

Regarding Casino Gambling Expansion in Connecticut

Testimony offered to the Legislative Committees on February 25, 2016
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Dear Fellow Citizens of the State of Connecticut serving in our Legislature:

There are a number of issues relating to the expansion of gambling opportunities that are troubling. For me, they reflect personal, ecclesial and social affronts to which I will refer below:

- On an interpersonal level, I have sat at kitchen tables in my ministry experience as a parish pastor with families and individuals severely affected by gambling addictions. Credit card debt, bankruptcy, divorce, and self-imposed poverty have been my first-hand observations in these situations. I have seen elderly people who have gambled away Social Security checks and resorted to feeding themselves cat food to survive. The gambling venues in our region make it all too easy to become addicted, and expansion of existing venues and the opening of new venues will only exacerbate the problem.
- Ecclesially, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has taken a strong stand on this issue, and we are wary as a church body of efforts by the gaming industry to take advantage of the most vulnerable, those least able to see the long term effects of gambling. At the same time, we are providers of social services in some areas and will continue to help individuals reclaim lives free of addictions of many kinds, including compulsive gambling. It would be however, disingenuous to merely treat when prevention provides a better outcome.
- Socially, we recognize the easy money tax revenues from gambling present. We also are aware of the implications of standing up to a significant source of sustenance for First Nations people who depend on this revenue. However, the social costs for all people are too costly, in terms of lives shattered and the most vulnerable taken advantage of. First Nations tribal people know first hand from experience the dangers of this kind of exploitation wherein people become commodities to be used and every interaction becomes transactional rather than relational. Jesus Himself warns us to beware of this trap.

It is my hope that you will make the harder, but more responsible choice to defeat gaming expansion in our state.

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