

# Consumption of Alcohol in the context of Parishes, Churches, Congregations and Fellowships in the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney

(This report was received by the Synod in 2009. The Social Issues Committee updated the report by request of the Standing Committee and provided it to Synod in 2023.)

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## 1. Preamble

The Anglican Church in the Diocese of Sydney is a fellowship committed to the purposes given to us by God. These purposes are to make disciples by proclaiming and commending Christ, establishing them in the life of the church, equipping them for compassionate service, sending some to serve beyond our Diocese, and prayerfully seeking God's work in all things.

In this context, the Diocese encourages appropriate behaviour among the members of our parishes, churches, congregations and fellowships: behaviour that reflects the truths of Scripture and demonstrates the love and concern for one-another and for the non-believer that was central to the ministry of Jesus and hence the gospel we seek to promote. One of these areas of behaviour is the consumption of alcohol.

It is an unfortunate fact that alcohol is widely misused in our society. In recent decades, governments, health organisations and other societal stakeholders have come to increasingly recognise that the misuse of alcohol is the cause of many other problems. Individuals and the community are impacted in terms of serious illness, injury, social violence, broken relationships, and financial cost.

From time to time the Diocese has given public expression to its concerns about the misuse of alcohol in the wider community. In the period up until the end of the Second World War, one of the distinguishing marks of Evangelical Christians was their total abstinence from alcohol. This position was commended to both church members and the general populace and was reflected in the use of church property. Alcohol consumption was banned except for its use in the Lord's Supper. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that the practice of total abstinence is far less common now among Christians at both the individual and communal level than once was the case.

For many years the Standing Committee has had a policy that alcohol should not be consumed on church trust property, except in the service of the Lord's Supper, and on certain particular properties where the lessee has a licence to sell alcohol. This policy is reflected in the 'social covenants' governing the leasing and licensing of church trust property. However, in November 2007 the Standing Committee resolved that the 'social covenants' are intended to apply only to church trust property that is being leased, and the following month passed an ordinance to confirm that position. Accordingly, after a brief policy debate the Standing Committee also requested the preparation of a draft statement of policy covering on the consumption of alcohol at church events and at private activities on church trust property.

In passing resolution 36/08 the Synod –

## 2 First Session of 53<sup>rd</sup> Synod : Proceedings for 2023

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- (a) noted the right of adult persons to enjoy alcohol in moderation,
- (b) regretted the increasing practice of binge drinking, the scourge of alcohol-fuelled violence and property damage, the knock-on effects of alcohol abuse, the carnage on our roads often caused by drunk drivers, the prevalence of alcohol-led physical assaults, and the practice of specifically targeting teenagers in some advertising of alcohol campaigns,
- (c) applauded the recently reported plans for the NSW Cabinet to consider a range of drinking laws designed to address the problems brought on by alcohol abuse,
- (d) requested the Archbishop to write to the Premier, Leader of the Opposition and Police Commissioner to encourage them to pursue this matter vigorously and to assure them of our support as they do so,
- (e) recalled the biblical teaching that everything God created is good, that drunkenness is always to be avoided, that civil rulers and church leaders must take special care in any consumption of alcohol, and that Christians should avoid causing others to stumble by what they drink,
- (f) noted section 6 of our code of conduct *Faithfulness in Service* in relation to the consumption of alcohol, and
- (g) therefore encouraged Christian pastors and other leaders and teachers to proclaim scriptural truths concerning the use of alcohol and to set a godly example in regards to any personal use of alcohol and further encouraged Christian pastors to take time to understand alcohol addiction which afflicts many in our congregations such that they can show compassion and pastoral care to Christians struggling to overcome this addiction.

In 2009, the Standing Committee considered a draft policy prepared by a committee appointed by the Archbishop which it resolved to bring to the Synod along with an corresponding report. The 2009 Synod received the report titled "Consumption of Alcohol in the Context of Parishes, Churches, Congregations and Fellowships in the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney" (the 2009 Report) and resolved to accept 45/09 "Policy on Consumption of Alcohol in the Parish Context", detailed below:

Synod receives the report on the consumption of alcohol in the parish context and, recognising that drinks containing alcohol are a gift from God to be enjoyed in moderation but also recognising that alcohol abuse has caused significant damage in our community, requests that the minister and parish council of each parish –

- (a) study the information in the report, and
- (b) determine the parish's own policy on the consumption of alcohol having regard to the Synod's recommendation –

"Except for –

- services of public worship where wine is provided as part of the Lord's Supper,
- private activities in ministry residences, and
- activities undertaken pursuant to a commercial or residential lease of church trust property,

no alcohol should be consumed or made available in the context of any public ministry activity of the parish on church trust property or any private activity held on church trust property, without the approval of the parish council."

(Archdeacon Deryck Howell 27/10/2009)

Since that 2009 Synod, most parishes have welcomed at least one new generation of ministers and parish councillors. It is unclear how many of these individuals are aware of the existing 45/09 resolution (and/or the 2009 report), and how many parishes have in fact determined a policy on the consumption of alcohol as requested by the Synod resolution. As a result, in March 2022, Standing Committee resolved to –

- (a) refer to the Social Issues Committee (**SIC**) matters raised by the 2009 Report and Synod resolution,
- (b) request the SIC consider whether the Report and/or the recommendations made by Synod need updating or revision, and reconsideration by Synod, in light of –
  - (i) more recent research on the health and social impacts of alcohol consumption in our society,
  - (ii) any discernible trends about the consumption of alcohol in parish and other ministry contexts, and
  - (iii) the need for educating a new generation of rectors and parish councillors on the desirability of good policy and practice in this area.

