



Community of Christ

Pastoral Letter on Intoxicants

To: The Church

The First Presidency extends greetings in the love and peace of Jesus Christ to the church throughout the world.

World Conference Resolution (WCR) 1300, “Drinking of Intoxicants,” asked the Presidency to provide “contemporary counsel regarding the interpretation of [Doctrine and Covenants] 152:4b, specifically regarding how the consumption of alcohol pertains to Community of Christ’s understanding of sin.” It also asked the Presidency and Council of Twelve Apostles to “review the policy requiring complete abstinence from alcohol consumption by members of the priesthood, and confirm and/or revise the policy and administrative guidelines so there is a clear understanding of expectations for priesthood on this issue throughout the church.”

Through an extensive time of prayerful study and review we are responding to the requests of WCR 1300 by releasing the following documents in English, French, and Spanish:

1. Commentary on Principles by the First Presidency
2. First Presidency Interpretation of Doctrine and Covenants 152:4b
3. World Church Health and Wholeness Team Statement: “Drinking of Intoxicants”
4. Official Policy: “Consumption of Intoxicants by Priesthood”

These documents can be found on the church’s website at www.CofChrist.org/official-announcements.

Why did this resolution come to the World Conference? WCR 1300 was submitted because of the growing trend of priesthood members drinking intoxicants in many Western

nations. Inconsistency in upholding policy resulted in a lack of clarity about the long-standing policy of priesthood not drinking intoxicants. This issue also is influenced by the cultural trends in many Western nations that promote the frequent and casual drinking of intoxicants.

In other non-Western nations, there is a clear practice that priesthood and members do not drink intoxicants. This is a justice issue because of the severe economic, physical, and emotional hardships that impact families, especially women and children. Through the expanding nature of social media, pictures of priesthood members consuming intoxicants have caused great concern and questions by many members and leaders from other parts of the world.

How did we approach this task? The First Presidency defined a process to study and consider the provisions of the resolution. We spent significant time in prayer and reflecting on essential questions, using the six lenses of “Discovering God’s Will” (www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Ways-of-Discovering-Gods-Will-Listening-Guide.pdf). Extensive discussions with the World Church Leadership Council, Council of Twelve Apostles, Council of Presidents of Seventy, and the Standing High Council demonstrated the extreme challenges of developing a standard policy for a global church.

The process was lengthy because of the approach to come to a final recommendation. We wanted to achieve a high level of consent on how to respond as a people of faith. We began by reviewing our beliefs, traditions, scriptures, official statements, and ethical principles rooted deeply in our history. From these principles we identified some as having priority in relation to the issue of priesthood members drinking intoxicants. A variety of statements for the

worldwide church were proposed, evaluated, and refined through additional discussion and evaluation. Finally, a general policy statement for the worldwide church was determined.

In summary it states that priesthood members are urged to refrain from drinking intoxicants. (See reference for entire policy.) Specific administrative provisions have been developed by field apostles for policy application in different national settings. Church leaders relied on the Holy Spirit for patience, wisdom, and insight throughout the process. The entire procedure, while demanding and time-consuming, provided World Church leaders with valuable experience in working together to resolve complex issues in an international church.

What have we learned through this experience? Viewpoints presented during this work revealed major differences in the church. Western cultures value highly individual choices. Other cultures stress community well-being as a greater concern than individual choices. As we pondered these differences, we considered how our sacred story as a church, recent Doctrine and Covenant scriptures, and our Enduring Principles further inform our understanding.

Ultimately we agreed that gospel faithfulness, which forms our identity and mission, upholds the importance of community. Community well-being promotes the physical, spiritual, and relational health of all. This means giving

priority attention to the most vulnerable in our communities. The most vulnerable are children, youth, and those impacted by addiction or other disabling factors who are easily influenced by the behaviors of others. Priesthood members, as ordained servant-leaders, are entrusted with the well-being of the church community. All priesthood members are urged to honor this stewardship in all aspects of their public and private lives.

In many non-Western nations, where Community of Christ is growing rapidly, there is a firm belief that priesthood—and all members—should refrain from drinking intoxicants. This belief is upheld for the overall well-being of individuals and the community.

Members of the World Church Leadership Council will honor the principles outlined in the policy by refraining from drinking intoxicants as we seek to promote the well-being of all in the worldwide church community.

