SOME SOBERING THOUGHTS

A “brain teaser,” published in a national magazine a few years ago, effectively demonstrated how easily we can be misled while trying to solve a problem. “Be prepared for the answer by the time you finish reading this paragraph, without retracing your steps,” said the directions. The paragraph simply recounted the route of a bus. The bus started out empty but took on and let off various numbers of passengers at each stop. Most readers busily added and subtracted those numbers only to be surprised at the end: “Ready with your answer? The question: How many stops did the bus make?”

It’s easy to be misled in the course of our ministry by solely concentrating on “relevant” issues while completely ignoring age-old problems that plague us all. Drug abuse, for example, received a great deal of attention some years ago. Many chaplains were admirably involved in various drug abuse programs, providing a spiritual aspect to the selected therapeutic processes. Once the attention on drug abuse subsided, however, many assumed the problem was solved. Then someone asked: “What about alcoholism?”

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism tells us that 10 million Americans have severe alcohol problems today. Another 40 million—family members, friends, employers, motorists, etc.—suffer directly from the consequences of that illness.

The potential for alcohol abuse within the Armed Forces is no secret. While the drug scene tragically captured the fascination of some younger service people momentarily, alcohol abuse, especially among career soldiers, has been an omnipresent problem. As Doctor Marc Schuckit begins his article in this issue, “Armed service problems with alcohol have existed since the first soldier took up his weapon.” For that matter, as is also stressed in this issue, chaplains and their fellow clergy in the civilian realm are by no means exempt. No rank, no age, no sex, no race, no level of education, no profession is totally immune.

How ever brief or incomplete, this edition is offered as a reminder of the severity of a problem too often ignored. Hopefully, it will also serve as an aid in your ministry to those who suffer from it.

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