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NEW MEXICO GOVERNOR SIGNS BILL TO LEGALIZE RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA
By Morgan Lee Associated Press, April 12, 2021

SANTA FE, N.M. – New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed legislation Monday legalizing recreational marijuana use within months and kicking off sales next year, making it the seventh state since November to put an end to pot prohibition. The governor, a Democrat, has supported marijuana reform as a way to create jobs and shore up state revenue.

On Monday, she also touched on concerns about the harm inflicted on racial and ethnic minorities by drug criminalization and tough policing, noting that the new law could free about 100 from prison and expunge criminal records for thousands of residents.

“It is good for workers. It is good for entrepreneurs. It is good for consumers,” she said of legalization. “And it brings about social justice in ways in which we have been talking about and advocating for, for decades.”

The signed bill gives the governor a strong hand in oversight of recreational marijuana through her appointed superintendent of the Regulation and Licensing Department. Agency Superintendent Linda Trujillo said people age 21 and over will be allowed start growing marijuana at home and possess up to 2 ounces (56 grams) of cannabis outside their homes starting on June 29. Recreational cannabis sales start next year by April 1 at state-licensed dispensaries.

Lujan Grisham highlighted that licensed cannabis farmers can begin scaling up cultivation several months ahead of opening day in efforts to keep pace with demands when sales begin.

New Mexico voters ousted ardent opponents of legalization from the state Senate in the 2020 Democratic primary, opening the way for recreational marijuana.

The governor called a special legislative session to tackle the issue in late March after legalization efforts faltered.

Legislators rallied behind a legalization framework from state Rep. Javier Martínez of Albuquerque that provides automated procedures for expunging past pot convictions. Martínez said he hopes that a spate of legalization efforts by states will spur the federal government to follow suit, linking tides of immigration from Central America to drug-cartel violence and related corruption. “I grew up along the border. I’ve seen what the war on drugs has done,” Martínez said. “I’m proud that New Mexico — little old New Mexico — has done its part to tell the federal government once and for all to legalize cannabis for the people.”

Republican lawmakers were notably absent from the signing ceremony, though GOP state Sen. Cliff

Pirtle was credited with influencing the outcome through a competing bill that emphasized free markets and public safety.

Regulators in early legalization states have been whipsawed by initial fluctuations in marijuana supplies and prices, amid concerns about child access and workplace and roadway safety.

In New Mexico, regulators will be able to put a cap on marijuana cultivation quantities for years to come and impose a per-plant state fee of up to \$50 a year. The new law mandates child-proof packaging and defers to employers on whether workers can indulge in marijuana.

At the same time, home marijuana growers will be allowed to grow up to six plants per person, or 12 per household. The scent of marijuana will no longer be grounds for police searches.

Local governments can't prohibit marijuana businesses from setting up shop. They can have a say through zoning about the location and hours of operation.

Medical marijuana dispensaries already are staking out territory in small towns near the border with Texas — a major potential market for marijuana tourism. It remains illegal to transport marijuana across state lines.

Challenges await state regulators as they prepare to accept applications for a variety of marijuana business licenses as soon as September. The state will license product testing labs, industrial operations that grow, refine, package and sell cannabis products and craft marijuana “microbusiness” that grow only up to 200 plants.

Rules also are due by the start of 2022 on product safety, minimum qualifications for a marijuana business license and standards for vetting and training “cannabis servers” — who must hold a state permit and be 21 or older.

The state will levy an excise tax on recreational pot sales that starts at 12% and rises over time to 18%, on top of current taxes on sales. All taxes will be waived on medical marijuana. Decisions are still pending about exactly how much marijuana the industry must set aside for qualified medical cannabis patients.

Enrollment in the state's existing medical marijuana program climbed in March to more than 112,000 patients -- about 5% of the state's population of 2.1 million residents.

The approved legislation allows the state to forge agreements with Native American tribal governments that could open the marijuana industry to tribal enterprises.

NEW MEXICO APPROVES RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA:
WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE CANNABIS REGULATION ACT
Algernon D'Ammassa, Las Cruces Sun-News

SANTA FE – With its passage of cannabis legalization Wednesday, New Mexico now faces the task of building an entire system of regulations and licensing for a new industry — one based on a substance that is still illegal under federal law.

Legalizing cannabis (commonly known as marijuana) for adult use has been a key legislative goal of Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, who has said she will sign the bill that emerged from this week's special session. When she does, New Mexico will become the 18th state to legalize cannabis for adults — depending on how you count.

Similar measures have passed or are close to passing in 17 other states, most recently in New York. Virginia's governor wants its state legislature to amend an already-passed recreational cannabis bill, and a South Dakota constitutional amendment legalizing adult-use cannabis was approved by voters in November, but faces a court challenge.

In a separate measure, New Mexico legislators also acted to undo historical criminalization of cannabis possession and use by expunging certain criminal records and calling for a review of cases involving people charged with cannabis-related offenses — possibly even dismissing eligible convictions.

New Mexico state Rep. Javier Martínez, D-Albuquerque, speaks during a House Judiciary Committee hearing on a cannabis legalization and regulation bill on the night of Tuesday, March 30, 2021. The Cannabis Regulation Act emerged after years of negotiation and debate; and state Rep. Javier Martínez, D-Albuquerque, one of the bill's co-sponsors, has promised there will be adjustments to the law in store for future sessions.

"In public policy you sometimes beat your head against the wall, but every so often the wall breaks first," state Workforce Solutions Secretary Bill McCamley said Thursday. McCamley served in the state Legislature in 2014, when he introduced a memorial calling for a study of the effects of legalization in Colorado and Washington, the first states to take that step.