The Presidency encourages congregational leadership teams and priesthood members to devote time to studying and reflecting on all the material provided. We trust in the awareness, wisdom, and ability of priesthood members to consider carefully this material. All priesthood members must responsibly choose how they will conduct themselves in public and private in light of their responsibility for the physical and spiritual welfare of the local and global church communities.

THE FIRST PRESIDENCY



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Community of Christ

First Presidency Interpretation of Doctrine and Covenants 152:4b

INTRODUCTION

The 2013 World Conference approved World Conference Resolution (WCR) 1300, “Drinking of Intoxicants,” which asked the First Presidency to provide contemporary counsel regarding the interpretation of Doctrine and Covenants 152:4b, specifically regarding how the consumption of alcohol pertains to Community of Christ’s understanding of sin. In addition, the resolution asked the First Presidency and Council of Twelve Apostles to review current policy on abstinence from drinking alcohol by priesthood members and confirm or revise the policy with clear expectations.

This paper addresses the interpretation of Doctrine and Covenants 152:4b. A specific request to the First Presidency in WCR 1300 is a matter of official scripture interpretation according to the responsibilities of the First Presidency as “leading interpreters and teachers of the laws and revelations of God” (WCR 386).

INTERPRETATION OF DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS 152

The First Presidency consulted with the Theology Formation Team, Health and Wholeness Team, church historians, Standing High Council, and World Church Leadership Council in developing an interpretation of Doctrine and Covenants 152. They used the “six lenses” in the church’s model titled, “Ways of Discovering God’s Will” (www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Ways-of-Discovering-Gods-Will-Listening-Guide.pdf).

SCRIPTURE

Scripture interpretation is vital to this issue; the church forms scripture so scripture then can form the community. For our community, interpretation must be guided by the statement, “Scripture in Community of Christ” (*Sharing in Community of Christ: 3rd Edition*, www.CofChrist.org/scripture-in-community-of-christ).

Scripture, including Restoration scripture, does not speak with a consistent voice about how members and priesthood should view drinking intoxicants.

BIBLICAL SCRIPTURE

The Bible presents a range of practices and teachings related to drinking intoxicants:

1. Indulging in wine and drinks containing alcohol was common in biblical times. In many instances, wine was considered safer to drink than water because many water sources were contaminated.
2. Some groups were strictly forbidden to drink wine or strong drinks when engaged in religious duties or because of religious vows (Leviticus 10:9; Numbers 6:1–3, 30; Judges 13:4–7; Jeremiah 35:1–8, 14).
3. The Book of Proverbs warns against drinking wine and strong drink (Proverbs 20:1; 21:17; 23:29–35, 31:4). Referring to wine, Proverbs states, “At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind utter perverse things.” However, Ecclesiastes advises to “...drink your wine with a merry heart...” (Ecclesiastes 9:7 NRSV).

4. In the New Testament it is difficult to determine in some passages if reference is being made to fermented wine or unfermented grape juice (new wine). The same word (*oinos*) is used for both.
5. At the wedding at Cana, Jesus miraculously turned water into wine (John 2:1-2).
6. John the Baptist didn't drink wine (Luke 7:33).
7. Jesus drank wine sometimes (Luke 7:34; Matthew 11:19; John 2:1-2; Matthew 26:29). It is uncertain what kind of wine it was (see 4 above).
8. Jesus associated with those who drank wine (Luke 7:33-35; Matthew 11:19).
9. Apostle Paul taught, "So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18 NRSV). He specifically warned that deacons should not be "indulging in much wine" (1 Timothy 3:8 NRSV).
10. One time Apostle Paul advised Timothy, who had a stomach problem, to "No longer drink only water, but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments" (1 Timothy 5:23 NRSV).
11. In Romans 14:13ff and 1 Corinthians 8-9, Apostle Paul speaks about how disciples should make righteous decisions as Christians regarding issues like what they shall eat and drink. Paul calls disciples to leave behind legalistic approaches to food and drink and to embrace a life of responsible choices that include evaluating the impact of one's eating and drinking habits on others in the Christian community and larger society.
12. 2 Peter 2:19 warns against allowing anything (other than Christ) to enslave and become "master" of one's life.
13. The Bible clearly teaches that Christians should view their bodies as "temples" of the Living God with the intent of honoring God by how they treat their bodies, including what they eat and drink (1 Corinthians 6:19; 10:31).
14. Using the example of not eating food offered to idols, Apostle Paul urges Christians to follow his example of not doing anything that might become a "stumbling block" for others, causing them to sin against their conscience, even if one considers it all right for oneself (1 Corinthians 8:9-13).

