



MICAP RECAP

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*Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems
Celebrating its 114th Anniversary in 2019*

AADIF/MICAP

(517) 999-0013
info@micap.org

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Drunkenness: A Sobering Reality in Church and Society

By Vernon K. Smith, Ph.D., MICAP Board Member

Today, it is more important than ever to have conversations about the real impact of alcohol in American life. David Sebastian has written a short book, *“Drunkenness: A Sobering Reality in Church and Society”* (2018) to help with these conversations. As a former pastor and academic Dean, Dr. Sebastian has seen first-hand the impact of alcohol on individuals and families, and he wants to bring awareness about its increasing use and deadly consequences. Dr. Sebastian was interviewed by MICAP Board member Vernon Smith. The interview is synthesized below.

Q: This is a small book about a huge issue, which you document carefully (with 69 footnotes in the first 32 pages.) What is the “sobering reality” of alcohol use in church and society?

Sebastian: *I refer to it as a booklet for teachers, pastors and parents. I realized as a pastor how often alcohol use is an issue, as it seemed like more people are drinking, and they are drinking more. As a University administrator, my research discovered that simply by enrolling in college, students changed their drinking behavior for the worse. There is a serious problem here, and someone needs to be talking about it.*

The health concerns are also hugely important, and people aren’t aware of them. There are more deaths from alcohol use – twice as many – than from breast cancer, for example, but you seldom hear anyone talking about that.

Q: You write that both church and society often choose to ignore the truth about alcohol. Why do you think this is so?

Sebastian: *The church and society have been desensitized to the dangers of alcohol. Some say it is legal, so why should we talk about it. If it is legal, it’s thought to be safe. And, people have bought into the lie that it is healthy, that it can in some way be helpful.*

Plus, alcohol is strongly linked to sporting events. So, these factors make it a subject that is not to be brought up in polite company.

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Q: You say that the public has bought into the lie that alcohol is healthy. The popular press has given a lot of attention to studies that suggest alcohol in moderation can contribute to health. You say that's not the case, that alcohol isn't healthy.

Sebastian: Researchers have examined those studies and found all the studies that found health benefits were flawed in their methodology. No study that didn't include alcoholics in the non-drinking group showed positive health results even for moderate drinkers. In my booklet, I quote Sally Davies, the chief medical officer of the United Kingdom, who said: "There is no safe level of drinking and that the health benefits of moderate alcohol consumption were old wives tales."

Q: You are a theologian and a pastor, and you write that in the Biblical texts on drinking wine and beer, that there is "friction." What are the Biblical messages about alcohol that we find in scripture?

Sebastian: There is a tension. The Psalmist paints wine as a gift from God, that it gladdens the heart of man. On the other hand, in both the Old Testament and New Testament are many references to the consequences of drinking and other vices that are to be avoided. Drinking isn't the only vice listed, but it is always listed as a behavior that is not consistent with the Kingdom life. One thing is certain: The Bible never places drunkenness or living under the influence in a positive light.

Q: When you set out to write this book, what were your objectives?

Sebastian: In the booklet, I quote singer and songwriter Judy Collins: "We must seek to understand what goes wrong in a world dominated by the most deadly legal liquid ever invented."

I wanted to help people understand what we now know about alcohol use. In the past couple of years, a number of studies and articles have been published based on sound research and scholarship. I wanted to provide a resource for people who might not read those publications.

I wanted to remind church and society that alcohol use is on the rise, along with problems associated with its use. I served a couple years

in the Army and was blown away by alcohol use in the military. I wanted to talk about prevention, especially for people going to college or the military. I am encouraged to see recovery ministries in churches, and I want to support and add to the long church tradition on this issue.

Q: Looking at where the book might be useful, what is your hope?

Sebastian: My hope is that it is readable and helpful to ministers, youth leaders, parents and other leaders who care about this issue. That's why I included a discussion guide to facilitate conversations.

I saw a friend recently and he said, "I appreciate your book because it's short!" I like that, because some people won't read a long book. I hope it is a resource worth reading, that it helps us understand alcohol use and abuse and helps begin a conversation, perhaps during Alcohol Awareness Month in April.

Q: After writing this book, where would you suggest efforts be focused to address alcohol problems, in terms of education and public policy?

Sebastian: It seems to me the priority should be on education and prevention. For me and for this book, a primary target audience is in the church. People need to have a place to talk about the facts, and there needs to be a consistency between what is taught in church and in school, especially regarding drinking and driving.

