



65 E. Wacker Place
Suite 1620
Chicago, IL 60601
Ph. 312-368-1066
Fx. 312-368-1090

108 E. Cook St.
Springfield, IL 62704
Ph. 217-528-9200
Fx. 217-528-7214

www.ilcatholic.org
Diocese of Belleville
Archdiocese of Chicago
Diocese of Joliet
Diocese of Peoria
Diocese of Rockford
Diocese of Springfield-in-IL

June 1, 2015

A Catholic Perspective on Gambling in Illinois

"Church teaching is clear. Gambling is not immoral in itself but may become so under certain circumstances... As gambling in our state increases, so also does the number of people whose passion for gambling is enslaving them."

In 1999, the Catholic Bishops of Illinois issued a statement entitled: A Catholic Perspective on Gambling in Illinois. As this issue is once again being discussed in the context of enacting legislation that makes gambling more available we, in the hope of being of service to our Catholic communities and the wider public, want to update that earlier statement released by our predecessors.

The issue of gambling raises serious questions about the impact of its growth, its public acceptance and its consequences both short and long range. Over the years we have witnessed the introduction of a state lottery, the proliferation of riverboat casinos and an increased popularity of video gambling. There is now a draft proposal to authorize a city-owned casino in Chicago, in addition to four other casinos located throughout the state and smaller so-called "satellite" casinos in central and southern Illinois. Additionally, slot machines may be allowed at horse-racing tracks.

We, the Catholic Bishops of Illinois wish to contribute to this debate by offering a perspective based on the proven wisdom of our tradition. It is a tradition that provides a useful framework to assess gambling as a concrete reality in our world. Thus we offer the following observations and recommendations for the consideration of Catholics and all people of good will in our state.

Observations:

1. We take as our starting point the traditional position of the Catholic Church on games of chance. "Games of chance (card games, etc.) or *wagers* are not in themselves contrary to justice. They become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for one's needs and those of others. The passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement. Unfair wagers and cheating at games constitute grave matter, unless the damage inflicted is so slight that the one who suffers it cannot reasonably consider it significant." (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2413).

2. Our traditional teaching is clear. Gambling is not immoral in itself, but may become so under certain circumstances. Buying a lottery ticket, placing a wager on a horse race, or spending an evening at a casino is not in itself wrong. Nor can it be said that it is wrong in itself for churches, schools or other nonprofit or even religious institutions to raise money through raffles or games of chance. Gambling is a moral problem only in certain circumstances.
3. While this Church teaching may be clear, it also may be difficult at times to evaluate or even specify the particular circumstances that make gambling a moral problem. Even people of good will may disagree on exactly when and where these conditions exist. Nevertheless, the serious negative impact of gambling experienced in Illinois is prompting greater numbers of people to evaluate the circumstances surrounding gambling in our state. For it seems that in our state, to use the language cited above, "the passion for gambling" is becoming "an enslavement" both for individual persons and for society.
4. This enslavement is experienced on a personal level. As gambling in our state increases, so also does the number of people whose passion for gambling is enslaving them. They lose money, many times in large amounts, which they and their families sorely need. The harm resulting from this enslavement is an increasingly serious problem that we must honestly face.
5. This enslavement is also experienced on a social level. The passion for gambling is entering more pervasively into the fabric of our society. Some see the lottery as a painless way to fund the public treasury. Riverboat gambling is increasingly intertwined with issues of political power. Advertisements for gambling, sometimes directed toward the poor, deceptively offer an easy path to wealth and the American dream.

Recommendations:

While our tradition holds that gambling is not in itself evil, we owe it to ourselves to examine with honesty and courage the real here-and-now circumstances that make gambling a real here-and-now problem on personal or social levels. Again, out of a desire to make a real contribution to the present debate on gambling in Illinois, we offer the following recommendations:

1. First, following the lead of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, we ask that all people recognize and evaluate within their own conscience the moral issues involved in their own possible enslavement to the passion for gambling. This is not an easy task. Self-deception often stands in the way. Many psychological experts see compulsive gambling as an addiction, and therefore a condition supported by denial. Merely hearing Church teaching or reading public service advertisements recommending moderation in betting will not break through the denial of the addictive process. As with alcoholism and other addictions, help is needed. Even when the passion for gambling is not a psychological addiction, a serious examination might be made about the use we make of our own money. Are we responsible stewards of the gifts with which we are blessed? Do we appreciate the Church teaching on the social aspect of private property? We live in a world where more than thirty thousand children die each day because of poverty. The

majority of the earth's population lives in subhuman conditions, and the gap between the wealthy and the poor is constantly widening. God will certainly judge us on our stewardship, on how we use our money. Let us ask ourselves if we have become excessive and immoderate in spending on ourselves while so many others are in need.

2. Second, we ask Catholics to take an active role in providing this help. Parishes, schools, campus ministries, and church agencies should take into account enslavement to the passion for gambling as they address other forms of enslavement to which our human condition makes us vulnerable. The passion for gambling must be realistically and practically addressed in our educational ministries and pastoral programs.
3. Third, it is important to commit to a fair system of taxation to support public programs, as it is not healthy to rely upon gambling as an alternative.
4. Fourth, there must be accountability built into the system. Financial records of gambling enterprises must be transparent, open and accountable to the public. We oppose gambling related advertising that is deceptively enticing, especially when ad campaigns target those people who can least afford to lose money. We must have a public examination of the impact of gambling upon the poor and upon the political process itself.
5. Fifth, we are committed to leading by example. Our Catholic institutions also must openly examine and debate the impact of gambling in their fundraising. Games of chance are not to be condemned outright. Funds are urgently needed. Yet many questions might be asked about these events. What is the effect these enterprises have by way of example? When do they become harmful to the poor? How else might necessary funds be raised? How do these events contribute to the passion for gambling among individual persons and within society?

We hope this Catholic perspective will be an effective contribution to the present debate on gambling in Illinois.

#####

The Catholic Conference of Illinois was created in 1969 to serve as the public policy voice of the Illinois bishops and the six dioceses of the state: Belleville, Chicago, Joliet, Peoria, Rockford and Springfield-in-Illinois.