In 2015, McCamley introduced a legalization bill in the state House which died in committee, along with other proposals by his Democratic colleagues to reduce criminal penalties for cannabis possession and amend the constitution to permit possession and use for residents aged 21 and older. It took six years of subsequent attempts and a two-day special session to move a bill to the governor.

What changed? More states proceeded to tax and legalize cannabis, including the neighboring state of Arizona. As legalization became more familiar and produced revenue for other states, cannabis politics also changed: Some Republicans grew more willing to consider it while Democrats took

majorities in both chambers of the Legislature. Gov. Susana Martinez, a two-term Republican who opposed legalization, was succeeded in 2019 by Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Democrat committed to legalization.

New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham hails the accomplishments of the Legislature and calls for a special legislative session in the coming weeks to approve recreational cannabis legalization in Santa Fe, N.M., at the close of a 60-day legislative session on Saturday, March 20, 2021.

"It's about the long game, right? Sometimes in a democracy good public policy takes a little while," McCamley said. "It will bring tax dollars in that are needed. Regulating substances like these tends to be healthier for society than throwing people in jail for using them. And the money saved in terms of law enforcement can be used for much more needed priorities."

Effective 90 days from the end of the session — the end of June — New Mexico will consider cannabis legal for adults aged 21 years or older to possess and use; but there are rules about where you can buy and consume it.

Commercial sales of regulated products through licensed dealers are required to be up and running by April of next year. You will need to keep your supply at home or out of public view. In public, it remains unlawful to possess more than 2 ounces of cannabis, 16 grams of cannabis extract or 800 milligrams of edible cannabis. Violations, depending on the amount, constitute misdemeanors or felonies.

Don't plan on smoking it in public outside of a licensed "cannabis consumption area" where it may be served and consumed. Otherwise you could get a \$50 ticket.

At home, you can grow your own: The law permits individuals up to six mature cannabis plants and six immature plants, or a maximum of 12 in a household. You can make edibles or extracts (with nonvolatile solvents, alcohol or carbon dioxide or no solvents) or roll yourself a joint; and you can share some with a friend as long as they are of legal age. To sell it, you need to be a licensed dealer — more on that below — and unlawful trafficking is a fourth-degree felony.

The smell of cannabis or possession of lawful quantities of it would no longer constitute grounds for law enforcement to detain people for suspicion of a crime, a change that the state Department of Public Safety says will require the replacement of all the agency's drug-sniffing dogs, who are trained to alert for marijuana.

However, cannabis remains illegal under federal law, which classifies "marijuana" alongside narcotics such as heroin and carries severe criminal penalties, including imprisonment. This can lead to conflicts between local and federal law, at work or simply moving about the state.

In New Mexico, where medical cannabis was legalized and regulated in 2007, registered cannabis patients have had their medicine confiscated at U.S. Border Patrol checkpoints near the southern

border. In 2015, a Deming resident sought an injunction against the practice, but the lawsuit was tossed by a federal judge.

Federal gun laws also prohibit the possession of guns and ammunition by users of narcotics, including cannabis — even legal medical cannabis.

When purchasing from a licensed dealer and filling out the required transaction form, buyers must answer "yes" or "no" to the question: "Are you an unlawful user of, or addicted to, marijuana or any depressant, stimulant, narcotic drug, or any other controlled substance?"

Possessing a firearm and using cannabis is a felony; and so is lying on the form. A recent example is Ethan Kollie, an Ohio man sentenced in 2020 to 32 months in prison after pleading guilty to both offenses.

Since cannabis is still federally prohibited, employers can prohibit workers from possessing and using it at work, implement "zero tolerance" and drug testing policies and discipline personnel or refuse to hire applicants accordingly.

In the meantime, it creates a brand new division under the state Regulation and Licensing Department which must, by next January, promulgate rules for the production, marketing and sale of cannabis, in consultation with several agencies and a new cannabis advisory committee.

By September, the new Cannabis Control Division must begin processing license applications for producers, which means an entire architecture of standards and documentation procedures must be established in a few months' time for testing laboratories, product and marketplaces.

For the first three years, there are limits on the number of plants producers may keep in stock. This provision was controversial among lawmakers, but the bill's sponsors said it would provide a window for smaller producers to enter a market that would otherwise be dominated from its inception by large corporations, including medical cannabis producers.

The regulations aim at undercutting the unlawful market and ensuring a marketplace for safe, regulated cannabis products from dealers holding annually renewable licenses.

According to the bill's fiscal impact report, the state Economic Development Department opined that 1,593 new jobs might be generated at commercial dispensaries alone, based on estimates of new consumers. The CRA also sets a 12 percent excise tax on adult-use cannabis sold by licensed retailers, of which 33 percent goes to local municipalities or counties.

PROS AND CONS OF MEDICAL MARIJUANA
By Angela Morrow, RN Medically reviewed by Rochelle Collins, DO
Updated on January 23, 2021

The debate over the therapeutic benefits of medical marijuana is ongoing. While a number of states in the U.S. have active medical marijuana laws (and a growing number allow recreational use), the federal government continues to classify it as a Schedule I controlled substance. Not only does that make it illegal to possess, but it also limits medical studies into the potential benefits of cannabis.

With strong supporters on each side of the debate, the arguments for and against the legalization of marijuana are hot topics. What are the debated pros and cons of medical marijuana?