The report below constitutes the SIC's response on these matters. It is presented as a revised and updated version of the original 2009 Report "Consumption of Alcohol in the Context of Parishes, Churches, Congregations and Fellowships in the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney". The content of the report has been particularly updated to include –

- (a) more recent research and data on the impacts of alcohol consumption in our society (including a new section on the relationship between social media and alcohol consumption),
- (b) the results and analysis of a diocese-wide survey of both rectors and wardens which sought to attain –
  - (i) a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which Synod 45/09 resolution has been adopted by parishes in the Diocese and applied in those settings,
  - (ii) an informed understanding of the current landscape of alcohol consumption at public ministry events in the Diocese (both on church property trust, and offsite),
  - (iii) opportunity to receive feedback from rectors and wardens on this matter.

## 2. Objectives

This report aims to –

- Acknowledge our responsibility to behave in a way that promotes the gospel, encourages 'safe' communities and models Christian love.
- Identify the particular circumstances, manner and controls under which it is, or is not, appropriate for alcohol to be available in the context of church activities and church trust property.
- Produce positive, educative guidelines and resource material to assist the clergy and lay leaders, parents, youth leaders and all members of our churches to make responsible decisions in relation to the use of alcohol.
- Explore the knowledge and implementation of Synod Resolution 45/09.

## 3. Theological perspectives – a précis

The Scriptures condemn drunkenness and portray in a disparaging manner many of the effects associated with the consumption of what we would term alcoholic drinks. Though they indicate that there are dangers associated with the drinking of alcoholic beverages, they give no overriding command from God to abstain from them. In some texts the beverage is fermented, in other cases it is unclear whether it is fermented or not. There are instances where the effects of consuming the beverage are portrayed in a favourable light and it is difficult to argue that the beverage must have been unfermented.

Out of concern for the believer, with respect to alcoholic consumption, an appeal is often made to what is termed "the weaker brother principle." The texts commonly referred to are those of Romans 14:1–15:6 and 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. The former text relates to different attitudes towards the eating or drinking of certain substances. The latter relates specifically to the consumption of food that has been offered to idols. In both situations, matters of grave concern are at stake, namely the faith of the believer and the believer's possible destruction. Whatever the limits to the strict applicability of these texts, underlying the arguments of both passages is the requirement under God to act out of love towards a fellow believer and not to place one's own beliefs or inclinations above the welfare of other members of the household of God.

In 1 Corinthians 10:27–11:1, Paul exhibits the same type of concern for the unbeliever. The situation addressed is where an unbeliever invites a believer to a meal, but it is soon revealed that some of the food has been offered to idols. Paul's position is that the believer, now knowing the origin of the food, for the sake of the "conscience" of others, and possibly unbelievers are predominantly in mind, should desist from eating it. One could argue from this passage that if an unbeliever's understanding of the faith is in serious jeopardy, as a consequence of certain behaviour of a believer, be it the consumption of alcohol in a specific situation or some other action, then that behaviour is to be abandoned. However, where it is judged that a serious misunderstanding of the faith by an unbeliever is unlikely to occur then the passage would not strictly apply. What would always be of concern however is having a sincere longing for God's salvation of the unbeliever. In certain circumstances, this might mean abstention from consuming alcoholic drinks. In other cases, such an abstention might be unhelpful for unbelievers and even mislead them in their understanding of the faith. The relevance of Paul's strategy of becoming all things to all men should be considered.

Furthermore, the Scriptures warn us of any behaviour that the unbelieving world might rightly judge to be inappropriate. Believers must be concerned about how the public perceives their behaviour. Certainly, whether believers or unbelievers are in mind, we are also under obligation to love those suffering from the effects of alcohol and, with that same love, we are to endeavour to reduce and not increase such suffering.

There is freedom that the believer enjoys because of the work of Christ. It incorporates freedom from slavery to sin and its consequences. There is also freedom from being constrained by human regulations, though the believer must not appeal to any such freedom as an excuse for sinful behaviour. Furthermore, the believers' freedom from human regulations is not to be made the basis of their actions. Rather, the rule is that one should act as a slave towards unbelievers in order that they might be saved and as a slave towards fellow believers so that they might grow and develop under God.

## 4. Consumption of alcohol in the Australian community

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Commonwealth Government and other research institutes provide ample evidence that the inappropriate use of alcohol is a serious and growing problem in the Australian community.

Alcohol is a depressant drug. The World Health Organisation (**WHO**) offered this assessment in 2004:

"Alcohol is a psychoactive substance with dependence-producing properties that has been widely used in many cultures for centuries. The harmful use of alcohol causes a high burden of disease and has significant social and economic consequences. The harmful use of alcohol can also result in harm to other people, such as family members, friends, co-workers and strangers. Alcohol consumption is a causal factor in more than 200 diseases, injuries and other health conditions. Drinking alcohol is associated with a risk of developing health problems such as mental and behavioural disorders, including alcohol dependence, and major noncommunicable diseases such as liver cirrhosis, some cancers and cardiovascular diseases."<sup>1</sup>

A diocesan policy relating to alcohol consumption needs to be informed by research on alcohol consumption in Australia with its consequent effect on the Australian population.

