceptance of alcohol in our society and I believe that we need to question the signal that this is sending, particularly to our young people. I am continually encouraged by the energy and commitment of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association in continuing to promote abstinence and particularly with their work with younger people.

I know that young people are our greatest resource and it is important that we guide and advise them safely through their early years. Research tells us that it is important to delay a young person's first drink for as long as possible. A young person is more vulnerable to the emotional and physical effects of alcohol on the brain and on the body than a grown adult. Encouraging young people to take the Confirmation Pledge to abstain from alcohol until 18 years of age is still good practical advice.

I believe that there are benefits for society as a whole if everyone tries to reduce their alcohol consumption. It is never too late to start and the onset of the season of Lent provides an ideal starting point. I very much welcome this timely and important initiative by the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association and wish them every success now and in the future.



## Bishop Éamonn Walsh

Vice chair, The Irish Bishops' Drugs Initiative

This special edition of the Pioneer Magazine to mark Temperance Sunday encourages us all to address our relationship with alcohol. Ireland will forever be indebted to Fr. Theobald Mathew, founder of the Temperance Movement. We are also indebted to Fr. James Cullen, founder of the Pioneer Association 111 years ago. Fr Cullen, in expressing appreciation of Fr. Mathew, described him as the 'giant at his shoulder'. Matt Talbot is an inspiration, a sign of hope to those who can only safely relate to alcohol through abstinence. The abstinence of the Pioneer Association is positive in the way it converts the sacrifice involved into reparation for the suffering caused through the misuse of alcohol.

I welcome the Pioneer Association's extended outreach to those who wish to enjoy the use of alcohol. A temporary pledge for Lent or a significant reduction in the consumption of alcohol is proposed. Temperance Sunday provides an opportunity to discuss honestly with family and friends the way we use alcohol. Minimising, denial and mistakes can be addressed in a friendly environment. Goals can be set and agreement made, to help one another in setting targets of abstinence or reduction with built-in friendly support structures to encourage and evaluate. There is always someone for whom this is the year that will make the difference in their relationship with alcohol. The Pioneer Association may occasion that difference.

# Contents

## 2

### Welcome

Fr Joe Dargan S.J.  
Mary Wallace T.D.  
Bishop Éamonn Walsh

## 3-5

Fiona Ryan  
CEO Alcohol Action Ireland  
Calling 'time' on  
alcohol related harm

## 6&7

Bernard McGuckian S.J.  
Grappling with the  
demons of addiction:  
Invitation to give up  
or moderate alcohol  
consumption for Lent

## 8

Interview  
Micheál Ó Muirheartaigh



# Calling 'time' on alcohol related harm

Fiona Ryan: CEO Alcohol Action Ireland

**A** distraught 15-year-old rings the police at two o'clock in the morning from a petrol station to say that her mother is drunk, and she is there with her younger brother and sister, one of whom is in a buggy. The teenager is forced to be a parent in a situation any adult would find daunting; two other children are probably scared and/or numb – depending on their age or how many times they might have been exposed to this before. Now add in the costs of gardaí, A&E and potentially social services: the human and economic costs are mounting.

The above is a real-life story: alcohol-related harm is not confined to the individual who is

drinking. We may consider ourselves individuals but we live in families and communities. We have relationships – mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, colleagues, friends, team mates... and alcohol-related harm can impact on every one of these.

Alcohol-related harm, like any social problem, requires political, economic and social solutions. Public health specialists would state there is a relationship between levels of alcohol related harm and consumption levels, and will point to statistics showing increasing incidence of liver disease or public order problems. The other side of the argument is voiced by those who back the rights of individual consumers to legally

buy what they want.

The argument might seem highbrow but in reality, it is played out in supermarkets in the way alcohol is sold, in courts, in accident and emergency rooms – one in four injury admissions are alcohol related – in courts and schools. One man summed up that tension between rights and their limits when he said: "Your right to wave your fist stops at the point of my nose." It's been two hundred years since the philosopher John Stewart Mill made that pronouncement, and politicians and law makers are still trying to work out when to intervene.