• The Pros

The legalization of marijuana for medical reasons is viewed favorably by many Americans, including members of the medical community and Congress. Some of the arguments for medical marijuana include:

- Marijuana is effective in relieving nausea and vomiting. Studies have shown that pharmaceutical cannabis can decrease nausea caused by chemotherapy used to treat cancer and almost completely eliminate vomiting.
- Marijuana can relieve the spasticity of the muscles that is sometimes associated with multiple sclerosis and paralysis.
- Marijuana can help treat appetite loss associated with conditions such as HIV/AIDS and certain types of cancers.
- Marijuana can relieve certain types of chronic pain, including neuropathic pain.
- Marijuana is safer than some other medications prescribed to treat the same symptoms. For example, it may be used instead of opioids for pain management. Opioids are highly addictive and are typically not recommended for long-term use in treating chronic pain.
- Cannabis does not need to be smoked to be medically beneficial. Products such as cannabidiol (CBD) oils, topical pain relief treatments, edibles, and other non-smoking applications are now available.
- As research continues, more of the individual compounds in cannabis are being found to be beneficial. When isolated—such as CBD has been—these may lead to further advancements

in medical treatment options without the "high" produced by the compound commonly known as THC.

- Marijuana has been used for centuries as a natural medicinal agent to good effect.

- The Cons

For every person who advocates for the legalization of marijuana for medical purposes, there is another who argues against it. Some of the arguments from the opposition include:

- Frequent marijuana use can seriously affect your short-term memory
- Frequent use can impair your cognitive ability.
- Smoking anything, whether it's tobacco or marijuana, can seriously damage your lung tissue.
- Smoked marijuana contains cancer-causing compounds.
- Marijuana carries a risk of abuse and addiction.
- Marijuana has been implicated in a high percentage of automobile crashes and workplace accidents.
- Marijuana is illegal under federal law. It is classified as Schedule I drug in the Controlled Substances Act (CSA), alongside heroin. This classification says that the substances have no currently accepted medicinal value.

- Scientific Evidence Remains Limited

In the past, clinical trials to evaluate the effectiveness of marijuana to treat certain conditions have been restrictive and limited. As medical marijuana becomes more prevalent throughout the world, researchers are doing more studies.

However, expert reviews of current research continue to advocate that more studies are needed. Many of the hurdles involve controlling the quality and dosing of cannabis with what is legally available to researchers. One review of research noted that the long-term effects of cannabis are still unknown. Without more research into dosage and adverse effects, scientific evidence on the therapeutic effects of cannabis will remain in question.

If we really want a definitive answer as to whether marijuana is valuable for symptom management, it needs to be evaluated using the same standards as other medications.

DISADVANTAGES OF USING RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA Medically Reviewed by Dr. Rajy Abulhosn, MRO

• Disadvantages of Using Recreational Marijuana

The global dilemma on drug abuse is far from over. Knowing how much it can affect both the mind and the body, these are the reasons why nonmedical cannabis use should be prevented:

- Marijuana directly affects short-term memory. Active ingredients in the drug alter the processing of information through the hippocampus. The use of marijuana at a young age has a great impact on the developing brain, which is why teens must avoid marijuana. The obstruction in memory formation can cause significant cognitive impairment. Marijuana accelerates age-related brain cell loss. Studies have found that there is a deterioration in the learning and cognitive thinking that can persist into adulthood, even if they have long stopped using marijuana.
- Marijuana heightens fear, anxiety, panic and/or distrust. This is the most common immediate side effect of using marijuana. Chemicals in cannabis can spur hallucinations, affecting relationships with others.
- THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, is the chemical responsible for most of marijuana's psychological and physical effects:
 - Impaired Balance
 - Poor Coordination
 - Slowed Reaction Time
 - Inability to Walk, Talk, or Drive
- Frequent marijuana use increases the risk of depression and anxiety, especially in users with a family history of mental illness.
- Psychosis, which includes delusions and a loss of identity, may develop in individuals taking large doses of the drug.

• Side Effects of Marijuana Use

The effects of marijuana use are usually felt immediately upon smoking or vaping the drug. Consuming marijuana via edibles or pills demands a longer wait time before side effects are experienced.

- Short-term effects of marijuana use include:
 - Dry Mouth
 - Bloodshot Eyes
 - Slurred Speech
 - Increased Heart Rate

These symptoms appear to be harmless, but long-term use of the drug can result in much more serious health conditions:

- Smoking marijuana can lead to breathing problems:
 - Excess Mucous
 - Chronic Cough
 - Bronchitis
 - Asthma
 - Cystic Fibrosis
- Long-term use of marijuana can also impair fertility in males and females:
 - Reduces Sperm Count
 - Creates Abnormalities in Sperm (still being researched)
 - Disrupts Menstrual Flow
 - Damages Eggs in Ovaries
 - Increases Risk of Miscarriages and Placenta Previa
 - Possibility of Premature Births/Stillborns
 - Medical Uses for Marijuana
- Medical marijuana is proven to be of significant help in treating various illnesses:
 - Arthritis
 - Epilepsy
 - Glaucoma
 - Multiple Sclerosis

Those undergoing marijuana therapy should take precautionary measures as the haphazard use of the drug can lead to more serious conditions.

Pastoral Letter on Drug Abuse in New Mexico
FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE¹

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On the Feast of All Saints, we listened to the scriptures reminding us “that we are children of God” (1 John 3:1). We are all precious in the eyes of God and are called, as best we can, to live lives close to Jesus Christ and his Church. Each one of us has the dignity of Baptism and the Sacraments of our Church and we are called to be saints.

