

Dear Parents

**Just some thoughts on *large* 18<sup>th</sup> birthday parties where alcohol is provided (because questions are already being asked).....**

The first question which occurs to me is, “Why do we have them?”. Who came up with the idea of making a big thing of an 18<sup>th</sup> birthday? Certainly, it was nothing special when I was at school. What was of special significance was the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. The 21<sup>st</sup> was when we acknowledged the transition from being a boy to being an adult – this despite the fact that many had been through the military before this and some had already started working.

So why celebrate an 18<sup>th</sup> any more than a 17<sup>th</sup>? What is its significance? Is it because he can now drive a car and drink alcohol? Those are more reasons for a serious talk than a party!

I can think a few reasons not to celebrate 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays to the degree that many tend to do nowadays with large amounts of alcohol and the freedom for boys to drink as much as they like.

1. In a matric year boys need to work. How many weekends are taken up with 18<sup>th</sup>s in the year? How much work can a boy do the day after a large 18<sup>th</sup>? Indeed, many boys are so excited in the run-up that they cannot concentrate well then either. This is on top of Matric Dances, Saturday sport and other things which take time at weekends.
2. Do you supply alcohol? If so, what about the boys who are not yet 18? Do you let them break the law at your party and become liable yourself if anything awful happens? Do you willingly break the law to keep your son happy? What does this teach him? Or do you have no alcohol? Or just invite those who are already 18? Or distinguish at the party? (You can see why the College stopped all giving of alcohol to matrics at High Tables etc some years back.)
3. It is not easy to control things where alcohol is supplied to young people. One may control the party quite well when they are with you but what about when they leave under the influence of alcohol? Are you suddenly not responsible anymore? So much that is negative happens when young people are drunk and even though much of this is kept secret it is still carried by the boys and girls for years.

Anyway, many of you will be faced with the question of an 18<sup>th</sup> either this year or in the future. I know it is not an easy issue in some families and I do hope that, whatever you decide, it will result in happy memories with no regrets. (You may like to open a dialogue with your son a long time prior to his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or he could well just be assuming that you are going to give him a huge party like the ones he has heard about.)

(The College has a policy on alcohol and parties which you can find under <http://college.bishops.org.za/Info/Policies.aspx> )

I hope you have a copy of *Teenagers and Alcohol* which was produced by the Bishops Support Unit in partnership with the ARA and has been supply to tens of thousands of homes around South Africa. Copies are available at the College.

Yours sincerely

Peter Westwood  
(Deputy-Headmaster Pastoral)