What can we conclude from this overview of biblical scripture?

1. The Bible does not make a convincing argument that abstinence from alcohol is a requirement for discipleship or ministry. Alcohol as a substance is not inherently sinful, but how we use alcohol can be.
2. The Bible teaches against excessive drinking, drunkenness, antisocial behaviors, and addictions that become "masters" of our lives instead of God.
3. The Bible teaches that our bodies are the "temples" of God, and whatever we do, including what we eat and drink, should be to God's glory.

ON THE WEB

The documents in this issue of the *Herald* and others related to intoxicants are on the church website at www.CofChrist.org/official-announcements.

They include two complete policies: "Consumption of Intoxicants by Priesthood" and "Consumption of Intoxicants at Community of Christ-sponsored Events or on Community of Christ-owned Property."

Also on the website is a pastoral letter, an interpretation of Doctrine and Covenants 152:4b, and the Health and Wholeness Team Statement on "Drinking Intoxicating Beverages."

The complete statement discusses the issues of genetics and personal vulnerability to addiction, behavior, body tolerance, altered judgment, safety, health, location, being a role model, the Enduring Principles, and Responsible Choices.

4. The Bible teaches that Christians should not do anything that could be a “stumbling block” or offense to others, even if you think it is all right for yourself.
5. The Bible teaches that Christians always should carefully consider the well-being of others when deciding about personal behavior.

THE BOOK OF MORMON

Like the Bible, the Book of Mormon does not specifically forbid drinking intoxicants. It does provide strong warnings to those who drink excessively. For example: “Woe to them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them (2 Nephi 8:81)! The Book of Mormon provides several examples of how drinking intoxicants can lead to drunkenness, stupor, and loss of self-control. For example, see Alma 25:34–50.

DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS 86

Section 86 was brought by Joseph Smith Jr. in 1833 in Kirtland, Ohio. It commonly is known as the “Word of Wisdom.” The historical setting in which Section 86 was introduced included an intensifying temperance movement in the USA. One segment of the temperance movement focused on abstinence from intoxicating beverages; another focused on moderation and self-control and distinguished distilled spirits from other alcoholic beverages.

The preface to the “Word of Wisdom,” while identifying the document as a revelation, tempers its standing by referring to it as “wisdom” and “a principle, with promise” to be “adapted to the capacity of the weak...” It seems the “Word of Wisdom” was not meant as a rigid requirement for all members, but as wise guidance based on principles for healthy living.

Section 86 became the church’s chief instruction on healthy eating and drinking. Other churches in the area, such as Methodists, Presbyterians, and Unitarians, held similar views on tobacco and “strong drinks.” Section 86 incorporates language similar to Owenite and Shaker communitarians and members of the Stone-Campbell movement, some of whom aligned with the Restoration in Kirtland.

According to Apostle Lach Mackay, director of Historic Sites and leader of the Church History and Sacred Story Ministries Team:

The temperance movement of the late 1820s and early 1830s was not initially an abstinence movement. The focus was on moderation. The medical community believed stimulants, especially strong stimulants, disrupted the internal workings of the body. As a result, distilled spirits were discouraged unless consumed for medicinal purposes. The use of milder stimulants like wine, cider, and beer generally was not the focus of temperance societies, although by the later 1830s some societies began to lift up prohibition.

“Strong drinks” meant distilled liquors and not fermented drinks. Strong drink “is not good” and “not for the belly, but for the washing of your bodies” (Section 86:1b–c). Cinnamon whisky was used in Kirtland by 1836 for the ritual washings associated with preparation for spiritual empowerment.

Wine was to be drunk “only in assembling yourselves together, to offer up your sacraments before him” and should be “pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make.” The reference to “pure” was likely to guard against adulteration. Despite the reference to “the grape of the vine,” the wine used at times during the earliest years of the church, including at the dedication of Kirtland Temple, was made by Elizabeth Whitney from red currants. Some argue the wine would have been “new,” which they interpret as nonalcoholic. However, it was not until after 1869, when a former Methodist preacher, Dr. Thomas B. Welch, adapted pasteurization to grape juice that unfermented juice was available beyond the harvest season. In addition to the use of wine for the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the drinking of wine occurred during the 1830s and 1840s following the sacrament of marriage.