There is no way in which that dignity is harmed more than through addiction to illicit drugs and alcohol abuse. Drug abuse has become a terrible curse affecting many families in our state, creating a climate of despair. As Archbishop, I want the Church to offer her resources to deal with this problem and help people move from despair to hope. I have written this pastoral letter for Catholics and all people of good will that seek to confront drug abuse which has been called the number one health problem in New Mexico.

Many families affected by drugs are embarrassed to talk about the problem of drug abuse which makes it more difficult to treat. In order to stimulate discussion and encourage a response to this terrible problem, earlier this year, the Archbishop’s Forum on Drug Abuse carried out four public hearings in Espanola, Las Vegas, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe. Many people gave personal testimonies about drug addiction and recovery and offered solutions to this serious problem. Approximately 1,300 people attended the hearings. Their insightful, heart wrenching testimonies are the soul of this pastoral letter. I invite you to listen with your hearts to some of the things they said. (The names of the persons have been changed to respect their privacy.)

Frances, a mother and victim of drugs shares her pain.

My son was a good boy...he became addicted to drugs...he was high on drugs when he did a terrible act.. he killed two people and will be in prison the rest of his life. I became a victim, too... our entire family is serving time with him. He is still my son and I love him.

Robert, a middle-aged man, shares his struggle with drugs.

I used drugs for 18 years. I lost everything, my job, my family, my friends. My only daughter wouldn’t speak to me. My road to recovery began when I asked a priest to pray for me after sharing my problem with him. I got treatment. I came back to the Catholic Church. I have a great relationship with my daughter and relatives.

¹<https://archdiosf.org/pastoral-letter-drug-abuse-in-new-mexico>

Maria, a mother who grieves over a daughter killed by a drug-crazed burglar stated,

I picked up my 9 year old daughter from school.. we drove home and she was praying the rosary. I entered my house... and thought I had been electrocuted. I had been shot... I saw the man shoot my daughter...she died in my arms.

These testimonies and many others that I heard confirm studies indicating that New Mexicans are using illicit drugs at an alarming rate and this is causing terrible harm to physical and mental health. Many are dying of drug overdoses. Our priests and deacons have buried too many young people who are victims of this terrible scourge. So many of our families mourn as innocent people are killed or harmed by drug abuse and by the violence surrounding it. Too many neighborhoods are blighted by the presence of drug deals. Drug abuse is the doorway to domestic violence, broken families, poverty and prison. Tragically in some communities drug abuse spans generations of families and is considered normal behavior. For some it has become an economic mainstay and an accepted way of life.

The abuse of drugs is seriously sinful because they cause grave damage to human health and life (Catholic Catechism, Paragraph 2291). Likewise, selling illegal drugs is an evil that deeply harms the entire community and is sinful.

In many ways the psychological aspects of drug abuse, as well as the physical aspects, reveal clearly the human devastation from drug dependency. Rather than finding the happiness they seek, drug dependent persons enter a world of lonely isolation, seeing their surroundings as increasingly hostile. Their reality feels devoid of a loving God. The drug abuser's self worth is often reduced to nothing and even the possibility of change, treatment and rehabilitation is overwhelmed by hopelessness, alienation, and spiritual starvation.

The good news is that people who are enslaved and blinded by drugs can be freed through the amazing saving grace of Jesus Christ. With God's strength, effective treatment and the help of loved ones, people can be freed from addictions.

Recognizing the severity of the drug abuse problem, I have drawn up a plan of action based on the results of the hearings and ideas given by many people. First of all, the Archdiocese is committing financial resources through the use of archdiocesan funds and a special collection in all the parishes to help in the implementation of the plan.

WHAT IS OUR ACTION PLAN?

What can you do as an individual?

(1) Seek ways of staying close to Jesus Christ, Our Savior, by frequenting the Sacraments and leading a life of prayer and goodness. (2) Be compassionate and reach out to those who are addicted, encouraging them to lead a drug-free life. (3) Decide, with God's help, to avoid serious sin. Stop using drugs or abusing alcohol, and seek help. (4) Develop your personal "anti-drug" (for example,

volunteer, get involved in sports, hobbies, church, civic activities, join a support group, bible reading, caring for others, etc.)

What can you do as a young person?

(1) Educate yourself on the physical and emotional harm that illegal drugs and alcohol abuse can do to you. (2) Choose your friends wisely and avoid those persons who abuse illegal drugs and alcohol. (3) Be involved in youth activities in your parish and stay close to the Lord through Sunday Mass, the Sacraments and prayer.

What can you do as a family?

(1) Stay involved in your children's lives; eat together, do things together and when children go out from home, ask the questions: Who? What? When? Where? and Why?. (2) Model good behavior and how to have fun without alcohol and drugs. Forbid illegal drugs in the home or at any family celebration. Use alcohol moderately or not at all. (3) Live your faith in Jesus Christ as a family; develop a family spirituality through prayer, Sunday Mass, the Sacraments, and parish activities.

What can you do as a parish?

(1) Parish Council members and parish leaders must study and implement this pastoral letter. (2) Offer spiritual support and speak about the drug abuse issue in homilies and in sacramental preparation. (3) Provide professional counseling at the parish level, when possible. Initiate a support group in the parish to help those addicted to develop a deep prayer life and relationship with Jesus and Mary to give them strength to stay clean. (4) Open parish facilities for use by drug counselors and by support groups, such as Alanon, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. (5) Keep a list of treatment centers and their phone numbers handy for referral purposes when the need arises. (6) Make young people and youth activities a priority in the parish by providing a youth minister, opportunities and space for young people to be together in healthy ways.