Just before Christmas, Alcohol Action Ireland highlighted how

## Are you thinking of abstaining from or reducing your intake of alcohol for Lent?

If so, below are some practical suggestions.\*

- Refrain from alcohol for the weeks of Lent.
- Consider drinking non-alcoholic drinks when out with friends at the weekend.
- Reduce the intake of alcohol from what is your normal use.
- Encourage your friends to reduce alcohol intake.
- Donate some of the money saved from alcohol to a charity of your choice.
- Encourage discussion with your friends about the dangers of excessive drinking.
- Initiate a discussion in the home about the family's attitude to and use of alcohol.
- Nationally, we might encourage people to reduce their alcohol use, say by one-third or a half, during the weeks of Lent.

\*Taken from *Alcohol: The Challenge of Moderation*, a Pastoral Letter from the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference for Temperance Day 2007.

If you would like to take a short-term pledge or become a member of the Pioneers, please contact: Róisín at 01 8749464 or email [pioneerroisin@jesuit.ie](mailto:pioneerroisin@jesuit.ie)



one major retailer was selling a bottle of beer at 83c – cheaper than a bar of chocolate. A politician looking at this situation has a choice: they could say nothing, they could decry the fact that alcohol is being sold cheaper than sweets, or they could say that it is the retailer's right to price goods accordingly and it is the consumer's right to take advantage of the best deal.

It is fair to say that over the last decade, whether stated publicly or not, the latter has effectively been the official position. Alcohol Action Ireland's argument around the 83c beer was that the real cost of cheap alcohol might end up costing families dear in terms of unintended consequences, and that alcohol is not an ordinary grocery despite the fact that it has become part of the normal shopping basket.

Alcohol is enjoyed by many people in a variety of social settings, but alcohol is also a drug that can prove addictive for some and create dependency for a greater many, and catapult a

greater number still into situations they would never have considered without the presence of alcohol. Since it is not an ordinary grocery it should not be treated as an ordinary grocery. Alcohol deserves to be treated with respect, and its pricing should reflect this.

Alcohol Action Ireland has also pointed out that in the debate on competing rights there is a significant group of people whose rights are not recognised at all – they are the estimated 61,000

### Alcohol and Children

- Between 61,000 and 104,000 children in Ireland are estimated to be living in families adversely affected by alcohol
- A study of women who attended the Coombe Women's Hospital found that almost two-thirds (63%) of the 43,318 women surveyed said they drank alcohol during their pregnancy. Alcohol consumption, particularly in the first three months of pregnancy, can lead to disorders in how the brain develops in the womb



**“There are the children who will go hungry because family income is being spent on alcohol, or the children who will spend Sunday nights washing their school uniforms because they do not want to go to school in a dirty one and be called names.”**

they do not want to go to school in a dirty one and be called names.

In Ireland alcohol consumption increased from 9.8 litres to 14.3 litres between 1987 and 2001. Levels peaked in 2001 and the rate has been slowly decreasing ever since from 13.36 litres in 2006 to 13.19 litres in 2007. Again, the relatively high number of abstainers means that those who are drinking in reality are drinking even more. The marginally decreased figure is still among the highest in the 26 countries of the enlarged EU, putting Ireland at number three. The EU average was 10.2 litres in 2002.

In Ireland, in 2006 we drank 13.3litres of alcohol for everyone aged 15 and over – this translates into in actual drinks as 548 pints or 143 bottles of wine or 51 bottles of vodka. Again the real figures are higher when the number of abstainers is factored in. Equally, hospital discharges for alcohol-related liver disease increased by 147% between 1995 and 2004. Cancer of the liver has had the highest rate of increase of all cancer types between 1994 and 2003, increasing by 10.7% for females and 7.4% for males, compared

to an increase for all cancers of 1.1% for females and 1.1% for males.

Ireland's drinking levels have changed, but so has the profile of the drinker. Women are now a major market for alcohol. The increase in alcohol use and heavy drinking among young women is reflected in the fact that one in four women discharged from hospital for alcohol-related conditions was aged under 30, compared to 17% of men discharged. Between 1995 and 2004, there was an increase of 29% in the proportion of girls aged under 18 discharged from hospital for alcohol-related conditions compared to an increase of 9% for males under 18.

The latest statistics show that Ireland's teenagers are also among the top binge drinkers in Europe, with 29% of 15-year-olds reporting they were drunk in the last month. The Office of Tobacco Control estimates that the amount of money spent on alcohol by 16 and 17-year-olds came to €145m. Considering Irish teenagers are drinking as young as 13, this figure again is liable to be an underestimation.

