

Gambling

Policy No. 216

Policy Statement: No parish, Catholic institution or Catholic organization shall host or participate in fundraising through the use of harmful gambling activities to support their projects.

No parish, Catholic institution or Catholic organization shall apply for funding from the Alberta Lottery Fund or from any other organization that has raised the requested funding from harmful gambling activities.

Any monies raised from the operation of a harmful gambling activity and offered to a parish, Catholic institution or Catholic organization will be respectfully declined.

Definition: For the purpose of this policy, harmful gambling activities refer to casino gaming, use of video lottery terminals and high-stakes bingo.

Intent of Policy: The Catholic Bishops of Alberta, in 1998, issued a joint pastoral letter entitled *The False Eden of Gambling*. Its purpose was to raise awareness of the many difficulties associated with legalized gambling in the province of Alberta and to call for a Christian response. Foremost among the moral and social problems that arise from legalized gambling in this province is the exploitation of the poor and vulnerable. It is statistically verified that a weak and vulnerable minority suffers disproportionately in a culture of legalized gambling, especially through the use of video lottery terminals, casinos and high-stakes bingo.

It is gravely immoral to exploit the poor and weak for one's own benefit. Catholic social doctrine summons all members of the Church to stand in solidarity with the poor, and never to take advantage of them. Solidarity is "a commitment to the good of one's neighbour with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to 'lose oneself' for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to 'serve him' instead of oppressing him for one's own advantage (cf. *Mt* 10:40-42, 20:25; *Mk* 10:42-45; *Lk* 22:25-27)". (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 193, citing Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38). A Catholic institution that operates or participates in any activity that is known to cause harm to others, especially the weak, contradicts its identity and compromises its mission.

In the province of Alberta, government revenues derived from gambling are distributed through the Alberta Lottery Fund in two ways. The first manner is to channel gambling revenues to the various government ministries, which combine these dollars with those received from general taxation. This pooled revenue is used to

finance such provincial services as highways, education and health care. The second way is to allow groups to apply for a direct sharing in the proceeds of gambling activity, such as a casino. Our institutions may legitimately receive funding under the first scenario, because (a) they exercise no control over the manner in which the government provides their funding and (b) it is impossible, practically speaking, for them to differentiate between gambling receipts and other revenues. However, it is not legitimate – indeed, it is immoral – for our institutions freely to apply for funds they know come from a harmful gambling activity. This would constitute formal cooperation in a practice that is known to cause harm to our disadvantaged brothers and sisters.