What can we do as an Archdiocese?

(1) Maintain the Archbishop's Task Force on Drug Abuse in order to implement this pastoral letter through deanery and parish groups. (2) Make limited funds available to parishes for prevention activities. (3) Provide counseling, education, referrals, and support groups through the services of Catholic Charities. (4) Collaborate with other community groups to advocate in the state for the necessary resources for prevention and treatment of drug abuse through the Archdiocesan Office of Social Justice and the New Mexico Catholic Conference. (5) Encourage parishes to work with neighborhood organizations to promote safe communities and neighborhoods to be free from drug dealers and gangs.

Now is the time to make a commitment. I call on you to be involved in your neighborhoods and to vote. Advocate for improved resources in your communities. Take an active interest in your schools

that they will be healthy and drug free. Parents would not tolerate the presence of lice in their schools. Likewise do not tolerate drugs!

I call on government agencies and officials to allocate sufficient resources for prevention, treatment and aftercare and to work together with church and community groups to provide services.

The Church must be a sign of hope: to serve, to reach out, to help rebuild lives, and to support individuals and families in the fight against drug addiction. I urge your prayers and help in sharing this gospel message of hope through your response to my pastoral letter on drug abuse in New Mexico.

Sincerely yours in the Risen Lord,
Most Rev. Michael J. Sheehan
Archbishop of Santa Fe
Promulgated on November 1, 2001, Feast of All Saints

Addendum:
Additional Ideas for Action Planning

1. Recognize that as human beings we will suffer pain, and at our core is an emptiness that can only be filled by God and our loved ones, and not by drugs, alcohol, food, sex or any other material thing.
2. Volunteer in your parish or local community to help others; do what you know; offer your skills.
3. Take care of your own neighborhood; know your neighbors; get involved in your neighborhood organization.
4. Make family a priority - give spouses and children time. If there is a family problem, seek help.
5. Let children know they are loved and cared for and safe. Give children clear boundaries and expect them to share in responsibilities of home and community.
6. Teach children coping skills and how to deal with suffering and the pain of human life.
7. Call 1-800-729-6686 for free U.S. Government Alcohol and Drug prevention education information. Individuals and/or groups can call. There is no charge for materials or postage.
8. Provide parish opportunities for fasting, prayer and reconciliation services for healing from addictions.
9. Develop leadership among recovering addicts and make use of their skills for ministering to others.

- 10 Offer opportunities for caring adults to mentor young people.
11. Organize support groups and peer-to-peer ministry for young people.
12. Provide support and education for families through support groups, peer support among families, family strengthening and enrichment opportunities, parenting classes.
13. Recognize struggles of single parent families and grandparents raising children and provide support.
14. Offer education for pastors and preachers in the area of drug abuse and addiction through the Office of Pastoral Outreach and Catholic Charities.
15. Persist in supporting ministry to, with, by, and for youth, through youth activities, youth minister training and youth leadership development offered through the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry.
16. Provide parishes with homily helps, liturgical aids, intercessions, and bulletin announcements about substance abuse and prevention, as well as education and information for preachers, through the Office of Worship

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
Cannons 2290-2291

2290 The virtue of temperance disposes us to avoid every kind of excess: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco, or medicine. Those incur grave guilt who, by drunkenness or a love of speed, endanger their own and others' safety on the road, at sea, or in the air.

2291 The use of drugs inflicts very grave damage on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offense. Clandestine production of and trafficking in drugs are scandalous practices. They constitute direct co-operation in evil, since they encourage people to practices gravely contrary to the moral law.

Q. Many localities are in the process of decriminalizing the recreational use of marijuana. What is the church's view? Is using pot recreationally the same thing morally as having a drink? Is it OK in moderation? (Suffolk, Virginia)

A. The question as posed relates only to the recreational use of this drug. When used instead (with proper controls) for medical reasons, its use can not only be permitted but applauded; research has found medical marijuana effective for certain patients with epilepsy, bipolar disorders, cancer, etc. — as well as for some children with severe autism.

But, as for recreational use, Catholic moralists in general would be opposed. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “The use of drugs inflicts very grave damage on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is a grave offense” (No. 2291).

Pope Francis — speaking at the 2014 International Drug Enforcement Conference in Rome — spoke strongly against the legalization of drugs for recreational use.

With regard specifically to marijuana, the cannabis plant contains the mind-altering chemical THC, which often induces hallucinations and delusions and diminishes one's ability to reason.

Pia de Solenni, a moralist and theologian who was recently named chancellor of the Diocese of Orange in California, has noted that unlike taking a glass of wine to relax, marijuana cannot be used moderately. “Once you've gone beyond the buzz,” she says, “you actually lose control over your rational functions. It's wrong. It goes against our nature and who we're supposed to be.”

WHY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS LEADING THE FIGHT
AGAINST LEGAL POT IN MASSACHUSETTS

The Archdiocese of Boston gave \$850,000 to oppose an upcoming ballot measure.

By Emma Green², November 1, 2016

Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston is leading the opposition against Question 4, a Massachusetts ballot initiative that would legalize recreational use of weed. Legal weed has an enemy in Boston: the Roman Catholic Church. On Friday, the Boston Archdiocese gave \$850,000 to oppose Question 4, a ballot initiative that would create a system for regulating legal, recreational marijuana in Massachusetts. The Church's donation increased the opposition effort's funding by roughly 40 percent—only Sheldon Adelson, the Las Vegas billionaire who gave \$1,000,000 to the opposition in early October, has cut a bigger check. The Knights of Columbus, another Catholic organization, has also given \$150,000 to fight the initiative.