### (a) Alcohol and Demography

Between 2009-2018, Australia's overall consumption of alcohol (on a per capita basis) either declined or remained relatively stable.<sup>2</sup> However, in 2020-2021, one in four Australians (18+) exceeded the Australian Adult Alcohol Guidelines (or no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day).<sup>3</sup> In 2020, 45% of Australians who drank alcohol did so with the intention of getting drunk (28% reported doing this at least once a month).<sup>4</sup> While global respondents to a 2021 international survey reported that they would get drunk on average 14.6 times a year (a little more than once a month), Australian respondents reported getting drunk 26.7 times a year (more than twice a month).<sup>5</sup>

According to the Commonwealth of Australia's National Alcohol Strategy, approximately one in five Australian adults over the age of 40 drink at risky levels.<sup>6</sup> While those over the age of 65 are most likely to drink alcohol every day, 77% of 18-24-year-olds, 76% of 25-34-year-olds and 70% of 35-49-year-olds drank alcohol in 2020 with the intention of getting drunk (compared to 28% of 50+ year-olds).<sup>7</sup> While the number of teenagers choosing to abstain from alcohol increased from 72% in 2013 to 82% in 2016, 15% of younger Australians drink more than 11 drinks on a single occasion at least monthly.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Alcohol: Fact Sheet," <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/alcohol>.

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (CoA), *National Alcohol Strategy*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Alcohol Consumption* (March 21, 2022 2022), <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/health-conditions-and-risks/alcohol-consumption/latest-release>.

<sup>4</sup> Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), *2020 Annual Alcohol Poll: Attitudes and Behaviours* (2020), <https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ALCPOLL-2020.pdf>, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Global Drug Survey, *Global Drug Survey (GDS) 2021 Key Findings Report* (2021), [https://www.globaldrugsurvey.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Report2021\\_global.pdf](https://www.globaldrugsurvey.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Report2021_global.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *National Alcohol Strategy*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> FARE, *2020 Annual Alcohol Poll*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> CoA, *National Alcohol Strategy*, 9.

Men (33.6%) are significantly more likely than women (18.5%) to exceed the Australian alcohol guidelines,<sup>9</sup> and it is in the home that 67% of Australians drink the largest quantity of alcohol on a single occasion.<sup>10</sup> Australians in full-time employment were twice as likely (32%) to have exceeded the national guidelines as those who were unemployed (16.8%), and those living in the areas of least disadvantage were significantly more likely (30.7%) to have done the same when compared to Australians living in the areas of most disadvantage (18.5%).<sup>11</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are more likely to abstain from alcohol altogether (31%) than the rest of the Australian population (23%). However, amongst those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who do drink, higher proportions drink at risky levels (20%). High risk alcohol consumption is lower in non-English speaker Australian populations (5.4% compared to 18.7%). However, the government considers response to alcohol use amongst these populations to be higher priority because of increased barriers to receiving support.<sup>12</sup>

## (b) Alcohol and Physical/Mental Health

Alcohol-related disease is more likely to be experienced by older Australians, while their younger counterparts are significantly more prone to experience alcohol-related injury or accident.

Some lifestyle related health risk factors can be associated with risky/high risk level of drinking. The National Health and Medical Research Council (**NHMRC**) confirms that the effects of alcohol are often worsened by other risk factors, such as smoking and dietary factors. Indeed, alcohol use contributes to the burden of 30 diseases and injuries, 8 types of cancer and chronic liver disease.<sup>13</sup> In 2015, alcohol was the fifth leading risk factor contributing to about 4.5% of the disease burden across Australia.<sup>14</sup> And in 2017-2018, alcohol was the most common drug of concern for people accessing specialist medical treatment (35% of all such access).<sup>15</sup>

Alcohol consumption is the second highest cause of drug-related deaths in Australia (second only to tobacco), with approximately 4000 deaths annually. In 2020, there was an 8.3% increase in the age-standardised rate of alcohol-induced deaths in Australia, with 13% of deaths amongst 14-17 year olds attributed to alcohol. 1 in 4 road fatalities can be attributed to drink driving. Amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, alcohol is a contributing factor to avoidable mortality at rates 4.9 times higher than the rest of the population.<sup>16</sup>

Acute substance use or intoxication was the second most common risk factor/associated cause for suicide between 2017-2020,<sup>17</sup> and the risk of mental illness is about four times higher for those who drink alcohol heavily, than those who do not.<sup>18</sup>

## (c) Alcohol and Crime

As at 2020, 40% of Australians had been affected by alcohol-related violence (43% within the last 12 months).<sup>19</sup> Alcohol was involved in 34% of intimate partner violence and 29% of family violence incidents, while 25% of all frontline police officer's time involved alcohol-related crime.<sup>20</sup> 10% of Australians who

<sup>9</sup> ABS, *Alcohol consumption*.

<sup>10</sup> FARE, *2020 Annual Alcohol Poll*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> ABS, *Alcohol consumption*.

