

R-2: Adoption of Amended Diocesan Alcohol Use Policy

Resolved, by the 225th Convention of the Diocese of Virginia, that Convention adopt a new Diocesan Alcohol Use Policy, as follows, replacing the policy that was passed by General Convention in 1985. This amended policy reflects a deeper understanding of the impact of alcohol use in our parishes and in our lives, and seeks to set out standards for use of alcohol in church/parish/ diocesan settings that respect Virginia law, the support of those who are in recovery, the protection of the vulnerable, and the requirement that the Godly work we are called upon to do is carried out in a conscientious and unimpaired manner. This policy also offers a variety of resources to educate all members of the Diocese about the need for these standards.

Submitted by the Executive Board and the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Virginia.

The Policy:

The Diocese of Virginia seeks to live out the Baptismal Covenant in its life and its policies. This means that we seek to follow Jesus Christ in our manner of life, and respect the dignity of every person. This policy therefore is a call to the whole Church to use alcohol in appropriate and thoughtful ways, so that people are not put in a position that compromises their membership in the Body of Christ or their own integrity, or that threatens the life of another with their actions.

The Diocese of Virginia's alcohol policy conforms to Virginia state law which says:

- If alcohol will be sold, the parish must first obtain a license from the Commonwealth of Virginia to do so.
- Every effort must be made to ensure that someone who has had too much to drink does not drive.

In addition to state law, the Diocese of Virginia affirms that:

- Alcohol should be consumed in moderation;
- There must be an equally attractive and equally accessible non-alcoholic option and the alcoholic option should be clearly labeled as such, especially if the parish is serving drinks such as alcoholic punch;
- No church business or open discussion of issues is to be conducted during or after the serving of alcohol. Business includes the work of vestry, search committee, all church committees and councils, and church schools.
- **Individuals under the legal drinking age of Virginia** may not consume alcohol **outside of the Eucharist**.

- Parishes in the Diocese of Virginia should adhere to these policies. In addition, parishes are welcome to adopt their own more detailed policies concerning alcohol use on its properties and at parish events.
- The leadership of each parish, directed by the cleric-in-charge and vestry, should educate and inform its parishioners about alcoholism and substance abuse.
- There will be no consumption of alcohol by adults **when** leading events which involve youth, e.g. Youth Group, Boy Scout outings, camps, etc.

In addition, the Diocese of Virginia affirms that:

- Food must be served when alcohol is present.
- Clergy shall consecrate an appropriate amount of wine when celebrating the Eucharist and perform ablutions in a way that does not foster or model misuse.
- We encourage clergy to acknowledge the efficacy of receiving the sacrament in one kind and consider providing non-alcoholic wine.

WHAT FOLLOWS IS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since 1981, the Diocese of Virginia has required that all future clergy be trained in alcohol abuse prevention prior to ordination. In 1985, a further Resolution of General Convention once again addressed the troubling issue of alcohol in the lives of our parishes:

Resolution Number: 1985-A083

Title: Adopt Church Policy on Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Legislative Action Taken: Concurred as Amended

Final Text:

Resolved, That this 68th General Convention adopt the following policy statement:

AN EPISCOPAL NATIONAL POLICY ON ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE

The Episcopal Church acknowledges the need for exercising a healing ministry and for offering guidance to problem drinkers or chemically dependent persons and to members of their families.

Alcoholism and other drug abuse are recognized as treatable human disorders which are manifested by a three-fold impairment of the body, mind and spirit. The Church concurs with health authorities that alcohol and other substance abuse is a major health concern of our society. It affects not only the alcoholic or abuser's health and self-concept, but also interpersonal relationships with family, co-workers, friends and counselors. It may affect any individual, regardless of financial situation, education, employment, race or creed.

The Church calls on all clergy and lay people to take to heart the seriousness of the illness of alcohol and drug abuse and its manifestations as a disrupter of family, economic and social

life; and urges all church people to do everything in their power to offer forth the love of Christ in his healing ministry to those afflicted persons and families.

Diocesan Committees on Alcoholism and Drug Dependency

The General Convention of 1979 encouraged each diocese to appoint a Diocesan Committee on Alcoholism and Drug Dependency to implement a program on alcohol and drug abuse. Such committees are responsible for developing a diocesan policy and planning a diocesan resource center for education, information, counseling and training. Clergy and lay counselors are encouraged to pursue continuing education in these fields. Congregations are encouraged to provide members with educational opportunities to learn more about the nature, prevention, techniques of treatment and pastoral care of alcoholics and drug abusers and their families. Trained consultants should be made available to interested clergy and congregations to facilitate this education process. Through education and usage of appropriate resources, intervention is made possible to stop the progress of the disorder before it runs its full destructive course.

The Church commends and encourages the many programs offering treatment and support to persons suffering from the illnesses of alcoholism and drug addiction. Clergy and vestries are encouraged to further their assistance to the National Episcopal Coalition on Alcohol (NECA), Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, AlaTeen Groups, Adult Children of Alcoholics Groups, Narcotics Anonymous and to chemical dependency programs and halfway houses as well as becoming knowledgeable concerning all local resources offering intervention, treatment and continuing care for these persons.

Employees of the Church

Alcoholic or drug dependent employees of the Church should be treated with pastoral love and concern. Church health insurance policies should include provision for the treatment and care of persons afflicted with these illnesses. Treatment intervention for the person and family along with counseling and continuing support during recovery should be coordinated by the clergy and other support groups in the parish. Every effort should be made to offer job protection and re-employment, with salaried sick leave during hospitalization, to alcoholics and drug abusers accepting treatment. Those refusing treatment will not be offered this protection.