The donation is surprising, both for its politics and its size. Advocates of legal weed often frame their cause as a social-justice issue, pointing to the harms of the U.S. drug war and the way low-level drug arrests disproportionately affect men of color. On many other issues, these progressive activists would likely find themselves aligned with Cardinal Sean O'Malley, who leads Boston's archdiocese. During his 13 years in the city, O'Malley has redirected many of the Church's resources toward caring for the poor. He has led the development of policies around sex-abuse for the Church, and is part of Pope Francis's inner circle; in 2013, the pontiff appointed him to a small council of advisers tasked with reforming Church governance.

Unlike many progressive reformers in the United States, though, O'Malley sees marijuana as a “dangerous drug that causes people to have problems with memory [and] ... reasoning.” He describes pot as a gateway drug to heroin and cocaine, and has argued that if Question 4 passes, Boston could “become a mecca, for people coming here as they do to Holland, Amsterdam, or ... Colorado, looking for drugs.” His suspicion of marijuana marks his distinctively Catholic approach to reforming communities: He believes legalization would be utterly destructive to communities in need, rather than their salvation.

The Church has long stood against drug legalization. Pope Francis has specifically argued that “attempts, however limited, to legalize so-called recreational drugs are not only highly questionable from a legislative standpoint, but they fail to produce the desired effect,” according to a Vatican diplomat. While early 20th-century American Catholics largely opposed a prohibition on alcohol, clergy have widely defended the ban on marijuana in recent years.

But there's a big difference between opposing a ballot measure and flooding the opposition with cash—\$850,000 is a huge chunk of money, especially for an archdiocese that has closed parishes,

²<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/boston-archdiocese-marijuana-legalization/505997> Emma Green is a staff writer at *The Atlantic*, where she covers politics, policy, and religion.

shuttered schools, and dismantled the palatial archbishops' residence due to financial strain over the last decade and a half. Financially, things still aren't great: The archdiocese lost \$20.5 million in operating income between 2014 and 2015. And it has spent significant money on legal fees related to sex-abuse allegations in recent years—it came to new settlement agreements with seven alleged victims as recently as March.

In an email, the archdiocesan spokesman Terry Donilon wrote that the money came from a “central ministry” fund, not from donation baskets or funds that would normally go to parishes. The donation “reflects the fact that the archdiocese holds this matter as among the highest priorities,” he wrote. He listed off its social services, including food pantries, health clinics, counseling programs, addiction treatment, housing assistance, and support for immigrants. “If Question 4 is approved,” he wrote, “all of these programs and the people we serve will be negatively impacted.” He said the archdiocese is particularly concerned about how the ballot measure will affect young people, including the 40,000 students who attend Catholic schools in the Boston area, even though the measure only allows recreational marijuana use for people over 21.

The Church seems to see legal marijuana as a foundational threat to its social services—and theologically suspect. “The argument here would be that if you’re using money to buy marijuana to get high, instead of using the money for other purposes, then that’s wrong,” said Father Richard McGowan, a Jesuit priest who studies drug and tobacco legalization at Boston College. “Remember: The big thing theologically for the Church is that no matter what gifts you have, they should be for the greater glory of God.”

The Church presumably believes that if recreational marijuana is legal, people will consume more of it, undermining the Church’s efforts to build families and communities. “They’re trying to ... alleviate poverty and improve family welfare,” said McGowan. “This is going to make it that much more difficult.” As the Knights of Columbus added in an emailed statement, “The focus of the state of Massachusetts should be on helping people, not giving them easier access to the false hope inherent in drug use, which does not solve problems but compounds them.”

O’Malley is not alone in opposing Question 4; he has collaborated with a number of other religious leaders on a public-information campaign against the ballot initiative. Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh, and Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healy wrote a Boston Globe op-ed opposing the measure in March, along with a number of other state officials and medical associations. But unlike his political allies, the Boston cardinal has backed up his words with money—the new donation accounts for roughly 30 percent of the opposition’s funding. While the archdiocese originally planned not to spend much money on the effort, “the more he thought about this and prayed about this, he thought this was the right thing to do because it directly impacts the people we’re trying to help,” Donilon told The Boston Globe.

No matter how substantial, the last-minute donation might be too late. With Election Day roughly a week away, recent polls show Massachusetts voters firmly in favor of legalization.

ARIZONA CATHOLIC LEADERS OPPOSE MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION,
CITING NEED TO PROTECT KIDS, by David Hudnall³, September 28, 2020

The public policy arm of the Catholic Church in Arizona has weighed in on Proposition 207, the November ballot initiative that seeks to legalize recreational marijuana in the state. They don't like it.

Legalized weed “sends a message to children that drug use is socially and morally acceptable,” the Bishops of the Arizona Catholic Conference wrote in a joint letter, published September 25. “As people of faith, we must speak out against this effort and the damaging effects its passage would have on children and families.”

The statement was signed by Rev. Edward J. Weisenburger, Bishop of Tucson; Rev. Thomas J. Olmsted, Bishop of Phoenix; Rev. James S. Wall, Bishop of Gallup; Rev. Eduardo A. Nevares, Auxiliary Bishop of Phoenix; and Rev. John S. Pazak, Holy Protection of Mary Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Phoenix.