<sup>12</sup> CoA, *National Alcohol Strategy*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> CoA, *National Alcohol Strategy*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Australian Government (Department of Health), *Budget 2022-23*.

<sup>15</sup> CoA, *National Alcohol Strategy*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> CoA, *National Alcohol Strategy*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Alcohol consumption*.

<sup>18</sup> CoA, *National Alcohol Strategy*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, *2020 Annual Alcohol Poll*

<sup>20</sup> CoA, *National Alcohol Strategy*, 7.

consume alcohol have driven after drinking, with 40% of young risky drinkers having been in a vehicle with an alcohol-affected driver. 1 in 4 road fatalities can be attributed to drink driving.<sup>21</sup>

### (d) Alcohol and the Covid19 Pandemic

In the pandemic years of 2020-21, 9.8% of Australians increased their alcohol usage, 23.9% decreased their alcohol use (possibly impacted by reduced opportunities to gather with others socially) and 66.4% report their use stayed reasonably stable. However, when compared to 2019 data, 2020 calls to the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline had almost doubled and 2021 calls had almost tripled. Emerging evidence suggests there was a greater increase in female alcohol consumption during the pandemic and that alcohol use in the home has become more concentrated during the pandemic.<sup>22</sup>

## 5. The social impact of alcohol

The core issues relating to alcohol consumption are issues of culture, pleasure, and identity.

“The search for pleasure and the pursuit of playful enjoyment and hedonism generally I think plays a much greater role in young people’s lives today than it did previously. And this is partly the phenomenon of the period of extended adolescence, that they’re simply in an environment with the facilities and the resources to party hard and play longer than they have been able to do previously. And so alcohol then becomes a crucial and central part of that sort of hedonistic lifestyle.” (Professor Ann Roche, Director of the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction, Flinders University Adelaide)

Alcohol can serve many functions. Reasons for drinking can vary from culture to culture, person to person and occasion to occasion. No single factor alone is sufficient to explain drinking, but it is useful to consider some of the important factors. For example, alcohol might be consumed for –

- Socio-cultural reasons (to celebrate, commiserate, or to cement an agreement),
- Self-medication (to help them sleep, to deal with anxiety or stress, to build self-confidence),
- Social acceptance (to feel part of the crowd, to gain peer acceptance),
- The taste and symbolism of the drink.

Some people are more vulnerable to develop alcohol problems. These include people who live in a heavy drinking community or culture, people who have other significant problems in their lives (e.g. mental health problems; people recovering from trauma; people who live in socially and economically deprived environments) and people have a familial history of alcohol dependence. However, as the Australian Government’s National Alcohol Strategy concludes, ‘social pressures can also influence young people to consume alcohol in harmful ways’.<sup>23</sup> A subsequent section of this report will explore how the ever increasing influence of social media exacerbates this reality.

The majority in our society would probably agree with the Bible’s clear teaching that drunkenness and certain behaviours associated with the consumption of alcohol are inappropriate. On the other hand, our society values alcohol when used appropriately and the Bible certainly does not contain a general prohibition against its use.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many people who consume alcohol believe they do so in a way that does not harm themselves or others. And yet, at the same time, 77% of Australians either strongly agree or agree that more needs to be done in Australia to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.<sup>24</sup> The research detailed in the previous section of this report evidences that alcohol consumption in Australia continues to result in very real and significant risk, harm and cost, not only to our society as a whole but also to individuals within it. Sadly, it is often the most vulnerable or marginalised of those individuals who disproportionately bear that risk, experience that harm and carry that cost.

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<sup>21</sup> CoA, *National Alcohol Strategy*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, *Alcohol use and harms during the COVID-19 Pandemic* (May 2022), <https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Alcohol-use-and-harms-during-the-COVID-19-pandemic.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> CoA, *National Alcohol Strategy*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> FARE, *2020 Annual Alcohol Poll*, 6.

Governments are obviously in the difficult position of having to balance competing interests on this issue – on the one hand a significant part of their revenue comes from taxes from the sale of alcohol, on the other they recognise the heavy social cost of alcohol abuse. To their credit both the Australian and NSW governments have developed policies and resources aimed at delineating what levels of harm are associated with alcohol abuse, and to develop appropriate harm minimisation strategies. In general these policies reflect concerns about the adverse health effects of alcohol for certain vulnerable people and particular social practices, while retaining space for individual freedom.

A variety of risk factors influence the experience of alcohol related harm. There are things to do with the individual (their health; their age) things to do with the drug (the amount of alcohol consumed; how quickly it is consumed) and things to do with the environment (drinking at home with a meal is less risky than drinking quickly before driving a car). The context of drinking is also important. For example, some licensed venues have been identified as “hot spots” which account for a disproportionate amount of alcohol-related violence attended by police. Particular times of day are riskier than others. Young people, particularly are more prone to binge drinking, while older Australians are more likely to drink daily. While historically young men have been the heavier drinkers, there is evidence that young women are catching up with, and in some cases overtaking young men, in terms of drinking at risky levels. Data evidences that those within the LGBTQ community are more like to be classified as risky drinkers than those who are not (25.8% compared to 17.2%).<sup>25</sup> How we make alcohol available also seems to matter. Hours of sale, who we sell to (e.g. their age and their state of intoxication) number and type of alcohol outlets all seem to have influence. Some parental attitudes and family factors (e.g. connectedness, communication, clear rules about alcohol consumption) reduce risk while other factors (e.g. poor communication, family disharmony and conflict, permissiveness about alcohol) increase risk. The degree of young people’s connectedness to school, to community and to adults can influence the risk of a range of problems, including risky alcohol consumption.

