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St. Louis archdiocese orders end to alcohol at youth events

by Stephen Deere by St. Louis Post-Dispatch by Religion News Service

St. Louis — The archdiocese of St. Louis is putting an end to alcohol sales at youth-related events.

Under a new policy that went into effect Friday, drinking will not be allowed at any event that is directed primarily toward minors.

That means parents will no longer be allowed to throw back a few beers during their kids' soccer, volleyball and softball games. And athletic associations will no longer rake in revenue from beer sales at their concession stands.

Archbishop Robert Carlson announced the change in a letter to parishioners. Now alcohol at games or other events directed toward minors "is not to be served to anyone or brought in by someone," according to the letter.

Carlson noted that the new policy was passed unanimously by an advisory committee of clergy in September. His letter did not give a reason for the change.

Fr. Tom Molini, pastor of St. Gerard Majella Church in Kirkwood, Mo., and a member of the advisory committee, played down the new rule, describing it as more of a minor tweak than an overhaul.

Molini said the previous policy already discouraged the sale of alcohol at youth-related events, and many parishes prohibited it anyway.

The change makes parishes consistent, he said.

He couldn't say how many parishes the change would affect because he was unaware of how many allowed alcohol sales.

Not everybody is happy about the new policy.

Tom Carnaghi, 60, who belongs to St. Ambrose parish in St. Louis, said he believed the rule could hurt some parish fundraisers.

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"If you have an official, controlled function that raises money for the parish, for a good cause, alcohol in moderation should be allowed," Carnaghi said.

But his cousin Tom Cissi, 48, had another opinion. Cissi said alcohol was not allowed at the parish's pre-Halloween event for families and neighbors and people enjoyed themselves.

"If you can't go for two events a year without drinking, you got a problem," he said with a chuckle.

At St. Mary Margaret Alacoque Parish in south St. Louis County, the concession stands have been beer-free for a year, as part of a trial experiment for the diocese, said Keith Louis, president of the parish athletic association.

Being the guinea pig hasn't been easy.

Louis estimated the change has cost his organization about \$10,000 a year in concession sales. That money used to pay for uniforms, equipment and a host of other expenses.

His parish has promised to help make up the difference, Louis said. The organization is also doing more fundraising.

"We will do what the archbishop wants," Louis said. "Will it make things more difficult for us financially? Yes."

What irks Louis, more than the lost revenue, is the lost camaraderie.

Parents used to stay long after games talking and drinking, he said. Now they just head home.

"Since we lost the beer, everybody leaves," he said. "That's what bothers me."

[Stephen Deere writes for the Post-Dispatch in St. Louis. Margaret Gillerman contributed to this report.]

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