Beer was understood to be “good” as a “mild drink.” “All grain is good for the food of man...and barley...for mild drinks and also other grain.”

DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS SECTION 119

Section 119:3d specifically states: “...be not addicted to strong drink in any form, that your counsel to be temperate may be made effectual by your example.” The commonality between Sections 86 and 119 and the Bible is a reaction to misuse and drunkenness, and a shared concern to uplift communal and individual well-being.

During the Presidency of Joseph Smith III, the church came to interpret Sections 86 and 119 as discouraging both the regular and occasional use of alcoholic drinks. General

Conference Resolutions (GCR) approved by the Reorganized Church evidence this direction:

GCR 92, “Intoxicating Drinks and Tobacco,” adopted in 1868: According to this resolution, “...this conference deprecates the use of intoxicating drinks (as beverages), and the use of tobacco, and recommends, to all officers of the church total abstinence.”

GCR 297, “Drinking Intoxicants,” adopted in 1885: The focus of this resolution is on “visiting saloons and drinking intoxicants, which habit seems to hinder the spread of the work.” GCR 297 resolved, “That...it be made a test of fellowship for any member of the church who will persist in this practice.” This resolution was rescinded by the 2013 World Conference.

GCR 463, “Appointee Standards,” adopted in 1898: This resolution mandated, “That henceforth we recommend no man for General Conference appointment whom we know to be addicted to either of the above evils [tobacco and strong drink].”

The intent of Sections 86 and 119 is concern about addiction. However, since the late 1800s, tradition in the church about the use of intoxicants has carried more weight than the actual wording of scripture. In particular, GCR 463 begins with this straightforward statement: “Whereas, The Lord has spoken against the use of tobacco and strong drink on different occasions...” Regarding GCR 463, Apostle Mackay observed, “We seem by the late 19th century to have lost the earlier differentiation between strong drink (distilled liquors), wine, beer, and cider.”

In summary, apparently the Reorganized Church’s understanding by 1898 was that Sections 86 and 119 strongly discouraged the drinking of intoxicants as beverages (vs. for medicinal or sacramental use), especially in saloons, and spoke out clearly against addiction. Over time, the standard for priesthood members became “refraining from the use of alcohol...” as stated in the *Church Administrator’s Handbook*: 2005 Edition, “Priesthood Standards and Qualifications,” page 89.

GCR 702, adopted in 1913, finally decided the question on the use of fermented wine for the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. “That fermented wine should not be used in the Sacrament services of the church, but that either unfermented wine or water should be used, and so be in

harmony with the spirit of the revelations.” (See Doctrine and Covenants 26:1; 86:1; 119:5.)

DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS SECTION 152

In 1976 President W. Wallace Smith presented an inspired document to the World Conference. It was approved as Section 152. Paragraph 4b states:

Some have been led to inactivity, yea and even lulled to sleep by the spirit of carelessness and indifference. Some have been overcome by the grosser sins of the world—the spirit of revelry, wanton living, use of drugs, drinking, and fornication—and have fallen away. And still others have turned away for personal aggrandizement, rejecting my leadership because of trivial offenses.

Scripture sometimes uses an approach called “vice lists” to emphasize how pervasive sin is as a human condition. Such lists should not limit our understanding of sin to “checklists.” Section 152:4b is an example of the use of a “vice list” to make a point.

If we focus only on Section 152:4b and not the whole paragraph, we miss the initial affirmation of God’s faithfulness regardless of behaviors that separate us from God. We also forgo hearing anew God’s invitation to repentance and forgiveness and the eternal promises of God affirmed in the final part of paragraph 4. When seen as a whole, the main theme of Section 152:4b is God’s invitation to renew a covenant with God that leads to personal health, healthy relationships, and peace.

Section 152:4 has an interesting background. It can be found almost entirely in a portion of “A Message to the General Conference and the Church” presented by Presiding Patriarch Elbert A. Smith to the 1946 General Conference.