In 2022-2026, the Australian Government has committed to investing \$372.4 million to help build safe and healthy communities by reducing the social impact of drug and alcohol use.<sup>26</sup> It has released a comprehensive National Alcohol Strategy (2019-2028) aimed at preventing and minimising alcohol-related harms among individuals, families and communities by:

- identifying agreed national priority areas of focus and policy options,
- promoting and facilitating collaboration, partnership and commitment from the government and non-government sectors, and
- targeting a 10% reduction in harmful alcohol consumption

The national strategy prioritises engaging and building capacity of local community stakeholders and identifies four agreed national priority areas:

- Improving community safety and amenity by working to better protect the health, safety and social wellbeing of those consuming alcohol and those around them,
- Managing availability, price and promotion by reducing opportunities for these things to contribute to risky consumption,
- Supporting individuals to obtain help and systems to respond, by facilitating access to appropriate treatment, information and support services,
- Promoting healthier communities by improving the understanding and awareness of alcohol-related harms.

In 2020, the National Health and Medical Research Council published revised alcohol guidelines.<sup>27</sup> Healthy adults consuming alcohol within these guidelines have less than a 1 in 100 chance of dying from an alcohol-related condition –

- (i) Healthy men and women should drink no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day. (A standard drink contains 10g of alcohol).
- (ii) Children and people under 18 years of age should not drink alcohol.
- (iii) Women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should not drink alcohol. For women who are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for their baby.

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<sup>25</sup> CoA, *National Alcohol Strategy*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Australian Government (Department of Health), *Budget 2022-23: Addressing the impact of alcohol and other drugs* (March 29 2022), <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/budget-2022-23-addressing-the-impact-of-alcohol-and-other-drugs>.

<sup>27</sup> Australian Government (Department of Health and Aged Care), *Australian Alcohol Guidelines Revised*, The National Health and Medical Research Council (December 8 2020), <https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-alcohol-guidelines-revised>.

## 6. Social media and alcohol consumption

One very significant societal development which has emerged since the 2009 Synod's consideration of the consumption of alcohol is the ubiquitous impact of social media. Even though the first-generation social media platforms are little more than a decade old, it would be nearly impossible to overestimate the extent to which the medium has come to exercise formative impact on society (including on its attitudes towards and use of alcohol), and especially amongst its younger users.

Alcohol advertising and marketing in Australia is self-regulatory and voluntary. One particular standard within the Code for responsible alcohol promotion is that alcohol advertising cannot target minors or those under the age of 25. However, as the *Australian Drug and Alcohol Foundation* notes, not only does the self-regulatory nature of compliance result in 'large amounts of unchecked marketing content [being] publicly released [... but] through social media, alcohol brands are now targeting young people in new ways that are even more difficult to regulate than traditional advertising'.<sup>28</sup> This is especially problematic because not only is social media advertising particularly lucrative (providing up to a 600% return on investment for alcohol companies),<sup>29</sup> but its age verification processes and technologies are broadly ineffective and easy to evade. For instance, one group of researchers, using underage profiles, were able to achieve a 100% success rate in subscribing to various alcohol brands' YouTube channels.<sup>30</sup>

And yet, it is not only paid promotion and targeted advertising that makes these platforms such a powerful medium in shaping societal attitudes to alcohol. Just as significant, if not more so, are social media users' sharing of their own content relating to or featuring alcohol. Numerous studies have evidenced that between 36% to 96% of adolescents and young adults post content on Facebook which features, visually depicts or otherwise relates to alcohol.<sup>31</sup> Not only is there an abundance of alcohol-related content generated on social media sites, but 'the social aspects common to alcohol posts trigger social interactions that show further appreciation of the post and help spread the message even further'<sup>32</sup> (usually through "likes", comments and shares). This is one of the fundamental reasons why organic social media promotion of alcohol by individual users can be so much more effective than traditional advertising from the companies themselves. It creates a perpetual self-reciprocating loop of positive social messaging about alcohol, which informs and reinforces social norms concerning alcohol consumption amongst users and their social circles, which then feeds back into further positive social messaging, and so on. The loop is further strengthened by the fact that negative reactions to alcohol related social media content tend to be far less common, with one study reporting that 'the number of pro-drinking tweets was more than 10 times the number of anti-drinking tweets'.<sup>33</sup>

The operative role of social media "influencers" in endorsing specific alcoholic products, promoting certain attitudes towards alcohol consumption, and encouraging the formation of particular cultural norms regarding alcohol use is also key to this discussion. And yet, it is not only social media users with very large followings whose digital content relating to alcohol exercises significant influence amongst other users. The posts of anyone considered to be a trusted, liked or otherwise important figure within any online relational network can exercise significant influence amongst and over that network. Within the Christian context, this certainly includes ministry leaders, and perhaps even most relevantly, those involved in ministry to young people. Adolescents and young adults are not only the most ubiquitous users of contemporary social media platforms (and especially the newer, more visually oriented platforms) but these younger members of society also tend to be the most vulnerable to peer pressure, influence and manipulation. That 'exposure to alcohol posts of older peers has increased interest in alcohol among underage [social media] users',<sup>34</sup> makes it especially important for those in any form of Christian leadership and ministry amongst young people to consider the impact any of their alcohol related social media content may be (inadvertently) exercising.