The role of marketing cannot be ignored in youth drinking, but alcohol marketing has permeated daily life to the extent that we are constantly exposed whether in the supermarket, watching a match or even turning on the

### Alcohol and Driving

- Alcohol was identified as a factor in 37% fatal crashes in 2003, in which 124 persons were killed
- In the period from 2003 to 2005, almost one third (32%) of crash deaths were alcohol related
- Where Blood Alcohol Concentration levels were available for drivers killed, almost six out of ten had alcohol in their blood
- One in every six drivers with alcohol in their blood, who were responsible for fatal crashes in 2003, were not above the legal limit

television. Can some space be reclaimed by calling for limits on marketing whether on price or promotion, sponsorship and advertising?

As a new generation faces up to increased risk from alcohol-related harm, politicians and society have some hard choices to make both in terms of setting policy priorities, legislation and providing services for those who need help. Some of what is needed is happening, but not enough. Will it be in time to make a difference to that family outside the petrol station, or stop the 15-year-old from becoming an alcohol casualty before the age of 30?

**Fiona Ryan is the chief executive of Alcohol Action Ireland, the national charity for alcohol related issues [www.alcoholireland.ie](http://www.alcoholireland.ie)**



## PLEASE SUPPORT OUR CAUSE

Would you like to make a donation towards helping us at the Pioneer Association to continue our work?

If so, please send your donation to:

**Pioneer Association  
27 Upper Sherrard Street  
Dublin 1**

or you can visit our website at:

**[www.pioneertotal.ie](http://www.pioneertotal.ie)**

and see the donations link on our home page.

**THANK YOU**

Bernard J. McGuckian SJ: Central Spiritual Director, PTAA



# Grappling with the Demons of Addiction

**D**o not drug yourselves with wine, this is simply dissipation; be filled with the Spirit". This is the advice of St Paul to the people of Ephesus when he told them to be "very careful about the sort of lives they lead, like intelligent and not like senseless people".

St Paul knew that wine was a good thing. Didn't he recommend his friend Timothy to ease up on his water-based fast and to "take a little wine for the sake of your digestion and your frequent bouts of illness"? However, Paul also castigated drunkenness as something so serious that it could jeopardise one's salvation. His main concern was that people be blessed with the self-control leading to joy and peace that comes from a Spirit-filled life. The slavery of addiction is incompatible with the freedom of the children of God.

Wine has loomed large in the human story since the dawn of history. Indeed, the vine was one of the first things Noah discovered on emerging from the Ark. The great Patriarch himself has the dubious distinction of being

the first person to get drunk. Since that time, throughout the Bible, the "fruit of the vine" with its significant alcohol content has been considered a mixed blessing, bringing with it both pleasure and pain. This has led the inspired authors, from the prophet Isaiah to St Paul, to alert us to both the benefits and the dangers of wine.

Alcohol is a powerful "mood-changer". Few substances do this more effectively or more quickly. This is one reason why it must be treated with respect and handled with great care. If we become too attached to the pleasant feeling, to the extent that we want it to be permanent, we are headed for serious trouble. Very soon we will find that from being an amenable servant, alcohol has turned into a tyrannical task-master. You cannot trifle with God's gift of alcohol any more than with electricity. The consequences are lethal.

For the late Bishop Sheen, the famous American television preacher, there are only two philosophies of life: first the fast and then the feast or first the



feast and then the hangover. This applies across the whole board of our lives. Do I realise that worthwhile things, even satisfying pleasures, require patience and preparation, or am I a person who wants a quick fix to everything? My attitude to and use of alcohol is one area that reveals very clearly my stance in life.

## ADDICTION AND SPIRITUALITY

Today the word addiction implies an inappropriate attachment to something. This wasn't always so. In *The Decline and Fall of the*

Roman Empire, written in 1773, Edward Gibbon used the notion of addiction in another way. He refers to the freedom given to people "of following the religion which each individual thinks proper to prefer, to which he has addicted his mind, and which he may deem the best adapted to his own use".

Today we would probably use the expression "committed himself" in place of "addicted his mind". However, addiction still has the connotation of being completely "given over" to something. If we are completely given over to something, it has become our god. It is interesting that wine loomed so large for our pre-Christian ancestors that they gave it a god all to itself, Bacchus, and built temples to him. For the Christian, there is only one God. To give loyalty to any other god is idolatry.

