

Vestry Policy on Alcohol Use at Parish Functions Incorporating the Diocese of Chicago Policy on the Use of Alcohol at Church Functions

The Episcopal Church has no policy prohibiting the use of alcohol among its members. Holy Scripture sanctions alcoholic beverages as a gift from God, and Our Lord Himself dignified the use and serving of alcoholic beverages in His first miracle at Cana and in the institution of the Holy Eucharist.

However, where there is potential for good, there is often potential for evil. Nowhere is this more evident than in the use of alcoholic beverages. Alcoholism is a disease which has reached epidemic proportions. For that reason, it is imperative that Church members use prudence regarding alcohol. The Church has a responsibility to those who abstain from alcohol, for whatever reason.

The 1979 General Convention passed legislation requiring that each Diocese develop a policy on the use of alcohol at church functions or on church property. Therefore the following guidelines are given for that purpose.

Church or church-related groups should consider the nature of functions at which alcoholic beverages are proposed to be served, to determine whether or not these functions would be enhanced by the serving of such beverages. The consumption of alcohol is inappropriate at or before meetings at which clear thinking and judgment are required. If significant matters are to be discussed or important business transacted, the serving of alcoholic beverages must be postponed until after such matters have been concluded.

Any beverage containing alcohol must be clearly labeled as such; this also applies to any food in which the alcohol has not been "cooked out." It should be remembered that there are two types of alcoholics: practicing and non-practicing. There is no cure for alcoholism. For the non-practicing alcoholic, the very taste of an alcoholic beverage used in cooking, even though it may have had all the alcohol cooked out, may be something that he or she wants to avoid. Accordingly, foods so prepared should be appropriately marked.

Whenever alcohol is served, in any form, food and non-alcoholic alternatives must be offered. Non-alcoholic beverages must be as accessible and served as attractively, as those containing alcohol, so that people who choose to abstain from alcohol may do so comfortably. When selecting an alternative, it is important to select something of equal value or quality. It is inappropriate to serve an expensive bottle of wine in a crystal glass and put a can of soda pop in the back of the refrigerator or a pot of coffee on the stove with nothing to drink from but a paper cup.

Although beverages and food containing alcohol may be offered (together with non-alcoholic alternatives), they may never be promoted in such a way as to imply that partaking of them is any kind of social requirement. Alcohol may not be used as an enticement to participation in a church-related activity. Occasions at which alcoholic beverages are to be offered may not be openly advertised as such. (For example, "Bratwurst Festival" is to be used instead of "Beer and Bratwurst.") Alcohol may not be served in such a way that children are led to believe that growing up requires the consumption of alcohol, rather than such is an adult choice. References to Kiddie Cocktails, Shirley Temples, and Kids Drinks are not to be made.

All Federal, State, and local laws and ordinances, including those requiring that alcoholic beverages not be sold without a license, and those prohibiting the serving of alcohol to minors, must be observed. Care must be taken that responsible people are in control of the serving of alcoholic beverages. Groups or organizations sponsoring occasions at which alcoholic beverages are served must recognize that they incur a liability by doing so, and assume the responsibility for persons who might become intoxicated. This includes providing transportation for anyone whose driving might be impaired.

Alcoholic beverages may be used in St Paul's Parish buildings and on Parish property only for specifically liturgical and semi-liturgical purposes, such as the celebration of the Eucharist, the Maundy Thursday Agape, the Easter Vigil party, or a Seder. (The Rectory and the Sexton's apartment, as personal residences, are exempt from this restriction.) At these designated events only simple still wine may be used; fortified wine, hard liquor, mixed alcoholic drinks, or alcoholic punches of any sort may not be served.

At Parish events which take place beyond the Parish property (such as an adult dinner in a restaurant) hard liquor and mixed alcoholic drinks as well as wine may be served and consumed, but the preceding conditions under which they may be offered apply.

Under civil law, criminal law, canon law, and the policies of the Bishop of Chicago, the Rector, Churchwardens, and Vestrymen of the Parish are responsible for the dissemination and observance of these regulations.