



GUIDELINE FOR THE USE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES  
AT CHURCH FUNCTIONS OR ON CHURCH PROPERTY  
WITHIN THE DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

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The Episcopal Church has never taken a stance endorsing the prohibition of the use of beverages containing alcohol among her members. To the contrary, the Church has recognized that Scripture sanctions alcoholic beverages as a gift from God, and that the Lord Himself dignified the use and serving of alcoholic beverages in His first miracle at Cana and in the institution of the Holy Eucharist. Responsible use of the "wine that maketh glad the heart of man" is, in fact, one of the elements of freedom of those who are in Christ.

However, the Episcopal Church also recognizes that where there is a potential for good, there is often a potential for evil; nowhere is this more evident than in the use of alcoholic beverages. Alcoholism is an illness that has reached epidemic proportions in our own society and culture; for that reason it is imperative that the members of the Church use the same prudence regarding the use and serving of alcoholic beverages that they would use in handling any other potentially dangerous drug. Although the social use of beverage alcohol may be permitted for those who choose to use it responsibly, the Church has a further responsibility for those people who, for one reason or another, choose to abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages.

Therefore, the following guidelines are given for the serving and use of alcoholic beverages at Church functions or on Church property within the Diocese of Maryland:

- (1) Recognizing the unvarying effects of alcohol as a mood-altering drug, any church or church-related group should consider the nature of the function at which alcoholic beverages are proposed to be served in order to determine whether or not that function would be enhanced by the serving and use of such beverages. Meetings for purposes for which clear thinking and judgment are required are functions at which the prior consumption of alcoholic beverages is inappropriate. Examples of such meetings are: vestry and advisory councils; diocesan councils; meetings dealing with financial, planning and program matters; meetings at which important elections are to occur; annual congregational meetings. This includes all interviews for candidates in searches for congregations and all aspirants for Holy Orders. If significant matters are to be discussed or important business transacted, a church-related group should postpone the serving of alcoholic beverages until after such matters are dealt with.

If it appears evident that the absence of alcoholic beverages would reduce attendance or lessen the appeal of a particular meeting, the sponsors of such a meeting should consider whether or not that meeting is justified in the first place; in any case, the presence or absence of beverage alcohol must not be used as an enticement to encourage participation in a church-related activity.

- (2) Any beverage that contains alcohol must always be clearly labeled as such; this also applies to any food (such as fruit compotes, desserts, etc.) where the alcohol has not been volatilized (i.e., "cooked out").
- (3) Whenever alcohol is served, in any form, non-alcoholic alternatives must always be offered. Non-alcoholic beverages must be served with the same attractiveness and accessibility as those containing alcohol, so that people who choose not to drink alcoholic beverages need not feel any embarrassment, discomfort or inconvenience in exercising their preference.
- (4) Although beverages and other foods containing alcohol may be *offered*, together with non-alcoholic alternatives, they must never be *promoted* in such a way as to imply that partaking of them is any kind of social requirement.
- (5) Alcoholic beverages cannot be sold without a license; this is in violation of Maryland State Law.
- (6) It is the responsibility of the sponsoring congregation or entity to be sure all applicable Federal, State and Local Laws and Ordinances, including those governing the serving of alcoholic beverages to minors, are observed.
- (7) Any occasion at which alcoholic beverages are to be offered should not be openly advertised as such; (for example, "Crab Feast" should be used instead of "Beer & Crab Supper" or "Bull Roast" should be used in place of "Beef 'n' Beer"). The group of people sponsoring an event where alcohol is offered should be either a parish organization or a group of members of the parish. Invitations to affairs held on parish premises at which alcoholic beverages are to be offered should be events that support the church's mission and not simply as social events. Departures from this guideline should be cleared through the Bishops' office, in each instance explaining the nature of the sponsoring group and the activity.
- (8) Although these guidelines recognize the positive social value of the use of alcoholic beverages, they also recognize that drunkenness is always unacceptable Christian behavior; care must be taken to insure that responsible people are in control of the serving of alcoholic beverages. The group or organization sponsoring the activity or event at which alcoholic beverages are served must also assume responsibility for those people who might become intoxicated; such responsibility includes providing alternative transportation for anyone whose driving might be impaired.
- (9) It is the duty of the Vicar, Rector, Interim or Priest-in-Charge of the congregation, or in their absence, the Senior Warden and the Vestry, to assume responsibility for the dissemination of and the observance of these guidelines.

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