## BECOMING FREE IN THE IGNATIAN TRADITION

Ignatius of Loyola, one of the great masters of the spiritual life, made extensive use of the word

**"Fr Cullen believed that excessive drinking, with all its pernicious ramifications, was one of the greatest impediments to peace and harmony in Irish life."**



## THE PIONEER CONTRIBUTION

Fr Cullen believed that excessive drinking, with all its pernicious ramifications, was one of the greatest impediments to peace and harmony in Irish life. For him, addiction to alcohol was one of those “demons” that Jesus said could only be driven out by “prayer and fasting”. So in December 1898 he asked a number of people, beginning with four women in St Francis Xavier’s Church, Gardiner Street, Dublin, to join him in a campaign of prayer and fasting that would bring about a change of attitudes among people in every segment of society. This would become known as the Pioneer Association.

The Pioneers pray to Jesus, under the symbol of His Sacred Heart, which the Pope at the time of Fr Cullen called “The Source of Life and Holiness”. Their hope and prayer is for an improvement in the quality of life in whole community.

■ **For moderate users of alcohol:** that they will never lose the gift of self-control and that some of them will consider freely giving up alcohol in a gesture of solidarity with those addicted.

■ **For people with a personal problem of addiction to alcohol:** that they will receive the grace and light needed to extricate themselves from their predicament.

■ **For those suffering because of the excessive drinking of loved one:** that they will not lose heart but be empowered to live through their difficult situation without becoming embittered or alienated and see an end to it sooner rather than later.

■ **For young people with the whole of their lives before them:** that they will be wise in their choices during their formative years and avoid dangerous experimentation with alcohol and drugs

■ **For total abstainers:** that they might consider consecrating

their abstinence to the Lord as do the Pioneers. They can take as their model John the Baptist, of whom it was said before he was even conceived: “he must take no wine or strong drink” (Luke 1:15)

■ **For the Pioneer membership around the world:** that they carry out their commitment in fidelity and generosity without any trace of hypocrisy or self-righteousness.

## COMPASSIONATE AWARENESS

On October 9th, 1974, during a pilgrimage to Rome to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Pioneer Association, Pope Paul VI gave this truly inspired summary of the role of the Pioneer in society. One of the most important messages ever received by the Association, it is as relevant as ever 35 years later.

“Among the Irish pilgrims we

warmly welcome members of the Pioneer Association Total Abstinence Association of the Sacred Heart. On the occasion of your seventy-fifth anniversary we exhort you to continue your praiseworthy efforts to help eliminate the disorder of alcoholic abuse from society. This is done by prayer and the sacrifice of abstinence which you gladly offer to God in reparation for the misuse made of his good gifts. This is likewise furthered by a compassionate awareness of the complex physical, psychological, moral and religious aspects of the disorder itself. We earnestly hope and pray that the joyful sobriety of your own lives and the Christian love and service which you show to all whose lives are affected by this grave problem may, indeed, serve to strengthen the moral fibre of society and bring closer to it the healing and sustaining hand of Christ the Saviour.

attachment. He regarded the propensity to drink excessively as coming from a “disordered attachment” to the pleasure attaching to alcoholic beverages. In Ignatian spirituality, one of the principal aims of Christian prayer is to help us overcome such weaknesses since they can wreak havoc in our lives.

In a classic phrase, Ignatius wrote that the purpose of spiritual exercises (prayer, reflection, examination of conscience, frequentation of the sacraments) is three-fold: to conquer myself, to put order into my life and to avoid coming to a decision as a consequence of a “disordered attachment”.

This simple formula, under God’s grace, has led to freedom and holiness for countless millions of people over the past five centuries.

The successful 12 Step Programme to Sobriety of Alcoholics Anonymous has been influenced by it. The founder of the Pioneer Association, Fr James Aloysius Cullen (1841-1921) was also inspired by the spirituality of Ignatius.

# PIONEER

## Why do the Pioneers exist?

Our mission in the Pioneers is to address the problems in society caused by excess alcohol consumption and drug abuse.

