

CRPC Statement on Alcohol Use in the Church

Scripture does not forbid the use of alcohol, but it does forbid drunkenness which it calls a “sin.” For a lengthy discussion of these matters see the paper by Shawn Honey on alcohol use, available at the City Reformed website on the Articles and Resources page.

Because CRPC ministers in and to the university community, issues of appropriate alcohol use are particularly important. We must consider what practices will best promote maturity and godliness for the whole community. Our church seeks to serve those who have a prior history with drug and alcohol abuse as well as those whose conscience is sensitive to the use of alcohol.

The intersection of the above ideas requires a careful response and nuanced guidelines. For example, we have long differentiated between private vs. public use of alcohol and social vs. ceremonial use (in Communion would be an example of ceremonial.) It is also helpful to differentiate between events which are both “official and open” and events which are not “official and open.” As our church continues to grow we recognize the necessity of putting these guidelines into writing.

- 1.) We believe that the use of wine in Communion is beneficial because it most closely matches the practice established by Jesus in the Lord’s Supper. However, we also offer grape juice to communicants who do not wish to drink alcohol.
- 2.) We encourage our leaders and all members to practice and promote responsible use of alcohol in all settings. (Again, see our paper on alcohol published online.) We should hold each other to the standard of responsible alcohol use (or abstinence from use), and urge each other to avoid drunkenness.
- 3.) We recognize that the social use of alcohol can be particularly problematic in some settings. We wish to focus attention on church settings which are “official and open.” By using this designation we refer to events which are publically advertised and therefore open; they are recognized to be sponsored or overseen by CRPC. We ask our leaders and members to refrain from social alcohol use in any setting which is both “official and open.” We repeat that we ask our leaders and members to refrain from misusing alcohol in any setting.
- 4.) The terminology of “official and open” could be misunderstood, but it flows from an attempt to address the complex social situations that surround alcohol use. Therefore we give here both an explanation of our reasoning and some examples that help indicate which events are “official and open.”
 - a. Because of the nature of the church anyone may choose to attend a worship service. As a result, all events which are advertised in the bulletin or after-church announcements and associated with the church may be attended by anyone. We must account for the possible attendance at any event of someone who struggles with alcohol use. In order to serve those people, we should all refrain from alcohol use in those settings. This is an example of choosing to sacrifice a freedom for the purpose of loving our brother. It seems to be a direct application of Paul’s decision to refrain from eating certain meats lest he offend a brother in Christ and cause them to stumble. (See I Cor. 8:5-13)
 - b. Refraining from alcohol use in certain settings does not mean that we must refrain from responsible use in *all* settings. There are many times in which members of CRPC will gather in unofficial ways. Responsible alcohol use may be appropriate in some of these settings. Loving our brothers and sisters may mean that we refrain from exercising our

freedoms in certain settings. It does not require us to modify our practices for all settings. (Again this appears to the application of I Cor. 8:5-13.)

- c. This is how we understand the terms “official and open” to apply to some church activities:
 - i. Activities announced at the worship service or placed in the bulletin would be both “official and open.”
 - ii. There is an exception to this, however. We have a segment of the bulletin which is entitled “In the Community.” Members of the church are free to post there and it is clearly marked as events which are not sponsored by CRPC. Events listed in this section are not “official.”
 - iii. Groups that meet regularly often choose to get together for social events. This presents a challenge to applying our alcohol policy. Clearly a community group’s regular meetings, including dinners together, are both “official and open.” Also, a fellowship dinner designed to attract newcomers would also be “official and open.” However, it is less clear what happens when a group of people from a community group decide to meet up together at a restaurant. When does the group cease to be “official?” That is partly why it is helpful to apply the term “open.” There seems to be a natural distinction that forms when people who are members of a group choose to do something different and social. When members of a community group meet together for a social event and it is not part of their regular meetings, it is probably not “official.” What happens when an event is announced at the community group and the same people are going? It can be helpful to distinguish that the event is not “open.” That is, unaffiliated people will not show up. In this setting, Christians can use their judgment and their relational knowledge to know how to plan activities which will not cause harm or offense.
 - iv. In short, it is probably a pretty helpful rule of thumb to say: *If an event is announced in the bulletin and part of the ministry of the church, please do not serve alcohol.*
 - v. And... *in all events and circumstances, please use alcohol responsibly.*