As rationale, the bishops cite rising child fatality rates in Arizona attributed to marijuana and state that “problematic” marijuana use is 25 percent higher among teens in states that legalized recreational marijuana.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment might beg to differ. The state agency recently published a survey that found youth marijuana use has not significantly changed since the drug was legalized in Colorado in 2014. There, 20.6 percent of high school students and 5.2 percent of middle school students reported cannabis consumption in 2019. Both those numbers are lower than they were pre-legalization, in 2011, when those rates were 22 percent and 6.3 percent, respectively.

A 2019 study from Washington, which also legalized recreational marijuana, explained declining youth pot use in the state by suggesting a “loss of novelty appeal” — in other words, the normalization and regulation of cannabis had the effect of making marijuana a less attractive vehicle for youth rebellion.

The bishops also opposed Proposition 205, Arizona's failed 2016 legalization measure. They cited different reasons back then, though, such as the drug's impact on the IQ of adolescents (a correlation that has not conclusively been established) and the “gateway” theory that marijuana use leads to harder drugs, which is also not proven.

³<https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/marijuana/arizona-catholic-leaders-don't-like-legalized-marijuana-proposition-207-11497736> David Hudnall is editor in chief of Phoenix New Times. He previously served as editor of The Pitch in Kansas City.

POPE FRANCIS SLAMS DRUG LEGALIZATION, BUT U.S. CATHOLICS ARE MIXED —
AT LEAST ON POT, by Niraj Chokshi⁴, June 20, 2014

Pope Francis on Friday condemned the legalization of drugs for recreational use as a failed policy, but Catholics in the United States have complicated views on the subject — at least as it relates to marijuana.

Francis dismissed the policies — like the ones in Colorado and Washington — as naive and ineffective, in remarks to the heads of world anti-drug agencies at the 31st International Drug Enforcement Conference in Rome.

“Let me state this in the clearest terms possible: the problem of drug use is not solved with drugs! Drug addiction is an evil, and with evil there can be no yielding or compromise,” Francis said, according to an English translation. “... No to every type of drug use. It is as simple as that. No to any kind of drug use.”

Despite his official and absolute stance, American Catholics have mixed attitudes on drug use, especially marijuana. About 40 percent of Catholics favored forms of legalization in a January Washington Post/ABC News poll and an April 2013 poll from the Public Religion Research Institute. Both also found age correlated with views, with substantial declines in support among respondents over age 65 regardless of religious affiliation. (Francis is 77 years old.)

Catholics also have mixed views on the dangers of marijuana use. About one in three say new laws legalizing marijuana are a sign of the nation’s moral decline, according to the PRRI poll. Catholics are split on the morality of the using the drug itself, with 46 percent saying it’s morally acceptable and 41 percent saying it’s wrong. (Just about one in three say they have tried marijuana, making Catholics the only religious group with a significantly lower rate than the general public.) More than half of all Catholics — 55 percent — disagreed with the idea that it is a gateway drug in an April 2013 Pew Research poll.

They also represent a huge share of the national population and of the populations of states where recreational or medical marijuana is allowed. About 24 percent of Americans are Catholic, according to Pew Research Center estimates. The group also accounts for about 30 percent of the population of all states that allow medical marijuana, according to an analysis of 2007 Pew state religious breakdowns as applied to current Census population numbers.

In Washington and Colorado, the two states that allow recreational use of the drug, slightly more than one in every six people are Catholic.

⁴<https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2014/06/20/the-pope-slams-drug-legalization-but-u-s-catholics-are-mixed-at-least-on-pot/>

POPE FOR LEGAL DOPE? STILL NOPE.

By Elizabeth Dias⁵, June 20, 2014

Pope Francis is not changing his mind about recreational drug use or marijuana legalization. On Friday morning, the Holy Father made his anti-pot position clear to the International Drug Enforcement Conference in Rome. “Let me state this in the clearest terms possible: the problem of drug use is not solved with drugs!” the Pope said. “Drug addiction is an evil, and with evil there can be no yielding or compromise.”

Legalization, he continued, should be a no-go. “Attempts, however limited, to legalize so-called ‘recreational drugs,’ are not only highly questionable from a legislative standpoint, but they fail to produce the desired effects,” he said.

It is far from a new position, either for Francis or the Vatican. In 2001, the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Health Care urged governments to resist legalization even on soft drugs in the manual “Church, Drugs, and Drug Addiction,” published at the request of John Paul II. Francis said no to legalization as a bishop in Argentina when he was still Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio. Last summer, Pope Francis condemned legalization when he was in Rio de Janeiro for World Youth Day. “The scourge of drug trafficking, that favors violence and sows the seeds of suffering and death, requires of society as a whole an act of courage,” he told the crowd, adding that legalization would not yield “a reduction in the spread and influence of drug addiction.”

The Pope’s position is similar to the Dalai Lama’s, who also warns against recreational use. “These kinds of substances are generally considered poison, very bad,” he told TIME in February. “The ability to judge reality is something very unique. Our brain is something very special. So if that is damaged, that’s awful. So alcohol and drugs are very bad.”

Francis’ reasoning is not so much about drugs themselves as about the broader suffering they cause, not just for individuals, but also for communities. Drugs dependencies can both hurt relationships and trap people in poverty. “To say this ‘no,’ one has to say ‘yes’ to life, ‘yes’ to love, ‘yes’ to others, ‘yes’ to education, ‘yes’ to greater job opportunities,” the Pope explained. “If we say ‘yes’ to all these things, there will be no room for illicit drugs, for alcohol abuse, for other forms of addiction.”