President Frederick M. Smith had died March 20, 1946. Church members and leaders were grieving his passing and were concerned about presidential succession. The Council of Twelve Apostles was presiding over the calling of a successor. Given the importance of the question, the Council of Twelve passed a resolution requesting Presiding Patriarch Elbert A. Smith to seek the “mind of God” on the matter while the Twelve sustained him in prayer.

World Church Historian (retired) Mark Scherer, in an April 10, 2014, memo to the First Presidency, wrote about the context of Section 152:

[Doctrine and Covenants Section 152] emerged from the prophet's survey of social problems confronting the church in his day. President Smith addressed the disrupted state of society at the 1976 World Conference through two specific statements—first from the pulpit and second by revelation.

To understand Section 152 as presented Monday, March 29, 1976, one must look back to his sermon the night before. What President Smith could not insert into the prophetic document he included in his sermon, "Let Us Walk in the Light."...

President Smith's Conference sermon covered a wide range of topics. One was the proliferation of social issues such as the "new morality" and human sexuality. He also addressed alcohol and tobacco use...

President Smith cited GCR 92 that "recommends to all officers of the church, total abstinence." Next he drew attention to Doctrine and Covenants 119:3d that cautioned "be not addicted to strong drink in any form." He rejected occasional use as many rationalized that the scriptural advice does not prohibit but merely cautions against addiction. He stated that "[i]n my opinion it does not in any degree justify the use of table wine or other beverage having an alcoholic content." He continued, "It is a well-established fact that the church has always stood for total abstinence from alcoholic beverages." Then he offered his reasoning by listing that drinking is injurious to health, totally lacks redemptive value, and entails high social and economic costs.

President Smith's most powerful statement was: "Every president of the church has stood consistently against the consumption of alcoholic beverages by priesthood, lay members, and society in general. Church leaders through the years have always taught against social drinking and required total abstinence on the part of ministers. He stated his disappointment that it seems to be in vogue in some members' homes and on the part of some priesthood to drink dinner wines at times. Where this is known to exist, the administrative officers should take considerate but firm action to end it."

In light of President Smith's World Conference sermon, it is clear he understood Section 152 to mean church leaders, priesthood members, and members should refrain from "drinking" intoxicating beverages. It also is clear the

majority of World Conference delegates supported President Smith's views and adopted language in Section 152 that equated "drinking" as one of the "grosser sins" of the world. The World Conference action was a reaffirmation of the church's long-standing tradition (with the emphasis on *tradition*) prohibiting the drinking of intoxicants by members and priesthood.

However, Section 152:4 should not be used as the only word on drinking intoxicants. It must be understood in relation to other scriptures, Conference resolutions, and ongoing theological reflection.

THE OTHER FIVE LENSES

KNOWLEDGE AND REASON

Theological reflection and scripture interpretation in Community of Christ take seriously scientific and medical knowledge applied through solid reasoning. Alcohol is a drug that alters a person's mood and affects consciousness. Alcohol affects the chemistry of the brain. Drinking too much alcohol can lead to poor judgment, high-risk behavior, and serious health problems. Some studies indicate small amounts of alcohol may be good for cardiovascular health. Other studies question those results. All scientific studies may reflect some bias.

PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

Experience includes culturally shaped perceptions. People in different cultures view alcohol use differently; what seems taboo in one setting may be considered normal and proper in another. The challenge is in determining whose experience is normative. The felt disjunction (among some) between the church's tradition and current experience promotes an unhealthy culture of secrecy in church life.

TRADITION

Abstention from alcohol is a deeply embedded tradition in the church's identity in many, but not all places. Nevertheless, tradition evolves: WCR 1085 (1970) replaced many earlier resolutions governing church members' behavior with an attempt at a principle-based ethic and rules.

It states, in part:

Resolved, That it is the conviction of the church that as stewards over their temporal resources, bodies, skills, time, and social influence, it is incumbent upon members of the church to conduct themselves at all times in such manner that they use their resources constructively, promote personal health and well-being, cultivate productive skills, participate in wholesome leisure time activities, and exert an affirmative influence on their fellowman for their mutual spiritual development and abundant life; and be it further

Resolved, That in making such choices the Saints are admonished to avoid experimentation with or addiction to any activity or habit which is known to have an adverse effect upon health and to avoid conduct which is likely to lead others by either word or example into such activity...

