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Alcohol Free Lent

Sign up now! Ash Wednesday is March 9!
By the Rev. Cynthia Abrams

The United Methodist Church's Social Principles affirm the denomination's long-standing support of abstinence from alcohol as a faithful witness to God's liberating and redeeming love for persons. Problematic use of alcohol is a major factor in crime, disease, death and family dysfunction. Therefore, our Social Principles support education programs as well as other prevention strategies to encourage abstinence and/or deliberate, intentional restraint from alcohol use, with scripture as a guide.

An effective way to undertake this kind of education is through your congregation observing an "Alcohol Free Lent."

A few years ago, the Rev. James Howell, pastor of Myers Park United Methodist Church in Charlotte, N.C., and I were in conversation about the challenge he issued from the pulpit to remain alcohol free during Lent. Church members took up the challenge and exceeded expectations by raising almost \$26,000 in their "Spirit Fund."



His proposal to engage the entire denomination in the challenge seemed daring and I met it with not just a little trepidation. After all, not more than 50 years ago, Methodist clergy and young people were required to sign alcohol-abstinence pledges. Many of our older members were involved in the Temperance movement

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that included significant ministry in confronting alcohol abuse. [12:2](#)

We are mindful of the legacy of this important work. I pondered, though, whether a challenge such as Howell suggested might somehow conflict with our contemporary alcohol-prevention advocacy work.

It is indeed a provocative challenge. The call to remain Alcohol Free during Lent is meant to inspire an international discussion among United Methodists. It is to encourage them to grapple with the “elephant in the room”: alcohol use among our members.

Frank conversations are unlikely to happen without some sort of bold action. Furthermore, we hope the conversation raises awareness and sheds light on the efforts of the alcohol industry to permeate society and influence our choices about alcohol usage. This is particularly worth discussing as it relates to the industry’s efforts to encourage underage drinking.

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We hope Myers Park United Methodist Church inspires your congregation to issue its own alcohol-free challenge this year. To read more about their experience read the Rev. Howell’s account in this issue of *Faith in Action*, "[How about a spirit fund?](#)"

During Lent, our *Faith In Action* e-newsletter will offer discussion questions and other resources to guide you through the “Alcohol Free Lenten Season.” Like Myers Park, we encourage you to establish a Spirit Fund in conjunction with the Lenten challenge to benefit a local recovery/addiction prevention project or one of the worthy national projects listed in the Alcohol Free Lent section of our Web site.

To become involved register your church’s participation: [Alcohol Free Lent](#) at www.umc-gbcs.org/alcoholfreelent.

Editor’s note: The Rev. Cynthia Abrams directs the Alcohol, Other Addictions & Health Care program at the General Board of Church & Society (GBCS).

National organizations focused on comprehensive advocacy strategies to combat alcohol addiction:

- Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (www.cadca.org)
- Faces &Voices of Recovery

[We’ve only just begun - Medicare, Medicaid survived — for now](#)

[Interview with Bishop Carcaño - FaithLink downloadable study resource](#)

[Young clergy to gather in New York City - Justice for the poor will be topic Jan. 23-25](#)

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(www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org)

- National Assn. for Children of Alcoholics (www.nacoa.org)
- National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence
(www.ncadd.org)

For more on alcohol and other addictions, visit the Alcohol & Other Addictions page on the GBCS Web site: [Alcohol & Other Addictions](#).

Abrams supervises an “action network” that provides legislative updates, educational resources and identifies opportunities to act on issues involving alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, gambling and pornography. Information focuses on addiction recovery, prevention and regulation. She issues “action alerts” periodically through e-mail.

Joining the Alcohol & Other Addictions Action Network is free: go to umpower.org or click on My GBCS on the General Board of Church and Society Web site, www.umc-gbcs.org. You can also contact [Donna Brandyberry](#), (202) 488-5641.

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