



Community of Christ

CHRIST'S MISSION, OUR MISSION

World Church Health and Wholeness Team Statement

DRINKING INTOXICATING BEVERAGES

The following statement is a summary of the review on drinking alcohol provided by professionals serving on the World Church Health and Wholeness Team. All members contributed data and information from their different professional backgrounds.

Drinking intoxicants is not necessarily a matter of right or wrong, virtue or sin, faith or straying. The decision to drink intoxicants is a matter of a careful review of several considerations that can guide personal choice. After examining these issues, the most responsible choice can be made—a choice that ideally leads to health and wholeness for body, mind, spirit, and relationships.

Issues of Genetics and Personal Vulnerability to Addiction

If a person has a family history of alcoholism (or addictive behavior), it is not wise to drink alcoholic beverages. Genetics and/or personality traits may predispose a person to increased sensitivity to alcohol and potentially addictive behavior. Medical sources estimate that genetics are responsible for 50 percent of vulnerability to alcohol-use disorder or alcoholism.

Another issue of personal vulnerability is difficulty with self-control and/or a tendency to “follow the crowd.” If one has difficulty setting limits or making personal choices apart from what others are doing, it is best to avoid situations where alcohol is consumed.

Alcohol is a psycho-active substance with dependence-producing potential. The American Society of Addiction defines addiction as “a primary chronic disease of the brain, [involving] reward, motivation, memory, and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits [from the results of alcohol] leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social, and spiritual results...” These results are seen in an individual who is seeking relief through substance use and other behaviors...to the point of a pathological condition.

Internationally, the evidence is that in the general population 13 percent of people who regularly drink will become alcoholics.

Behavior Issues

The fact that alcoholic beverages are intoxicating is important. Webster defines intoxication as “to be affected temporarily with diminished physical and mental control by means of alcoholic liquor, a drug, or another substance, especially to excite or stupefy with liquor.” This *toxicity*, then, affects behavior and judgment, causing people to lose control, or true agency, over behavior and choices.

Bodily Tolerance Issues

People’s tolerance of alcohol varies by size, gender, age, health, and biological considerations. It generally is agreed that more than one or two glasses of an alcoholic beverage at a time can cause intoxication.

Altered Judgment

Altered behavior and judgment may result in problems with safety, violence, untoward relationships, and other negative outcomes. Consequences include risky sexual behavior, poor

school or work performance, and increased risk of suicide and homicide. As disciples of Christ, we need to consider the impact of our behavior when not under our usual control or judgment. Issues of altered behavior or judgment can jeopardize our call to be examples for Jesus and his mission.

Safety

Safety issues are of concern, especially when people experience the effects of drinking more than one or two glasses of an alcoholic beverage at a time (amount depending on their unique characteristics and conditions). The World Health Organization names alcohol as the worldwide leading cause of preventable death. Globally, its 2012 report attributes 3.3 million deaths per year to alcohol. It is implicated in many fatal traffic accidents.

Health

Health issues are an important consideration for people who have conditions incompatible with drinking alcohol. Research is not conclusive about the impact of drinking intoxicating beverages on physical health. But alcoholic beverages may negatively impact conditions such as diabetes, liver disease, kidney problems, pregnancy, and others. Also, negative interactions mean many medications should not be taken with alcoholic beverages.

Some evidence suggests that drinking a glass of wine with dinner or before bed may benefit heart health for some people. However, this evidence is not conclusive, and questions have arisen about the research methods.

Data are more uncertain about alcohol and women. Several major studies link even two drinks a day with increased chances of breast cancer.

Though drinking small amounts of alcohol may not be of major concern to overall health for some, negative effects on anyone's health must be considered. Alcohol can deplete nutrients, especially the B vitamins. Vitamins C, A, zinc, calcium, and magnesium also are affected.

It is interesting to note that the World Health Organization, when reviewing the impact of drinking alcohol (2014), considered it a global issue of great concern. The harmful use of alcohol causes large disease, social, and economic burdens in societies. Overall it attributes 5.1 percent of the global burden of disease and injury to drinking alcohol.

Location

We increasingly are aware that alcohol consumption, especially with meals, is a cultural reality in some countries. Further, in some situations, drinking a beverage with alcohol may be a healthier choice than drinking unsafe water. As a worldwide church, our challenge is to craft policy and guidelines that are appropriately sensitive to local cultures while upholding our faith culture. We recommend policies and guidelines based on our foundational beliefs, especially those beliefs regarding health and wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships, as well as Responsible Choices.

Another issue related to this topic concerns having alcohol on church property. Although drinking alcoholic beverages on church property may not involve church members (e.g. nonmember weddings, receptions, anniversaries, etc.), such activities can increase church liability and create an environment that promotes drinking intoxicants. There is also the potential for members to be offended, believing that alcohol used on church property violates "sacred space." Further, drinking alcohol on church property can lead to injuries, accidents, or incidents that can compromise church sanctity, facility-member image, and community standing.

Being a Role Model

Our choice to be followers of Jesus calls us to model responsible behavior. As disciples, we are to remember that our actions might influence those who look to us as role models. Even

limited use by a disciple may influence another person. We may not know the situation or sensitivities of a person seeing our behavior or listening to our words. We may be influencing their choices, and resulting behavior could harm them or result in their irresponsible or unsafe behavior. The effect our behavior has on others—especially when we are known as disciples of Jesus (and/or as priesthood members)—must strongly influence our responsible decision-making and choices.

Taking all of the above into consideration, we present the following as the Health and Wholeness Team statement on drinking intoxicants:

Enduring Principles

Our foundational beliefs and Enduring Principles of promoting body, mind, spirit, and relationship health and wholeness have great value in today's world and for each of us. We should recall that we are called to uphold these traits as “a desirable end toward which to strive” (Doctrine and Covenants 156:5c). These beliefs, then, provide guidance when making Responsible Choices about whether or not we drink intoxicating beverages.

Scripture does not specifically forbid the drinking of intoxicants. However, several passages warn about drinking “too much,” being concerned how our behavior influences others, and avoiding drinking when in a ministerial role. These scriptures can offer important direction for making responsible decisions about drinking intoxicating beverages.

It is important to emphasize that we believe in lifting up and healing those who are struggling, sometimes because of their own irresponsible, unwise choices. Indeed, we need to be mindful that many people consume alcohol to mask concerns, anxieties, and memories. It is incumbent on all members and priesthood members to minister to those needs without passing judgment on symptoms of underlying causes.

When we find people whose drinking is leading to altered behavior or judgment, relationship problems, and/or unsafe actions, we should provide love, acceptance, pastoral ministry, healing ministries, and referral for treatment as needed.

Responsible Choices

Because of the evidence of harmful consequences, the recommendation for Christian disciples and priesthood members is abstinence from intoxicating beverages. This is the most responsible choice for a Christian disciple striving to offer a loving, healthy, and wholesome lifestyle example. Abstinence prevents negative possibilities of drinking intoxicating beverages and upholds careful consideration of body, mind, spirit, and relationship health while modeling a loving, values-based Christian life.

Abstinence is a wise practice for priesthood members and disciples alike whose lifestyles and behaviors often are emulated. Being a role model, especially to children and youth, is important. For priesthood members in particular, drinking intoxicants carries a higher responsibility. Those who have been ordained as leaders with calls for special ministry for God's people should prayerfully review the considerations above and reflect on how their behavior and role modeling witness to others. It is good for priesthood members to recall:

Priesthood is a sacred covenant involving the highest stewardship of body, mind, spirit, and relationships. The priesthood shall be composed of people of humility and integrity who are willing to extend themselves in service for others and for the well-being of the faith community.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:6a