The tendency in RLDS/Community of Christ theology over many generations to identify specific behaviors as “sins,” but to not speak of sin as part of the human condition of estrangement from God and one another has not been helpful. It has overlaid the Christian idea of sin with a kind of moralism, and then interpreted Christian discipleship as living by lists, and not by grace. The wider Christian tradition has never seen the use of alcohol per se as sinful; only the abuse of it.

COMMON CONSENT

Common consent is both official (approved by vote at World, national, mission center, or congregational conferences) and informal (the consensus or practice in a local area). As far as intoxicants are concerned, our official and informal consent are quite different. Because of the diversity of a worldwide church, we face two realities: Common consent that resolves the issue for the whole church is difficult to imagine, and no single policy may work for the whole church as requested by the resolution.

CONTINUING REVELATION

We can identify principles in recent Doctrine and Covenants sections that can be applied to the issue of priesthood drinking of intoxicants. Section 164:6 reframes healthy relationships in terms of love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness. By analogy, it is better to think of discipleship and priesthood not in terms of what one must avoid, but in terms of what pro-

motes health and well-being for individuals and the whole community. Section 163:2b helps with our understanding of sin and redemption. Sin is whatever hinders right relationship with God, with the community, and with family, self, and the Earth. Section 163:6 stresses expectations for priesthood members that include the “highest form of stewardship of body, mind, spirit, and relationships.” It also emphasizes that priesthood members are accountable to the “needs and expectations of the faith community” and not just individual preferences.

DRINKING AND SIN

Several points were made about drinking and sin in previous sections through the lenses of “Scripture” and “Tradition.”

A fundamental point of Community of Christ beliefs (*Sharing in Community of Christ*: 3rd Ed., “Basic Beliefs,” p. 15) is that sin is a pervasive human condition. The human condition of sin is manifested in actions that separate humans from God and others. A theology of sin that begins and ends with attempts to list specific “vices” and ranks them as more or less “gross” is not sufficient and too often leads to “letter of the law” legalism that is not redemptive.

Alcohol as a substance is not inherently sinful or evil. Alcohol has some beneficial uses. However, consumption of alcohol becomes sinful if it contributes to alienation from God, others, oneself, or creation. Alienation from God, others, self, etc. can occur through various conditions resulting from drinking intoxicants like:

- Negative effects on one’s health (body, mind, spirit).
- Not being genuinely “present” to God and others, which is a fundamental aspect of discipleship and ministry. (Alcohol alters mental and spiritual consciousness.)
- Risky and potentially violent behaviors that wound self, others, and creation.
- Influencing others to drink intoxicants.
- High risk for addiction to alcohol.
- Avoidance of deeper personal/relational issues that need to be resolved.
- Erosion of family, congregational, and social relationships.
- Economic costs to person and family (unwise stewardship).

CONCLUSION

After study, prayerful reflection, and extensive discussion with other leadership bodies, the First Presidency presents the following conclusions:

1. Scripture does not speak with a consistent voice on priesthood members drinking intoxicants other than a preponderance of warnings about excessive drinking, drunkenness, and the dangers of addictions.
2. Section 86, the “Word of Wisdom,” generally was understood in the Restoration-era church (1830 to 1844) as wise counsel and not strict commandment to be applied literally in all instances. Abstinence from alcohol was not expected during this period.
3. Section 119:3, brought by Joseph Smith III, states, “... and be not addicted to strong drink in any form, that your counsel to be temperate may be made effectual by your example.” This paragraph prohibits addiction to strong drinks so priesthood members can provide an effective example of “temperance.” Temperance means moderation and self-control.
4. General Conference Resolutions 92, 297, and 463 evidence a strong tradition in the Reorganized church that specifically discourages the drinking of intoxicants by members and priesthood.
5. The likely source material for Doctrine and Covenants 152:4 (“A Message to the General Conference and the Church” by Elbert A. Smith) was presented, “not as commandment or law, but by way of testimony, counsel, and comfort,” similar to the nature and intent of Section 86, known as the “Word of Wisdom.”
6. Section 152:4 identifies drinking as one of the “grosser sins of the world.” However, when studied with the rest of scripture and in light of relevant General Conference Resolutions, it seems that Section 152:4b represents a strong tradition of the Reorganized Church that evolved over time, eventually becoming administrative policy.
7. Given the World Conference action to approve WCR 1300, which included rescinding WCR (GCR) 297, a majority of delegates expressed their desire to modify the church’s tradition. It appears the World Conference primarily views Section 152:4b in its historical-social context and not as the only word on whether priesthood members may drink intoxicants in moderation in some settings.
8. Section 152:4b’s listing of specific “grosser sins” reflects a longstanding belief that sin is particular immoral acts or vices. However, current church teaching is that sin is a pervasive human condition of estrangement from God. Sin is manifested in unhealthy and unrighteous relationships with God, others, self, and the whole creation. The gospel offers grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation to people through Christ in the midst of sinful lives.
9. Regardless of how Doctrine and Covenants 152 is understood today, drinking intoxicants is a serious issue for Christian and ministerial ethics. Any revised policy must take into full consideration the scriptural warnings and obvious health, social, and ministerial hazards involved in consuming intoxicants.



