

Alcohol Study Task Force

We, the Alcohol Study Task Force, submit the following report and recommendation to the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the 47th General Conference to meet on June 23-27, 1997, in Huntington, Indiana. We trust this report and recommendation will help unify the Church in its view of the use of alcohol and the need for the Church of the United Brethren in Christ to take a firm stand against this ill of our society.

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Dr. Chaney Bergdall
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This taskforce was appointed by the General Board of Administration during its reorganizational meeting immediately following the 1993 General Conference.

The Issue

The mandate of the 46th General Conference to our task force, as we understood it, was to review the position of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ as it relates to the consumption of beverage alcohol. The primary issues addressed by the task force included whether abstinence should be a requirement for gaining and maintaining membership; how we can best strengthen our position against the use of beverage alcohol; and how to articulate the biblical basis for our position.

The Process

The task force met on three different occasions for extended periods of time to discuss and develop the recommendation. The meetings were positive and every member contributed openly during the course of the discussions. A review of the church's position on alcohol was done in the following areas:

1. Biblical/Theological. What does the Bible say about the use of alcohol and how does our current position and any future position relate to the position of God's Word?

2. Church Membership. How does the use of alcohol relate to what it means to be a member of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ? This issue was the most difficult for discussion since most members of the task force believed that a careful study should be done about what it means to be a "member" of the United Brethren Church. Since the requirements for church members as a whole were outside the work of the task force, the alcohol issue was only discussed in relation to our current understanding of the requirements for church membership.

3. Leadership. Should there be any difference in the requirements for clergy and leaders within a local church and the general membership on the issue of alcohol?

4. Societal. How does consumption, manufacture, and sale of alcohol affect our society, and how is it viewed by our society in light of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ?

5. Historical/Tradition. What has the position been in the past, and how should that affect our position for the future?



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Task Force**

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We believe pastors and churches should instruct prospective members that United Brethren members make a commitment to abstinence as part of their commitment to holy living.

**Background and Rationale
for Our Recommendation**

1. We recognize that mature Christians with a firm understanding of the Bible have differing views on what the Bible teaches about the use of alcoholic beverages.

The Bible speaks positively about wine as a gift from God to be enjoyed (Deut. 11:14; 14:23-26; Psa. 104:15; Hos. 2:8; John 2:1-11). It also warns about the danger of wine because its use leads to drunkenness, immoral behavior, and poor judgment (Gen. 9:21; Prov. 4:17; 20:1; 23:29-33; Isa. 5:22-23; 28:7; Eph. 5:18). How are we to interpret and apply these biblical statements?

There is evidence that "wine" in the Bible refers to both unfermented and fermented beverages. There is also evidence that wine was often mixed with water and thus greatly diluted. This evidence means that Christians should take care how they apply the Bible's teaching to the contemporary scene and modern alcoholic beverages, whether they are arguing for abstinence or moderation.

The Bible does clearly state that:

- Some kinds of drink are to be completely avoided (Prov. 23:31-33).
- Certain persons in positions of responsibility are to abstain from wine (Lev. 10:9; Prov. 31:4-5).
- Drunkenness and the overindulgence of alcoholic beverages is sin and has no place in the believer's life (Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18).
- We should not do anything that would harm our bodies since we are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20).
- Christians should do nothing that provides a stumbling block to others around them that would move them away from becoming all that God would want them to be (Rom. 14:21).

2. We believe that the social and moral factors surrounding alcohol use provide a strong argument for believers to abstain from the use of alcohol in any form.

Alcohol use is linked to many physical ailments, such as liver damage.

There is strong evidence to indicate that some persons who take the first drink will become addicted. Homes are destroyed daily by the effects of alcohol, and accident-related injuries and deaths can be read about daily in our communities. Teens are increasingly falling victim to this destructive substance and destroying their lives.

Hence, it is clear that the use of alcohol has many adverse effects on our society and thus should be viewed as harmful to the well being of our communities, nation, and the church.

3. We believe that the position on alcohol of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ should remain very strong and that the Church should take a firm stand at a time when society as a whole is becoming more liberal on the use of this substance. Thus, it is the desire of the task force to strengthen the church's position on alcohol.

4. We believe that the position on alcohol should be *made stronger* as it relates to the church's encouragement of its members to take a stand against the manufacturing, vending, and use of alcoholic beverages and advocate abstinence from the use of all alcoholic beverages for all people in our society. Thus, you will see revisions to the first paragraph of the recommendation that reflect such a view.

5. We believe that members of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ should abstain from the use of alcohol because of its effects on society. We believe abstinence is the best position for our members as they try to reach their communities and world for Jesus Christ and not provide a stumbling block or hindrance in any way to young believers and non-believers.

We believe pastors and churches should instruct prospective members that United Brethren members make a commitment to abstinence as part of their commitment to holy living. We do not believe that abstinence is a test of membership in the sense that taking one alcoholic drink automatically removes one from membership. Churches should provide continued instruction and support to maintain the

position of abstinence within the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.

6. We believe that clergy should lead the way in living a life of total abstinence from alcohol. Consequently, all requirements in the *Discipline* concerning the use of alcohol should remain as currently printed.

7. Our society has changed dramatically over the last several decades and has allowed for the sale of alcoholic beverages in grocery stores, convenience stores, and other locations in which many persons find themselves working. We believe members of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ should seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and consider carefully their work in such places.

We further believe that members of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ should not be direct investors in any business related to the sale, vending, or manufacture of alcohol. Thus, we have included a statement requiring members to not be involved in this way.

8. A study on the essentials of church membership and the requirements for church membership are outside the work of this task force. It is our belief, however, that the requirements for church membership should be reviewed in the near future.

Our Recommendation

We believe the following recommendation takes into account all of the above issues. We submit this recommendation to the Church and ask that it replace paragraph 143.1 in the United Brethren *Discipline*.

Alcoholic beverages are injurious and at the core of significant social problems. The manufacturing, vending, and use of alcoholic beverages are contrary to the best interests of personal and social morality, economy, and welfare. Therefore, the Church of the United Brethren in Christ stands in opposition to the alcohol industry and advocates abstinence by all people from the use of alcoholic beverages in any form, except as a medical prescription.

Furthermore, the church believes that even the moderate use of alcohol by believers undermines our efforts to oppose the alcohol industry and may be a stumbling block to others. Members of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ are to abstain from the use of alcohol of any kind. They are expected to oppose the manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages. They are not to be involved as a direct investor, manager, or owner (full or partial) of businesses which engage primarily in the manufacture or sale of alcoholic beverages. Neither should a member lease or rent property to those who would use it for the manufacture, storage, or sale of these harmful beverages.

Conclusion

It is our prayer and hope that we can now put this issue to rest within the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and not allow it to become a divisive issue that might keep us from the task of making disciples for Jesus Christ. It should be noted that at no point did we consider liberalizing our position on alcohol in such a way as to encourage its use. Alcohol is a serious societal ill and the Church of the United Brethren in Christ must continue to speak out against its use and effect on our homes, churches, and nation.

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