



St. Mark United Church of Christ

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To the Editor:

St. Mark United Church of Christ in Chicago Heights, at its February Board meeting, adopted the following policy statement regarding the issue of gambling: We urge our state legislators to vote against any legislation which allows for any form of expansion of gambling in our state (including casinos for Cook County). We feel the negatives of legalized gambling for our society far outweigh the gain in tax revenue. We have listed some of the negatives below:

1. Human suffering -- loss of home, loss of job, bankruptcy, child neglect, divorce or family break-up, crime, and suicide.
2. Costs to the local economy -- the economy of the "feeder" area surrounding a casino is ~~cannibalized as money otherwise spent on other goods and services is spent in the casino~~ instead.
3. Crime -- insurance fraud, bad checks, embezzlement and theft are common. One study conducted for insurance companies says that 40 percent of white-collar crime can be traced to gambling. Usually those involved have no prior criminal record. Crime caused by gambling often begins with theft from family and/or employer.
4. Cost to taxpayers -- the human costs listed above also have a price tag for society at large. According to an article by Jim Nesbitt of the Newhouse News Service in May of '98, total tax revenue from all forms of gambling in the U.S. was \$16.8 billion, but the social costs of gambling addiction was estimated at from \$40-50 billion. A study by the American Medical Association also placed the estimated social cost of gambling addiction at about \$40 billion.
5. Effect on government -- because the potential gain is so great, the gambling operators are generous employers of lobbyists and generous donors to political campaigns, buying "influence" in government. Also, there has been a dangerous shift in the fundamental role

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of government from regulator to promoter. Regulations designed to protect the public are being gutted or ignored because government bodies have become "partners" to the gambling operators, dependent on the flow of profits to operator and to the government partner, local and state.

6. Potential danger to our youth -- As we know from our experience with tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, anything young people see adults doing, they too will do (even if it is illegal). Gambling is the fastest growing addiction among teens. It is the addiction of the 90's, since the proliferation of legalized gambling in the continental United States began. And the more accessible gambling is, the more likely our youth will fall into its trap.

ST. MARK UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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