States need to look at the legal definition of drunkenness. The current Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) threshold of 0.08% is higher than most other countries. Each state sets its own legal limit, and Utah just lowered its BAC threshold to 0.05% where it is in most of Europe, and other states should follow.

I'd love to see alcohol products labeled like tobacco, as something we need to treat with care and caution.

My hope is that our cultural icons can speak out about a life lived soberly, that life can be good without alcohol.

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Q: What's next for you in your research and writing?

Sebastian: *I just finished a second book, titled: "The Plan: Shining a Light on Alcohol Consumption and Cover-Ups." This one is didactic fiction, focusing on alcohol consumption, the alcohol*

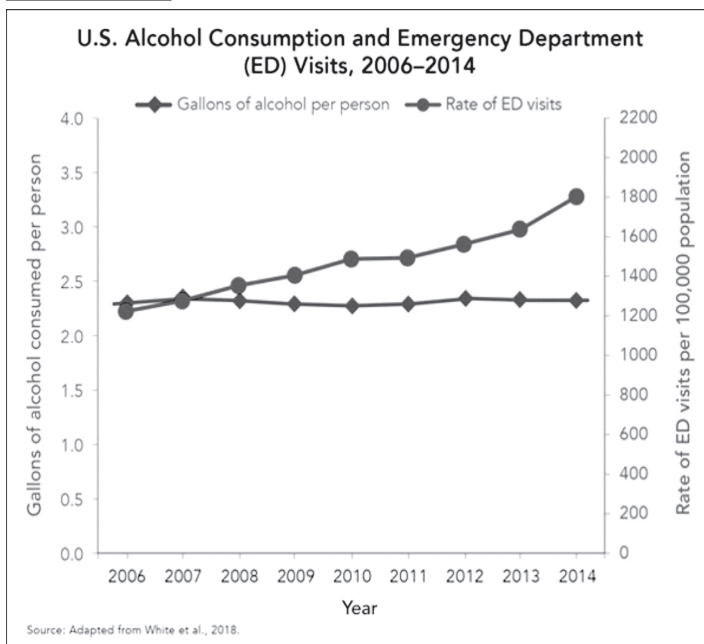
industry and how a young couple seek to make sobriety the new intoxication for young adults. It shows how to deal with the facts about alcohol, and shows parallels to our experience with the tobacco industry in the 1950's.

Editor's note: David Sebastian's books are available on Amazon, in print or Kindle editions.

Alcohol Misuse Can Be Hazardous to Your Health!

by Rev. W. J. (Bill) Amundsen, Retired

The title highlights a fact spotlighted by a new study of U.S. Emergency Department (ED) visits. According to NIAAA researcher Aaron M. White, Ph.D., the study's lead author, the data suggest that the rise in the rate of ED visits appears related to an increase in alcohol use among women and older adults who drink.



The chart above simply documents, statistically, what the Vern Smith article in this issue also highlights. My personal experience, which follows,

also highlights it. During the first week of 2019, I had occasion to speak with a middle-aged woman who has been battling a form of Lymphoma for two years. In the middle of this social gathering she was graciously visiting from table to table, being the good hostess; but she was also sipping a glass of wine while she was doing it. There were several other persons in the venue who were drinking on that occasion, but most were not drinking. There were also children present. **It was startling: the person who had been battling Lymphoma for two years was drinking a cancer-causing substance.** This was one of those situations which is exhibited in the NIAAA study, charted above, reminding us of that new increase of drinking among women and older adults. The question for us: How do we remind people without offending them, especially persons who have survived cancer, that beverage alcohol is a cancer-causing agent? We must if we are to turn the tide on the statistics shown above. Further, can those of us who read this remind our friends, family and acquaintances that beverage alcohol drinks are also possible cancer-causing agents?

Source of chart was adapted from White et al, 2018.

(For more information, see the NIAAA article, News From the Field story Steep Increase in Rate of Alcohol-Related Emergency Department Visits.)

Good news! MICAP's and Michigan Alcohol Policy's efforts paid off again. The bill that would extend alcohol sales to 4:00 a.m. in Detroit has been defeated again! Thanks to any of our readers who contacted their lawmakers on this issue!



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Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems
American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation
Mailing address: P.O. Box 10212, Lansing, MI 48901

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