Community of Christ

OFFICIAL POLICY

Consumption of Intoxicants by Priesthood

INTRODUCTION

The 2013 World Conference approved World Conference Resolution (WCR) 1300—Drinking of Intoxicants. This resolution requested the First Presidency and Council of Twelve Apostles to review the policy requiring complete abstinence from alcohol consumption by members of the priesthood and confirm and/or revise the policy and administrative guidelines so there is a clear understanding of expectations for priesthood on this issue throughout the church.

Since 2013, the First Presidency has engaged World Church leadership teams in extensive discussion on scriptural, theological, historical, ethical, legal, cultural, pastoral, and health issues related to drinking intoxicants. As a result of this study and review of existing policy, the World Church Leadership Council approved this updated policy on consumption of intoxicants by priesthood in Community of Christ. This updated policy is effective beginning January 1, 2018.

PRINCIPLES

1. ...An “attitude of wholeness of body, mind, and spirit [is] a desirable end toward which to strive” (Doctrine and Covenants 156:5c).
2. “Priesthood is a sacred covenant involving the highest form of stewardship of body, mind, spirit, and relationships” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:6a).
3. “As revealed in Christ, God, the Creator of all, ultimately is concerned about behaviors and relationships

that uphold the worth and giftedness of all people and that protect the most vulnerable. Such relationships are to be rooted in the principles of Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness...” (Doctrine and Covenants 164:6).

4. Priesthood policies developed through wisdom and inspiration provide a clear way for disciples to respond to calling. They also define the difference between a sense of call as potential and the need to align one’s life with principles of moral behavior and relationships that promote the well-being of the church community” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:4b).
5. Priesthood members should “model an ethical, moral, and holistic [health of body, mind, spirit] lifestyle” (“Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry”).
6. Priesthood members should “protect the safety and well-being of children...” (“Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry”).
7. “We are called to make responsible choices within the circumstances of our lives that contribute to the purposes of God” (Enduring Principles, “Responsible Choices”; Luke 19:1–10).
8. We value our connections and share a strong sense of trust in and belong with one another—even if we never have met” (Enduring Principles, “Blessings of Community”; Acts 2:41–47).
9. “True community upholds the worth of persons while providing a healthy alternative to self-centeredness,

isolation, and conformity” (Enduring Principles, “Blessings of Community”; Ephesians 4:11–13).

The church promotes health and wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships for all disciples and priesthood members. The risk of causing harm to self and others through the consumption of intoxicants is great and may result in the “loss of power to minister effectively” (WCR 1192).

Priesthood members are accountable to choose responsibly what they do and say in their public and private lives, always keeping in mind the nature of their calling and stewardship for the well-being of the church community.

To support these principles the following policy is developed to provide for a clear way for priesthood and disciples to respond to their call in promoting the well-being of the church community.

DEFINITIONS

These definitions apply for the purposes of this policy:

1. **“Intoxicant”** is any beverage that contains an intoxicating element such as alcohol.
2. **“The most vulnerable”** includes children, youth, and

those prone to addictions or recovering from addictions who are influenced by priesthood member behavior.

3. **“Loss of power to minister effectively”** is lessening of spiritual, sacramental, moral, and leadership authority in the eyes of the people being served by the priesthood member and presiding officers.

POLICY

For the well-being of individuals and the church community, especially the most vulnerable, disciples and priesthood members are urged to refrain from drinking intoxicants.

Applying the Policy

Provisions for applying this policy will be developed by the apostle for each nation or field after consultation with field leaders and with approval of the First Presidency. No apostle can request modifications to this policy to be less restrictive.

