

Episcopal Diocesan Alcohol Policy

The Use of Alcoholic Beverages at Church Functions

Adopted by the Executive Committee February 26, 1981.

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 the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) and in the institution of the Holy Eucharist. Responsible use of the “wine that maketh glad the heart of man” (Psalm 104:15) is, in fact, one of the elements of the freedom for those who are in Christ.

However, the Episcopal Church also recognized that where there is a potential for good, there is also a potential for evil. Alcoholism is an illness which has reached epidemic proportions in our own society and culture; and 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 in handling any other potentially dangerous drug. Although the social use of beverage alcohol may be permitted for those who 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 Mississippi:

1. Any beverage which contains alcohol should always be clearly identified as such; this also applies to any food (such as fruit compotes, desserts, etc.) where the alcohol has not been violated (i.e. “cooked out”).
2. Whenever alcohol is served in any form, non-alcoholic alternatives should always be offered. Non-alcoholic beverages should 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.
3. Although beverages and other foods containing alcohol may be offered, together with non-alcoholic alternatives, they should never be promoted in such a way as to imply that partaking of them is any kind of social requirement.
4. Alcoholic beverages cannot be sold without a license; this is a violation of Mississippi State law.
5. All other applicable Federal, State and local ordinances, including those governing the serving of alcoholic beverages to minors, must be observed.
6. Groups of people sponsoring the event should be either a church organization or a group of members of the church. Departure from these guidelines should be cleared through the appropriate authority.
7. Precautions must be taken to insure that responsible persons 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 assume responsibility for providing alternative transportation for anyone whose driving might be impaired.
8. It is the duty of the Priest in charge of the congregation and the Wardens and Vestry or Mission Committee to assume the responsibility for the dissemination and observance of these guidelines.
9. Invitations to affairs held on church premises at which alcoholic beverages are to be offered should be issued only to the congregation, parish/mission organizations, their guests and friends, and never to the general public.