

ANTI-GAMBLING RESOURCE FOR UNITED METHODISTS IN ALABAMA

Prepared by the office of Mission and Advocacy of
the Alabama-West Florida Conference
www.awfumc.org

For use in small groups, Sunday school classes,
United Methodist Women's Units/Circles, and other groups

God calls us to love one another, to not cause pain to others, and to not take advantage of others. To be a neighbor means doing what is good and right for others. What we do for others is what we do for Jesus. One of John Wesley's General Rules is to do no harm. Allowing gambling, however, causes pain and loss for our neighbors and for ourselves.

Scriptures to consider:

Exodus 20:17

Matt. 25:31-46

Gal. 5:22-26

Heb. 13:5

Prov. 22:22-23

Luke 10:25-37

Eph. 4:28

Matt. 6:24

1 Cor. 10:31-32 (NIV)

1 Tim. 6:9-10

Question: Why should we, as Christians, be against any new gambling proposals in Alabama?

1. **The few that win at gambling only win at the expense of the losers.** The odds are always stacked in favor of the casino, so any winnings do not come from the casino itself. Winnings come from the bank accounts of the losers. Many lose so that a few may "win". The Bible indicates that we are to work creatively and use our possessions for the good of others (Eph. 4:28). Gambling is presented as a replacement for work, creates no product, and bases all income on chance and someone else's loss.
2. **The majority of those who gamble are those who can least afford it.** They are the poor, the vulnerable, the elderly, and others who consider gambling their only "hope" of a more fulfilling life. Unfortunately, the gaming industry knows this, and preys upon them with the allure of "getting rich quick". Casinos use all sorts of marketing schemes to entice gamblers to risk as much money as possible. Everything in a casino is perfectly structured for taking money in large sums and giving nothing in return, except for fleeting and empty pleasures. Slot machines are especially addictive, yet the odds of winning are extremely low, which results in the lives of many being ruined.
3. **Gambling costs more than the revenues it may generate.** It leads to increased crime, prostitution, broken families, suicides, child neglect, spousal/partner abuse, bankruptcies, loss of jobs, financial destitution, mental illness, alcohol and drug related problems, and so much more. Some studies have shown that **these social costs of gambling are as much as two or three times the revenues generated.** We ALL pay these costs, even those who would not consider stepping into a casino.
4. **Gambling does not generate the revenue promised for education, Medicaid, or other programs.** Many other states have instituted gambling, yet have seen no significant increase in social services. In Alabama, it would only provide a three percent increase - at best - of the current budget. In other states, while promised otherwise, state budgets were adjusted so that the revenues generated by gambling substituted previously budgeted money instead of becoming additional funds available. Only look to Mississippi for an example - that state is still facing enormous problems with its education system despite implementing various gambling schemes.
5. **We are cautioned not to "cause anyone to stumble" (1 Cor. 10:32).** By creating and legitimizing gambling "destinations" in our state, we ensure that more people will be ensnared by gambling addiction. Studies show that the incidence of "problem" gambling doubles within 50 miles of gaming locations.

Is the promise of a limited increase in revenue really worth all this?

Please see other side

Those are just a few of the many reasons that we should take a stand against predatory gambling. As United Methodists, our *Social Principles* clearly state that we should abstain from gambling:

From *The United Methodist Social Principles*, ¶163G (2012):

Gambling is a menace to society, deadly to the best interests of moral, social, economic, and spiritual life, destructive of good government and good stewardship. As an act of faith and concern, Christians should abstain from gambling and should strive to minister to those victimized by the practice . . . The Church's prophetic call is to promote standards of justice and advocacy that would make it unnecessary and undesirable to resort to commercial gambling - including public lotteries, casinos, raffles, Internet gambling, gambling with an emerging wireless technology and other games of chance - as a recreation, as an escape, or as a means of producing public revenue or funds for support of charities or government.

Discussion questions:

- What reasons do people give to justify gambling? What are the counter points and alternatives to these reasons?
- Gambling revenues are considered a "regressive tax." What positive alternatives are there for economic development and raising revenue?
- What alternatives to gambling would provide jobs and a way to lift people out of poverty?
- Should any church accept financial donations won through gambling?

What can we do?

- Do not gamble at casinos or participate in lotteries, no matter what form
- Encourage others not to gamble
- Learn all you can about this issue. See websites listed below
- Find ways to minister to those who are victimized by the practice
- Encourage your legislators to oppose all legislation that would allow gambling in any form. Call 334-242-7800 (State Senate), 334-242-7600 (State House), or check this website (<http://www.legislature.state.al.us/>) to find your legislator.
- Write letters to the editor of your local paper
- Call local talk radio programs when they are discussing gambling and voice your opposition.
- Sign petitions
- Ask your church, in a business meeting, to vote on and pass a resolution opposing gambling. Send a copy of the resolution to each of the legislators who represent the people in your church.

Websites for more information:

<http://www.StopPredatoryGambling.org>

<http://www.alabamapolicy.org/?s=gambling>

<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/family/gambling/gambling-issue>

<http://www.ncpgambling.org>

<http://www.casinowatch.org/>

<http://umc-gbcs.org/issues/gambling>

Contact Susan Hunt, Conference Director of Mission, Advocacy and Ethnic Ministries, at 334-356-8014 or susan@awfumc.org for more information.