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<sup>28</sup> Barry AE, Padon AA, Whiteman SD, Hicks KK, Carreon AK, Crowell JR, et al. Alcohol Advertising on Social Media: Examining the Content of Popular Alcohol Brands on Instagram. *Substance Use & Misuse*. 2018;53(14):2413-20.

<sup>29</sup> "Social media as an advertising platform," <https://adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/parenting/alcohol-advertising-social-media-youth/social-media-advertising-platform/>.

<sup>30</sup> Barry AE, Johnson E, Rabre A, Darville G, Donovan KM, Efunbumi O. Underage access to online alcohol marketing content: a YouTube case study. *Alcohol Alcohol*. 2015 Jan;50(1):89-94.

<sup>31</sup> Hanneke Hendricks et al., "Social Drinking on Social Media: Content Analysis of the Social Aspects of Alcohol-Related Posts on Facebook and Instagram," *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 20, no. 6 (2018): 2.

<sup>32</sup> Hendricks et al., "Social Drinking," 8.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia A. Cavazos-Rehg et al., "'Hey Everyone, I'm Drunk.'" An Evaluation of Drinking-Related Twitter Chatter," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* 76, no. 4 (2015): 640-41.

<sup>34</sup> Mathijs Mesman, Hanneke Hendricks, and Bas Van den Putte, "How Viewing Alcohol Posts of Friends on Social Networking Sites Influences Predictors of Alcohol Use," *Journal of Health Communication* 25, no. 6 (2020): 527.



## 7. Legal considerations

The following information has been provided by SDS Legal.

### (a) Provision of alcohol to minors

There is an absolute prohibition of the *sale* of alcohol to minors (persons under 18 years of age), or the supply of alcohol to a minor at a licensed premises.

Parents, guardians, or someone authorised by a parent or guardian can supply alcohol to a minor at unlicensed premises, however, the provision of alcohol must be consistent with the 'responsible supervision' of the minor.

Penalties can apply where alcohol is provided to a child not in a manner that is consistent with the 'responsible supervision' of the minor. In determining whether the supply is consistent with the 'responsible supervision' of a minor the following are to be considered: the age of the minor, whether minor is intoxicated, whether the minor is consuming food with the liquor, whether the minor is being supervised, the quantity and type of liquor and the period over which it is consumed. If a minor is intoxicated at the time of supply, this will not, in any circumstance, be consistent with the responsible supervision of a minor.

### (b) Liquor licensing requirements

Generally, a person must not *sell* liquor unless authorised to do so by a licence. The term 'sell' is interpreted widely. For example, if a parish holds a function for which tickets are sold and the cost of the ticket will cover a meal and alcohol, this will constitute the sale of alcohol for licensing purposes.

A licence is not required if liquor is provided free of charge or people bring their own liquor.

#### *i. Limited Licences*

If a not-for-profit organisation holds a function (that is not for the purpose of fundraising) where alcohol will be sold, a type of liquor licence called a *limited licence* will be required.

Limited licences can be granted for single functions, or for multiple functions (up to 52 functions annually).

The liquor can only be consumed on the premises specified in the licence and the provision of liquor must be ancillary to the purpose for which the function is held.

Every person involving in selling, serving or supplying liquor at the function must have completed a Responsible Service of Alcohol (**RSA**) course and hold a valid NSW competency card. The licensee must complete two compulsory courses: Licensee training and Advanced licensee training. Certain signage must also be displayed.

The conditions attached to a limited licence must also be upheld. The conditions will differ depending on the size and nature of the event, but all licences will include at least the following:

- Food of a nature and quantity consistent with the responsible sale, supply and service of alcohol must be available during liquor trading hours.
- The licensee, or nominated person holding current RSA competency card in their absence, must be in attendance & contactable for the duration of the function.
- The Licensee must ensure that free drinking water is available at all times at or near the bar areas.
- The Licensee must not permit patrons of the function to take alcohol bought for consumption on the premises out of the licensed area.
- The Licensee must not permit the entry of intoxicated persons into the licensed area.
- Minors must not be permitted entry into the designated Bar Area, unless the minor is accompanied and in the presence of a responsible adult.
- No more than four (4) alcoholic drinks may be sold, supplied or served to a patron per visit to the bar.

ii. Fundraising functions

There is an exemption from licensing for not-for-profit organisations running fundraising functions. The functions must be held to raise funds for the benefit of the organisation conducting the function, or for the community.

Not-for-profit organisations can sell liquor at up to six fundraising functions a year without a liquor licence subject to compliance with exemption requirements. These include that:

- The provision of liquor supports the function and is not be the sole purpose of the function.
- Liquor cannot be supplied continuously for more than four hours.
- Substantial food must be provided.
- The function must not exceed 250 people.
- The same RSA and training requirements for limited licences apply for exempted fundraising events.

The exemption applies on application, not automatically. Organisations must apply for the exemption at least 14 days before the function is to be held.