He is particularly concerned about their impact on young people. “The scourge of drug use continues to spread inexorably, fed by a deplorable commerce which transcends national and continental borders,” he said. “As a result, the lives of more and more young people and adolescents are in danger.”

Even if his words are not new, it is still a significant stand for the first Pope from Latin America to take. The region has been at the forefront of the drug wars for years, and many lawmakers there have

⁵<https://time.com/2905077/pope-francis-marijuana-legalization-pot/>

been arguing that legalization and regulation are actually the way out of the cycle of violence and poverty associated with the trade.

Last year Uruguay became the first country in the world to legalize the marijuana trade—growing, selling, smoking—to try to push traffickers out to the pot business, and President José “Pepe” Mujica was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Argentina, Francis’ home, decriminalized possession of controlled substances in 2009, and Catholic priest Juan Carlos Molina, who serves as the country’s drug czar, called for a debate about whether or not Argentina should follow Uruguay’s example. In Brazil trafficking the drug is criminal but personal use is not punished. Mexico decriminalized small amounts of marijuana in 2009.

Francis may not have directly taken on these policies this morning, it is hard to imagine they are far from his mind, especially since South America is in the global spotlight for the World Cup games. The last major time he spoke out against recreational drugs was also when Rio de Janeiro was an international focus for World Youth Day. It’s another reminder that the world’s top Catholic leader knows how to play the political game.

MARIJUANA USE IS SINFUL, DESPITE LEGALIZATION
by Canadian Catholic Bishops Conference⁶, June 25, 2018

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) expresses its disappointment at the passage of Bill C-45, which legalizes cannabis/marijuana for recreational use. Given the numerous known risks cannabis use poses to human society and human health (physical, mental and emotional), it is lamentable that the federal government has decided to facilitate the provision and use of an addictive substance that will have disastrous effects for so many people.

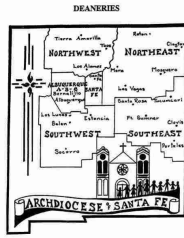
The Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Psychiatric Association, and the Canadian Paediatric Society have pointed out how the use of cannabis is linked to addictions, depression, anxiety, psychosis, damage to brain development, and lung problems such as asthma and emphysema. With Canadian youth considered by UNICEF as the most frequent users of marijuana in the developed world, the legalization of cannabis for recreational use will not – as the government has claimed – restrict young people’s access to marijuana or diminish their use of it. Canadian police chiefs, as well as many Indigenous, provincial and municipal leaders, continue to point out the need for additional funding to police the new legislation, and not all are convinced it is likely to reduce the involvement of organized crime but on the contrary may even have the opposite effect. Legalization is not necessary due to the difficulty of enforcement. There will always be social evils that are difficult to eradicate, but the answer surely cannot be to capitulate by condoning or legalizing them. Instead, as the Pontifical Academy for Sciences has recommended, the solutions for drug trafficking, dependency and abuse are found in educational and employment opportunities; community support for the vulnerable; treatment, prevention and medical services; family support; the curtailment of drug supply; the discouragement of drug use; and the promotion of recovery programs.

The position of the CCCB is shared by Pope Francis, who has pointed out that “the legalization, even partial, of so-called ‘soft drugs’ – beyond being at least questionable from the legislative point of view – does not produce the desired results” (speech to participants in the 31st International Drug Enforcement Conference, Rome, 20 June 2014). The massive increase in cannabis use that will accompany its legalization will not produce a more just and humane society, but will only exacerbate or multiply problems already widespread in society, including mental illness, crime, unemployment, family breakdown, injuries and fatalities resulting from impaired driving, and increased addiction to “harder” drugs along with associated problems resulting from overdose.

To cite the earlier CCCB statement on “Statement on Canada’s Opioid Crisis and Drug Addiction,” the legalization of marijuana “is potentially dangerous. The very significant health risks associated

⁶This item 11916 digitally provided courtesy of CatholicCulture.org

with the use of cannabis are widely recognized, particularly in young people. They include the heightened risk of heart attack, stroke, all of the respiratory and carcinogenic pathologies associated with tobacco smoke, and a multitude of psychiatric disorders, including schizophrenia. Studies have pointed to marijuana as a ‘gateway drug,’ underscoring the propensity of users to consume it in combination with other licit and illicit drugs, including some which may be ‘harder’. At a time when so many resources are already being spent to discourage recreational tobacco use, it is difficult to comprehend the disregard for public safety entailed in legalizing marijuana, which is arguably much more dangerous.”



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June 4, 2021

Dear brothers in Christ,

I ask for your comments about the recent legalization of the recreational use of cannabis (also known as marijuana). Fr. Michael Garcia and I are collaborating on a report about this matter to be given to Archbishop John C. Wester (at his request), and we'd like to have your input.

Thank you for your comments. You can answer these two questions right here or use the PDF file if you have the program to open it and edit it.

Blessings from Chimayo,

Rev. Julio Gonzalez

1. What would you say to a member of your congregation that asks for guidance about the use of cannabis for recreational purposes?

2. What is your opinion about a brother priest using cannabis for recreational purposes?

PLEASE, ANSWER THE NEXT TWO FOLLOWING QUESTIONS STATING YOUR POINT OF VIEW CLEARLY AND SINCERELY

New Mexico governor has signed the bill to legalize recreational marijuana. What is your opinion about allowing your relatives and friends to consume cannabis (marijuana) for recreational purposes?

New Mexico governor has signed the bill to legalize recreational marijuana. What is your opinion about priests or your pastor consuming cannabis (marijuana) for recreational purposes?

Name and Last name

Parish

Council, Committee, Association or Group