Alcoholic Beverages in the Local Parish

The Episcopal Church has never endorsed prohibiting the use of beverages containing alcohol among adult members. Scripture offers Jesus' example of the use and serving of wine in his first miracle at Cana and in the institution of the Holy Eucharist. If an adult member elects to use alcohol, however, moderate usage is expected. Church members should be educated regarding those conditions that might consequently compromise the health and safety of oneself or others. The Church also supports and has a responsibility to those people who abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages for whatever reason. Many churches do not serve alcoholic beverages at social functions, but, for those which do, the following guidelines are given:

- All applicable federal, state and local laws should be obeyed, including those governing the serving of alcoholic beverages to minors.
- Alcoholic beverages and food containing alcohol must be clearly labeled as such.
- Whenever alcohol is served, non-alcoholic alternatives must always be offered with equal attractiveness and accessibility.
- The service of alcoholic beverages at church events should not be publicized as an attraction of the event.
- The group or organization sponsoring the activity or event at which alcoholic beverages are served must have permission from the parish for this plan. Such groups or organizations must also assume responsibility for those persons who might become intoxicated and must provide alternative transportation for anyone whose capacity to drive may thus be impaired.
- Recognizing the effect of alcohol as a mood-altering drug, it would be advisable to consider the nature of the function at which alcoholic beverages are proposed to be served.
- Chemical usage other than alcohol is clearly controlled under federal, state and local laws and, as such, should be forbidden at any function.

From Resolution R-3 passed by the 186th Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia, January 1981:

“Postulants and candidates for Holy Orders in the Diocese of Virginia, prior to ordination, shall receive and demonstrate an adequate understanding of prevention, recognition, intervention and treatment of alcoholism as a spiritual, physical, emotional and social illness.”

Every clergy person has promised in his or her ordination vows to do his or her best to “pattern your life in accordance with the teachings of Christ, so that you may be a wholesome example to all people.” Setting an example around appropriate use of alcohol and encouraging God’s people in healthy lifestyles is an important part of this commitment. Clergy are expected to refrain from over-indulgence at all times, but particularly when participating in functions where those under their spiritual charge are present, so that we are careful that our freedom does not become a stumbling block to others (1 Cor 8).

Should a clergyperson begin to suspect that he or she may have an alcohol problem, the cleric is expected to seek the guidance and pastoral care of a bishop. The bishop will assist the cleric in identifying resources, including a treatment facility, if necessary. The bishop will operate from the assumption that alcoholism is a disease to be treated, not a moral failing. However, if the cleric does not make every effort to seek treatment for alcohol abuse, and exhibits of a pattern of behavior that is contrary to the bishop’s guidance and the cleric’s ordination vows, the bishop will necessarily be put in a position of disciplining the cleric.

RESOURCES AND EDUCATION

Discussion Questions

- The New Testament has a number of references to the use of alcohol. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding, and told parables in which people were encouraged to party; St Paul encouraged Timothy to drink a little wine with meals because it was good for the digestion, but also discouraged drunkenness. What is your understanding of the Bible's view of alcohol?
- Is there a "Christian" standard for alcohol use?
- How do we honor those who are in recovery if and when we serve alcohol at church functions?
- How should the church respond to recovering alcoholics? What about those who are not in recovery and who struggle with alcohol?
- What is your view on serving alcohol at church functions?
- Have you ever known someone who was struggling with addiction? What did you do? Was the church helpful?
- Do you believe that leaders in the church (clergy and lay people) should be held to a higher standard of behavior around alcohol use?
- Episcopalians have long valued the freedom we have to make thoughtful decisions for ourselves, tested out in the community of the church, about matters of faith, belief and how we act on our faith. How can we balance that freedom with the need to set boundaries around things like alcohol consumption?

TREATMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

- www.aavirginia.org/hp/va-intergroup.asp: This is a general website that will give info on Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings in any city or town in Virginia.
- www.nvintergroup.org: This gives AA info for Northern Virginia.
- www.aarichmond.org: Similar info for Richmond.
- www.aadistrict3ova.org/meetings/meetings.htm: For the Fredericksburg area.
- www.aamanassas.org: Similar for the Prince William-Manassas area.

EDUCATIONAL SITES:

- [This is the website](#) for the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism of the National Institutes of Health. Check out [Alcohol and Your Health](#) for extensive information on alcoholism and health issues. Also click on [Publications and](#)

[Multimedia](#) for detailed information for both clinicians and lay persons on the clinical treatment and other aspects of alcoholism. The NIH also has a helpful section of [screening tests](#) for alcohol abuse.

- Suggested Resource: ***Alcoholism and Substance Abuse: Handbook for Clergy and Congregations*** by Stephen Apthorp, 2003 edition. This is a helpful guide for dealing with alcohol and drug abuse in congregational settings. This book can be seen online and acquired at the following link:
<https://books.google.com/books?id=hWHYJloV35oC&printsec=frontcover&dq=isbn:0595265448&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjs5Pnlv7HhAhXIo1kKHeiXBKkQ6AEIKjAA#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Counseling Resource Mental Health Library provides [this screening quiz](#).
- [The Recovery Ministries of the Episcopal Church](#) has a page devoted to 12-Step Groups and additional resources and information.