We do this through:

- ❖ Faith and prayer ❖
- ❖ Self denial, through abstinence from alcohol for life ❖
- ❖ Example ❖
- ❖ Activities based on presenting alternatives to individuals, particularly the young. ❖
- ❖ Advocacy ❖

Our vision ~ based on the love of Christ, as expressed in the Gospels ~ is to help to build a society where people live to their full potential and alcohol can be enjoyed in moderation, avoiding the ills that arise in society from excess in its consumption.

To find out more about the Pioneers or to join:

- ❖ [www.pioneertotal.ie](http://www.pioneertotal.ie) ❖
- ❖ Call Róisín at 01 874 9464 ❖
- ❖ Email us at [enquiries@pioneertotal.ie](mailto:enquiries@pioneertotal.ie) ❖
- ❖ Write to us at: ❖

Pioneer Total Abstinence Association 27 Upper Sherrard Street Dublin 1.



## Interview

# Micheál Ó Muircheartaigh

**M**icheál Ó Muircheartaigh, one of our most popular broadcasters, and his wife Helen, now live in Meath, on the border with Kildare. This leaves him within striking distance of the Capital as well as providing speedy access to Ireland's main arterial roads. This way, Micheál, father of eight and now a sprightly grandfather of many more, is well placed to set out on his frequent journeys to the four corners of the country and further afield where he promotes the many and varied good causes he has taken to heart. He took time off from his busy schedule to talk to Pioneer magazine.

**Pioneer:** Even the least observant viewer of the Irish media must have noticed the Pioneer Pin on your lapel. How long have you been a member of the Association?

**Micheál:** I joined the Pioneers while still in Primary School in Kerry. I was one of the many youngsters at the time who became Pioneers as an extension of the Confirmation Pledge. There were so many people of all ages around wearing the Pioneer Pin that it seemed a very natural thing to do.

**Pioneer:** You were a teacher for a large part of your life before dedicating yourself so totally to the media and the world of sport. Has Pioneer membership ever proved a handicap to you in any of these areas?

**Micheál:** I have never felt in any way disadvantaged by my membership nor by wearing the Pioneer Pin. Some people seem to imagine that there will be difficulties. My experience has been that none ever actually arise. People allow you your own space in life. Jim Bolger and Aidan O'Brien, two of the world's top racehorse trainers have no trouble always wearing their Pioneer Pins. There are plenty of alternative drinks and they should always be made available.

**Pioneer:** You are identified with Greyhound Racing and other sports but your name is primarily associated with Gaelic Games. There is a widespread complaint, especially among parents, that a culture of drinking and, indeed, irresponsible drinking has crept into the GAA.

**Micheál:** People of authority in the GAA freely admit that they will have to do more to counteract this trend in the future. An important

step in this direction is the appointment of an officer to promote a change in attitudes. Since most of the really effective work in the GAA is done at local level, each Club is now expected to nominate a person to cooperate in this project. The main focus will be the younger players.

**Pioneer:** You have had first-hand experience of GAA activity over a long period. Have there been any significant changes in recent times?

**Micheál:** One thing that is very striking is the high level of player fitness nowadays. The majority of them realise that you cannot drink heavily and keep fit. For instance, a few years ago, after one of the GAA All-Star trips abroad I asked Seán Kelly, then President, if he had any comments.

"The big drinking days are now over", he replied.

This is clear to me also. I remember on one trip when Dónal O Cusac arrived late because of work commitments. His first question on coming into the hotel was "Where is the gym?". In an earlier day the query would probably have been about the location of the bar!

**Pioneer:** Have you any ideas about how we can help young people avoid the pitfalls of alcohol abuse and drug addiction?

**Micheál:** We must give them a reason for doing something. There is no point in simply telling them not to do something. This is why your effort to explain the thinking behind the Pioneer work is so important. Because they are young and as yet inexperienced they are open to being challenged and encouraged to do things. Indeed, I think that we don't ask young people enough. They would surprise us with their idealism and generosity.

**Pioneer:** We are grateful to you for your generous support of the Pioneer Association over the years, Micheál. We hope that you will continue to help us as we try to bring our message to a wider audience.

**Micheál:** Indeed I will. You should be fearless in using every opportunity to put your important message across. You should keep in mind the Seán-fhocail. "*Muna bhfuil agat ach pucan gabhair bígí i lar an aonaigh*". ("Even if you have nothing else to sell than an old puck-goat make sure you are in the middle of the fair").

And you have something much more valuable to sell!