## 8. Use of Alcohol in Sydney Diocesan Parish Ministry Contexts

In November 2022, all rectors, acting rectors, and wardens of parishes within the Sydney Anglican Diocese were invited to respond to an anonymous survey regarding the consumption of alcohol in the parish context. The survey was open for completion between November 2022 – January 2023 and was purposed to facilitate –

1. a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which Synod 45/09 resolution has been adopted by parishes in the Diocese and applied in those settings,
2. an informed understanding of the current landscape of alcohol consumption at public ministry events in the Diocese (both on church property trust, and offsite), and
3. opportunity to receive feedback from rectors and wardens on this matter.

A total of 277 responses were received (107 from rectors/acting rectors and 170 from wardens). Responses were received from all regions within the Diocese, with the South Sydney and Northern Regions having a very slightly higher response rate than the South Western, Western Sydney and Wollongong regions.

An analytical overview of the survey results is detailed below.

(a) The extent to which Synod 45/09 resolution has been adopted by parishes in the Diocese and applied in those settings

The majority of respondents (64% of rectors and 70.5% of wardens) were first appointed to that role (in any parish) following the 2009 Synod. Of all rector respondents, 65% were aware of the 2009 Synod report and 73% were aware of 2009 Synod resolution 45/09. Of all warden respondents, 55% were aware of the 2009 Synod report and 54% were aware of 2009 Synod Resolution 45/09.

Almost 25% of rector respondents and over 45% of warden respondents were *not aware* of the Synod resolution that recommended their parish determine a policy on the consumption of alcohol at ministry activities on church trust property.

Approximately 45% of both rector and warden respondents answered that their parish has developed and adopted such a policy. Significantly more wardens (38.5%) than rectors (24.5%) were unsure as to whether such a policy has been adopted. According to the data, somewhere between 28-53% of the respondents' parishes *have not* developed or adopted a policy as per Synod resolution 45/09.

(b) An informed understanding of the current landscape of alcohol consumption at public ministry events in the Diocese (both on church property trust and offsite)

*i. Parishes that do have an alcohol consumption policy in place*

Respondents who indicated that their parish *does* have such a policy in place were asked whether this policy informs all decisions about the consumption of alcohol at ministry events on and off church property. They were able to provide answers of always, usually, sometimes, never and unsure.

Regarding the policy's application to ministry events on church trust property, little differentiation was noted between wardens' and rectors' responses. Almost 80% of those respondents whose parish *does* have a policy in place responded that the policy "always" informs all decisions on this matter. Approximately 20% of parishes represented by respondents have a policy that "sometimes" or "usually" informs all decisions about alcohol consumption on church trust property.

When it came to the same question about the policy's application to ministry events held offsite, more than double the number of warden respondents answered "unsure" than did rectors. Assuming that rectors are in a better position than wardens to provide a more accurate answer to this question, the data suggests that only 25% of such offsite events are "always", 19% are "never" and 46% are "sometimes" or "usually" informed by the established policy. 10% of rectors were unsure about the extent to which their parish's policy is applied to alcohol consumption at offsite ministry events.

Where a policy *is* in place, rectors (only) were asked whether ministry staff employed within the parish and/or lay members who plan and run ministry activities are aware of and guided by the policy. Approximately 60% responded that this is "always" the case, 27% indicated this was true for "some of them", 10% were unsure, and 2% said "no".

*ii. Parishes that do not have an alcohol consumption policy in place*

When rector respondents whose parish *does not* have such a policy in place were asked how important they would consider the development and adoption of such a policy, only 9% said they would consider it to be "very important". 12.5% considered such a policy largely unimportant, while the vast majority were more ambivalent (41% answered "reasonably important" and 37.5% answered "reasonably unimportant").

The same rectors were asked what best describes the approach they take regarding the service of alcohol at ministry events (in the absence of a formal policy). 46% of those responded that they screen and review all requests, 24% said that it hasn't been something their parish has needed to consider, 15% entrust the decision to their ministry leaders, and another 15% answered "other" and provided further comment. A significant number of those comments indicated that even when rectors indicated they do not have a formal or informal process in place, there is a general expectation that no alcohol will be consumed at ministry events.

*iii. All respondents' parishes*

All rector respondents (i.e., both those whose parish *does* and *does not* have a formal policy regarding alcohol consumption) were asked how often alcohol has been consumed at parish ministry events across the last three years. (It is important to consider that this period coincides with a lower level of ministry events due to the Covid-19 pandemic and related restrictions).

With regard to *events on church trust property*, 0% of rectors did not know the answer to this question. 53.5% responded that it has not been consumed at all, 42% said it has occasionally or rarely been consumed, and 5% of rectors responded that it has been consumed regularly. With regard to offsite alcohol consumption, 6% of rectors did not know the answer to the question, 40% said it has not been consumed at offsite events (compared to 53.5% for onsite events), 61% responded that it has been consumed rarely or occasionally and 5% said it had been consumed regularly.

This data indicates that alcohol is more likely to be consumed at offsite ministry events than it is at events or activities held on church trust property. There is a 20% more likelihood for rare or occasional offsite consumption and almost 15% less likelihood that it is never consumed offsite.

