

A Conversation about Congregational Policy on Alcohol Use

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Workshop Description: No one wants a tragedy to spur the creation of a congregation's alcohol-use policy for church events on and off church property. This workshop discusses how a congregation can create an alcohol use policy to address the issue sensibly, sensitively and proactively.

Purpose of Alcohol Policy

- Church's liability and chance for tragedies minimized
- No alcohol served to underage people
- Comfortable event for non-drinkers
- Alcohol not abused

Two Approaches for Creating an Alcohol Policy

1. Look at what other churches have done and tailor it to your congregation
2. Comprehensive Congregational Alcohol Education and Policy Creation

Approach 1: What Other Congregations Have Done

Common clauses in church Alcohol Use Policies:

Liability

- The church must have host liquor liability insurance coverage.
 - Church Mutual does not cover liquor liability. To get \$1,000,000 liquor liability coverage on an event-by-event basis, would cost \$300-\$500 per event.
 - Locale where event is held may have a liquor use policy
- Host of event must ask permission of the church board to serve alcohol at an event
 - The host of the event assumes all responsibility and liability for obeying policy. He or she signs form to this affect.
- Alcohol is not to be sold at any church event directly or indirectly by voluntary donations unless a liquor license is obtained.
 - In Alameda County, the Department of Alcohol Beverage Control can issue a one-day liquor license
 - Policy may depend on locale
- The church is not liable for people who are intoxicated, but will arrange for alternate transportation home.
- Doesn't apply to events in individual members' homes when not an officially hosted church event.

What can be served

- Alcoholic beverages are to be provided only by the host group.
- Alcoholic beverages limited to beer, wine, champagne. i.e. no hard liquor.
- Non-alcoholic beverages also served and attractively and prominently displayed
- Food must be served along with alcohol

How can it be served

- People are designated to staff the alcohol table at all times. Alcohol only served by an adult manning the table. No self-serve
- Alcohol is not to be served when children or youth are present. Or have an effective way to ensure it is not served to anyone under 21.
- Someone is designated to monitor alcohol at the event. If someone becomes intoxicated, they will be asked to leave, but will not be allowed to drive. A taxi will be called.
- Cut off on alcohol serving for some time interval prior to the end of the event (as is commonly done in sporting events)
- No alcohol is to be left behind after the event

Approach 2: Comprehensive Congregational Alcohol Education and Policy Creation

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1. Assess Alcohol Use

- A small group of individuals gather with an informal charter to assess the use of alcohol in the environment of the congregation, the city or town and the region.

2. Propose Plan and ad hoc Committee to Board

- This group then formulates a draft plan and presents the plan and calls for a selected (by the Board) ad hoc committee on alcohol use in the congregation.

3. Summary of Plan

- Announce the plan from the pulpit and in the newsletter.
- The main steps will involve a series of open hearings (60-90 minutes each) with anyone and everyone invited, both members and friends. Each hearing will be set up with a panel of informed speakers, and after each session the floor will be open for remarks and discussion.
- Example of Subjects Studied:
 1. a medical and psychological presentation on the effects of alcohol on the body and brain
 2. a presentation by a lawyer on the potential for legal liabilities encountered by a home-owner, a bar, or a religious body.
 3. a law-enforcement officer to speak on criminal behaviors resulting from alcohol – both moderate use and addictive use.
 4. paradigms for treatment – presented by an addiction counselor, by a person in AA, and by a participant in Al-anon.
 5. the effect of alcohol use on the culture of a congregation, a neighborhood, and a community.

4. Open hearing for the discussion of a policy for the use of alcohol by the church.

- This may involve permission under certain rules, or banning under certain circumstances, or banning altogether.

5. Board approval of a draft of the policy on alcohol use

6. Congregation for a vote, with or without amendments.

Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Alcohol-Use Policy

This policy applies to official Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation (MPUUC) events only– that is, those events hosted by MPUUC at the congregation’s physical location or other public venue. This does not pertain to events held in individual members’ homes or when small groups of members meet to socialize privately.

Guiding Principles:

1. Minimize MPUUC’s liability and the possibility of an alcohol related tragedy
2. Ensure that no alcohol is served to underage people
3. Make events comfortable for drinkers and non-drinkers
4. Ensure that alcohol is not abused at official MPUUC events

Liability

- The host for any congregational event where alcohol will be served must ensure that proper liquor liability insurance coverage is in place. Liquor liability insurance may be purchased as an add-on to our existing insurance policy or can be provided by the establishment where the event is being held.
- The event host must have the permission of the Board President or the Minister in order to serve alcohol at an official MPUUC event.
- If alcohol is to be sold or distributed by donation then a temporary one day liquor license must be obtained. This can be done by calling the Alameda County Office of Alcohol & Beverage Control at 510.622.4970 at least one month before the event is to be held.

What can be served

- Non-alcoholic beverages must also be served and attractively and prominently displayed.
- Food must be served along with alcohol.

How can it be served

- The area in which alcohol is being served must be staffed at all times. Alcohol may only be served by an adult supervising the table. No self-serve.
- The event host must ensure that no alcohol is served to anyone under the age of 21.
- Someone should be designated to monitor consumption and behavior at the event. If someone becomes intoxicated, they will be asked to leave, but will not be allowed to drive – a taxi will be called. Intoxication can include the following symptoms: slurred speech, clumsy movement, or aggressive behavior.
- No alcohol is to be left behind after the event.