Instructions on how to apply the policy in each nation or field will be communicated to leaders and members by apostles.



Community of Christ

OFFICIAL POLICY

Consumption of Intoxicants at Community of Christ-sponsored Events or on Community of Christ-owned Property

This policy is based on the long-standing practice of not allowing consumption of intoxicants at Community of Christ-sponsored events and on Community of Christ property.

POLICY

1. Community of Christ does not allow consumption of intoxicants at Community of Christ-sponsored events at any location.
2. Community of Christ does not allow consumption of intoxicants on any Community of Christ property except where alcohol is being used for religious purposes such as the use of sacramental wine for Communion.

(To see the complete document on consumption of intoxicants at church-sponsored events or on church property, visit www.CofChrist.org/official-announcements.)





Community of Christ

Official Policy Consumption of Intoxicants at Community of Christ Sponsored Events or on Community of Christ Owned Property

Reference:

[WCR 1300]
[*Church Administrator's Handbook: 2005 Edition*]
[Doctrine and Covenants 152]

Policy Number: 60.

Effective Date: 1 Jan 2018

BACKGROUND TO THE POLICY:

The 2013 World Conference approved World Conference Resolution (WCR) 1300, “Drinking of Intoxicants.” This resolution rescinded World Conference Resolution (WCR) 297 “Drinking Intoxicants” which stated, “Inasmuch as some of the members of this church are in the habit of visiting saloons and drinking intoxicants, which habit seems to hinder the spread of the work, therefore, be it Resolved, That “...it be made a test of fellowship for any member of this church who will persist in this practice.” WCR 1300 also requested the First Presidency and Council of Twelve Apostles to review the policy requiring complete abstinence from consuming intoxicants by members of the priesthood, and confirm and/or revise the policy and administrative guidelines so there is a clear understanding of expectations for priesthood on this issue throughout the church.

Since 2013, the First Presidency has engaged World Church leadership teams in extensive discussion on scriptural, theological, historical, ethical, legal, cultural, pastoral and health issues related to drinking intoxicants. As a result of this study and review of existing policy, the World Church Leadership Council approved a revised policy on the use of intoxicants by priesthood in Community of Christ. This revised policy is “Consumption of Intoxicants by Priesthood” and is effective beginning October 1, 2017.

With WCR 297 rescinded and a revised policy on “Consumption of Intoxicants by Priesthood,” questions have arisen about whether or not intoxicants can be consumed at Community of Christ sponsored events or on Community of Christ property.

This policy is based on the longstanding practice of not allowing the consumption of intoxicants at Community of Christ sponsored events and on Community of Christ property. It also upholds the Church’s promotion of health and wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships for all disciples and priesthood members. This policy supports the well-being of individuals and the church community, especially the most vulnerable. This policy is intended to protect the most vulnerable and to minimize the risk of altered behaviors due to drunkenness leading to harm of

self and others at Community of Christ sponsored events and for events on Community of Christ owned property.

PRINCIPLES

1. An “attitude of wholeness of body, mind, and spirit [is] a desirable end toward which to strive.” (D&C 156:5c)
2. “As revealed in Christ, God, the creator of all, ultimately is concerned about behaviors and relationships that uphold the worth and giftedness of all people and that protect the most vulnerable. Such relationships are to be rooted in the principles of Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness.” (D&C 164:6)
3. “We are called to make responsible choices within the circumstances of our lives that contribute to the purposes of God.” (*Enduring Principles*, “Responsible Choices” – Luke 19:1-10)
4. We value our connections and share a strong sense of trust in and belong with one another – even if we never have met.” (*Enduring Principles*, “*Blessings of Community*”- Acts 2:41-47)
5. “True community upholds the worth of persons while providing a healthy alternative to self-centeredness, isolation, and conformity.” (*Enduring Principles*, “*Blessings of Community*”- Ephesians 4:11-13)

DEFINITIONS

1. “**Intoxicant**” is any beverage that contains alcohol such as beer, wine, and liquors.
2. “**Property**” includes land, buildings, and any other structures.

POLICY

1. The Community of Christ does not allow consumption of intoxicants at Community of Christ sponsored events at any location.
2. The Community of Christ does not allow consumption of intoxicants on any Community of Christ property except where alcohol is being used for religious purposes such as the use of sacramental wine for communion.