All rector and warden respondents were asked how pressing or significant they think the societal consumption of alcohol is in terms of its impacts on the church and Christian ministry. There was a strong correlation between wardens' and rectors' responses to this question, with approximately 25% of all

respondents saying they considered it a matter of great ethical significance and approximately 54% calling it a matter of reasonable ethical significance. Approximately 18% of both wardens and rector respondents answered that it is not particularly a matter of ethical significance (with 0% of rectors and 4% of wardens saying it was of no ethical significance at all).

### (c) Feedback from rectors and wardens on this matter

While the survey was designed to be both brief and anonymous, all respondents were also invited to make any freeform comments they wished. Approximately 90 additional comments were submitted, covering a fairly wide variety of relevant matters.

A number of respondents commented that their parish has a firm “no alcohol” policy in place, with some specifically citing the vulnerability of certain members of their congregations or the ethical importance of this issue within their broader social and geographic community. Other respondents spoke of having no official policy in place but erring towards a conservative practice in this regard. Still, others indicated that they think it is important for the consumption of alcohol at ministry events to allow for freedom of conscience, with certain respondents indicating that they make sure certain procedures are in place to ensure the safe serving of alcohol on such occasions.

A number of respondents expressed some frustration that this was a matter which Synod might wish to revisit and potentially regulate further. There was an element of scepticism amongst some respondents of the usefulness of such policies for ministry and a concern that the Synod does not overstep in this area. Conversely, another group of respondents indicated that they consider further discussion and possible regulation at a diocesan level to be both welcome and important.

## 9. Church law and protocols

### (a) Faithfulness in Service – code of conduct

For clergy and church workers the standards contained in *Faithfulness in Service* state –

- 6.7 You are to be responsible in your use of alcohol and other mind altering or addictive substances or services.
- 6.8 You are not to undertake any pastoral ministry when you are impaired by alcohol or any other mind-altering or addictive substances.

The guidelines then go on to say –

- 6.20 Monitor your consumption or use of alcohol and other mind altering or addictive substances or products (e.g. gambling) to ensure your well-being and that of others. Seek professional help if the use of these substances or products adversely affects your ministry, personal well-being or relationships.

### (b) Ministry standards

For clergy, the *Offences Ordinance 1962* specifies drunkenness as an offence for which a charge may be heard and determined by the Diocesan Tribunal.

Under the *Ministry Standards Ordinance 2017*, misconduct by church workers may include acts that would constitute the commission of an offence under the *Offences Ordinance 1962*. The types of misconduct listed in the Ordinance are not exhaustive and may include drunkenness irrespective of whether it would constitute an offence on the basis that it is conduct that calls a person’s fitness into question.

### (c) Use of Property

The *Sydney Anglican Use of Church Property Ordinance 2018* requires that a Diocesan body (including a parish) must only use or allow the use of its property for acts or practices which conform to the doctrines,

tenets and beliefs of the Diocese. These doctrines, tenets and beliefs are set out in the Synod's Property Use Policy.

With respect to the Doctrine of Christian Freedom, the Policy states that "Church property must ... not be used for activities which profit from addictive desires, or which will cause others to become entrapped by addictive desires." The following example of an inconsistent use is given:

The commercial manufacture, distribution or sale of liquor (other than the sale and consumption of liquor on premises where the liquor is intended to be consumed with food sold on those premises for consumption on those premises).

## 10. Practical issues for churches

The conditions attached to liquor licensing requirements (see section 7) may make it very difficult for a church's leaders (ministry staff and wardens as a minimum, but preferably also the parish council) to ensure complete compliance.

The legal requirement to obtain a licence only applies where the alcohol is to be "sold" and does not apply to where it is provided free of charge and when people bring their own. However, even if it were legal, it would not be appropriate (i.e. prudent or morally responsible) for a parish to hold a function or ministry event at which alcohol is available, either free of charge or on a BYO basis, without ensuring that the conditions under which it is provided at least meet the government's minimum requirements for the responsible service of alcohol and related harm minimisation strategies. Clearly, we would want to ensure that any church function or ministry event at which alcohol was available at least met the minimum community standards as reflected in current NSW government legislation and Australian government guidelines.

This highlights a significant moral point. A parish should take account of secular law and community expectations as well as church law and recommendations when considering the provision of alcohol at church functions or ministry events. The prevailing mood and law in NSW is for very rigorous and professional control of the provision of alcohol in group settings. So, before proceeding to permit the service and consumption of alcohol at a church event, the parish leadership (minister and parish council) must satisfy themselves that the leadership at the event has the relevant will, experience and organisational ability to provide it in the manner stipulated by the licensing laws and can ensure safe and responsible drinking. If that is not the case, the only responsible course would be for the parish council to determine that there will be no alcohol at such events.

As part of their response, parishes would also need to –

- Recognise the danger alcohol poses for the vulnerable (particularly people under stress, those with a history of alcohol abuse or dependence, and the young).
- Ensure that they are equipped to offer compassion, pastoral care and appropriate support (and no further temptation) for those struggling to overcome alcohol addiction.
- Acknowledge the validity of choosing a life without alcohol,
- Encourage their leaders, in particular, to proclaim scriptural truths concerning the use of alcohol and to set a godly example in regard to the personal use of alcohol.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee.

ARCHDEACON DERYCK HOWELL  
**Chair of the Committee**

14 July 2009

THE REV DR CHASE KUHN  
**Chair of the Social Issues Committee**

22 May 2023