

Pastoral Letter on Gambling, Gaming and Casinos to the Faithful of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie



Over the past year, I, raised serious concerns over the expansion of casino gambling. I am writing to offer pastoral guidance to our Catholic community.

In recent months it has been argued that the expansion of casino gambling will be a net benefit to our community. This is a common argument to justify building or expanding casinos in other cities as well. For example, Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto, writes in his pastoral letter of 2013: "Even if there were significant long-term economic benefits, and that is far from clear, the establishment of a new casino will have a negative social impact that outweighs such benefits and will have an adverse effect on the vitality and social health of our community." The available evidence clearly indicates that casinos impact health. The Wellesley Institute concludes that people living in poverty are more likely to spend a higher proportion of household income on gambling and Seniors' living on fixed incomes and accumulated savings are at a greater risk of becoming problem gamblers. (Barnes, 2013)

As a Catholic community, we are required to, in the words of the prophet Micah" ... to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

In this spirit, I ask you,

- Is the development of a casino a truly wholesome development that enhances the quality of life in our community?
- Does even more gambling make for a just society for individuals and for families?
- Can we support casinos when evidence shows they cause significant harm to the most vulnerable among us?

I am deeply concerned by the evidence strongly suggesting that casinos will contribute to family breakdown, depression, addiction, bankruptcy and crime. The harm caused by the development of casinos close to vulnerable communities is antithetical to the Church's commitment to **life and dignity of the human person**.

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004). We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005) The available evidence clearly indicates that casinos threaten the life and dignity of some of the most vulnerable members of our community. As we walk humbly with our God, I encourage you as the baptised faithful and as members of the body of Christ to do what you can to support the efforts to limit casino gambling in our communities.

If you or someone you know is struggling with such an addiction, I urge you to address the problem. The Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline (1.888.230.3505) is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They provide a free, confidential and anonymous service to people throughout Ontario in more than 140 languages.

As we continue our faith journey through the fall and into Advent, may we join together in word and deed to care for the most vulnerable among us and, guided by the Holy Spirit and a concern for the common good, contribute to the creation of a just community that is a truly wholesome place where individuals and families may flourish.

Sincerely yours,

+Marcel Damphousse
Bishop of Sault Ste. Marie
20 September 2018