Address by Charles Foley, Humanist Chaplain, Canberra Hospital at FFDLR’s 19th Annual Remembrance Ceremony

Dear friends and families of those who have paid the ultimate price for our crazy draconian drug laws, welcome!

I am Charles Foley, The Atheist/Humanist Chaplain at Canberra Hospital for the past almost 20 years. I am also a Civil Celebrant and a Registered Psychologist. I have labored in hospitals, the military, jails and detox clinics for the last 40 years with those suffering from the effects of substance abuse, with their families, associates and friends. I have been on the Advisory Board of the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimization and Advocacy (CAHMA), affiliated with the Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL). I have worked as a Drug and Alcohol Professional Langton Clinic in Sydney and at the Killiard Centre in Queanbeyan for the NSW Department of Health, have worked with Community Service Offenders with ACT Corrections and am a Recovered Alcoholic and Addict myself, with over 37 years of productive taxpaying continuous Recovery.

I stand before you having just read the names of only a few of those who have fallen in the so-called “war on Drugs”, a failed, punitive, brutal, unnecessary, phony, corrupt prohibition “war” instituted by the [International Narcotics Control Board](http://www.incb.org/)**, that is well and truly being lost every day.**

**A High Court Judge once said (words to the effect) that if all the tears that have been shed for those affected by substance abuse were gathered in one place, that we would all surely drown in the deluge. We come close to that here each year. If I had tears in my eyes or a hesitation in my voice when I was reading those dear memorial names, it is because I personally knew some of these people, their families and their friends.**

**We know that the reason people have asked that these names be read out is because these were real persons: brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, aunties and uncles, neighbors, schoolmates and workmates, citizens and residents of our city, territories/states and country.**

**These names are uttered here today because of Love. It is grief, borne of Love, that brings us together in this beautiful natural setting annually, along with the Hope that these unnecessary drug related suicides, murders, incarcerations and many, many accidental, inadvertent deaths will one day cease, so that others, like ourselves, will not have to grieve, alone and together.**

**As a long time card carrying financial member of Humanism, I am proud to be part of the Drug Law Reform movement. Humanists and humanistically inclined people have been at the forefront of efforts to reform drug laws, this labor of love. We are committed to the reform of the outrageous drug laws that enrich criminals, punish victims, corrupt many of our officials, fill our prisons to overflowing, orphan and deprive our children, ruin our physical and mental health and exhaust our personal and collective treasuries.**

**Like many of us here today, I have stood in court beside those charged with drug related offenses. Like many of us here today, I have visited those in jail and in prison for use of illegal substances. Like many of us here today, I have advocated for clean needles, for safe injecting rooms where deadly overdoses are prevented and have pleaded for compassionate sentencing. Like many of us here today, I have taken people to detox, at their request and have stood beside the beds of those in hospitals or those attempting home detox. Like many of us here today, I have tried to console and comfort the bereft friends and families of those that have left us far too soon. Like many of us here today, I have begged Magistrates to refer persons to rehabs and have driven people to the doors of compassionate professionals. Like many of us here today,** I have **been and continue to be a loving friend with those who are given free or low cost treatments of whatever kind to assist them on their journey through the nightmares of our judicial and punishing penal system.**

**Like many of us here today,** I have **been, and continue to be, a loving friend with those who are given free or low cost treatments of whatever kind to assist them on their journey through the nightmare of our justice and penal system. I have personally watched as some of my friends have utilized Methadone or Buprenorphine. I believe that these chemical substitutes are a form of medical care, concern and indeed compassionate LOVE for our fellow human beings. If these can be dispensed free or low cost within the community, including in pharmacies, one wonders why other such substances cannot be dispensed under medical and pharmaceutical care and control, as is done in other countries!**

I believe that the total drug reform legalization in Portugal leads the way for other countries, like ours! The Portugal experience is common sense and compassionate Love in action.

I believe that the drug reform legalization (sic) of Marijuana possession in the US States of Colorado and Washington State and in the countries of the Netherlands and in Uruguay is common sense compassionate Love in action.

I believe that the drug reform legalization of medical use of marijuana in countries such as in Canada, the Czech Republic and Israel is common sense and compassionate Love in action.

Twenty-three US states and the District of Columbia currently allow medical marijuana! Is this Love (and common sense) in action? I think so!

Most Humanists know that there is a difference between experimental drug taking, recreational usage, responsible drug use, and misuse of both legal and illegal substances. We know that most deaths from drugs are from legal pharmaceutical ingestion. We know that boundaries on driving, swimming, operating machinery and use in Sport competition need to be recognized by everyone, honored by all and educated about by government. We know that education is essential but that shrill propaganda can be counterproductive and seen through. Humanists believe that the laws that encourage criminal monopolies to flourish under prohibition over the last decades is NOT the answer.

More than 300 economists, including three Nobel Laureates have signed a petition based on a paper by Harvard economist Jeffrey Miron, which suggests that if the US government legalized pot it would save billions every year and if the US government taxed marijuana at rates similar to alcohol and tobacco it would save up to as much as $13.7 billion per year! This applies in Australia, too! The signing of that petition is Love (and common sense) in action!

In the first four months, (in Colorado) legal marijuana sales amounted to more than $202 million, about a third of those sales were for legal adult recreational use. Taxes from recreational pot sales were almost $11 million. Denver Colorado police say burglaries and robberies were down by between 4 and 5 percent, in just these first four months! Twenty recent surprise police “sting operations” have failed to catch any shops selling to anyone under the age of 21. Is this Legal Reform Love (and common sense) in action? I think so!

Washington State expects to collect taxes of $3 million on sales of $12 million as of September 8. Washington imposes taxes of 25 percent at the producer, processor and retail levels. Is this Love (and common sense) in action?

Yes, I am privileged to be here today to join with you, as a Peer and as a Humanist, to grieve and to memorialise our dear departed friends and family members. Time has only allowed me to reflect briefly about our past deep Love, care and concern and our optimistic compassionate hopes for the future based upon what we can see happening elsewhere, to help prevent what has happened to us and ours.

As we leave here today, may we ask ourselves, is there anything we can do to ensure that others do not have to trudge our sorrowful paths. As a psychologist, Humanist Chaplain and Celebrant I know that there is no death without anger along with many other mixed emotions. Sometimes some of our anger can be channelled into clamouring for what others, elsewhere, have as reforms and we don’t. Sometimes our emotions of compassionate Love for our own can assist others, through Love in action.

We need always remember, to hold Hope precious! Those who hold the power to change laws, (in politics and in the media) cannot hear what we do not say! Drug law reform change happened in other jurisdictions, other countries and other places, because those who cared and loved and hoped said: “Enough!” They said it (and wrote it) repeatedly, loudly and persistently. May we do the same so that we can see the same changes within our friendship and family circles!