

PERSPECTIVE Public Policy

from a Catholic Viewpoint

North Dakota Catholic Conference Opposes Gambling Measure

On June 11 a measure will appear on the primary ballot that will greatly expand legalized gambling in North Dakota. Measure Five will permit for-profit operation of 25 gambling machines (slots, poker, keno, craps, etc.) in restaurants and bars throughout the state. The North Dakota Catholic Conference, along with virtually every other religious group in the state, strongly opposes this measure. At the heart of NDCC's opposition to the measure is its concern for the common good and the least among us.

What is the Catholic Church's Position on Gambling?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "*Games of chance* (card games, etc.) or *wagers* are not in themselves contrary to social justice." However, the Catechism also recognizes that the passion for gambling can become an enslavement and that gambling becomes morally unacceptable when it deprives someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others. (No. 2413.)

The Church's analysis of gambling does not stop there. The Church also considers questions such as:

- whether the social consequences of gambling outweigh the purported benefits to society;
- whether easy accessibility of gambling threatens the common good; and
- whether the promotion of gambling is a legitimate role for the government.

It is with such questions in mind that the North Dakota Catholic Conference chose to oppose Measure 5. The Conference has opposed past efforts to expand legalized gambling primarily because our communities already face gambling problems.

Measure 5 would expand gambling in North Dakota more than proposed in previous measures. The measure would permit everyplace with an on-site liquor license (bar, restaurant, hotel, or lodge) to have 25 gambling machines.

Approximately 5% of every community has a potential gambling problem. The problem becomes real when the public has easy access to gambling machines. Thus, the type of gambling proposed by Measure 5 puts the least among us at risk and threatens the common good. Moreover, by requiring certain licensing and regulatory activities, the measure forces the state to have a vested interest in the success of the gambling machines, if only to pay for the activities required by law. Considering the social problems attributable to widespread availability of gambling, and the moral issues of state involvement, NDCC chose to oppose the initiative.

Catholic News Service recently reported that the boom in gambling is raising moral concerns among officials at the Vatican. The story quoted Father Georges Cottier, Pope John Paul II's in-house theologian, as saying that the spread of gambling is sign of a "social disease" and that he thought the morality of casinos could not be defended.

Gambling, Dr. John Warren Kindt.)

In the story, Mary Ann Glendon, a professor at Harvard Law School and a member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, noted that gambling hits the poor the hardest saying: "It's a very cheap and deceptive way of getting more money into the public coffers with direct taxation, but the burden of that tax falls on those people who are least able to afford it."

What are some of the problems associated with widespread availability of gambling?

A study recently published in the South Dakota Journal of Medicine examined the number of inquiries about gambling treatment and the actual number of gamblers treated before, during, and after the shutdown of the state's video lotteries due to a court order. The study revealed a marked decrease in the number of inquiries and treatments while the machines were turned off and a marked increase when the machines were turned back on.

The study concluded that *accessibility and availability of video lottery machines is an important factor in the number of people being adversely impacted by gambling*. (S.D. Jnl of Med, Vol. 49, No.1, Jan. 1996.) This study confirms others showing that the proximity of gambling influences the extent to which people gamble and the number of problem gamblers.

Studies have also repeatedly shown a link between the widespread availability of gambling -- which is what Measure 5 proposes -- and an increase in auto

accidents, suicides and suicide attempts, insurance fraud, embezzlement, child abuse, domestic violence and assaults, bad checks, and other crimes. (See, *Casinos in Florida: An Analysis of the Economic and Social Impacts*, Executive Office of the Governor.)

It is not only the problem gambler who faces such problems. Studies have shown that children of excessive gamblers are more prone to a higher use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, as well as overeating, and suicide attempts. (*The Economic Impacts of*

A recent *Minneapolis Star* report found that in Minnesota:

- more than 1,000 people a year are filing for bankruptcy protection in cases involving gambling losses;
- credit counselors are seeing gamblers with bigger and bigger gambling debts; and
- more and more gamblers are using welfare benefits to gamble.

The *Minneapolis Star* report also found the same crime, addiction, and suicide problems found in other reports and studies. (See, *Minneapolis Star*, Dec. 3 - 6, 1995; *The Forum*, Dec. 5, 1995, summarizing findings.) It should be noted that Measure Five, by bringing casino-type games into any bar, would make gambling more available in North Dakota than in Minnesota.

"If anyone thinks that putting lotteries and video terminals on every block won't lead addictive and criminal behavior, they're in outer space."

-- Valerie Lorenze, director of the Compulsive Gambling Center in Baltimore. From "Lotto Fever: We All Lose" *MONEY*, May 1996

Printed on recycled paper.

Do the Economic Benefits Outweigh the Social Consequences of Widespread Gambling?

A recent issue of *MONEY* magazine reported:

- lotteries have not lowered state taxes or boosted funding for education
- lotteries add an estimated \$10.9 billion a year to the financial burdens of the states and their taxpayers
- the annual cost to the U.S. economy of each problem gambler is \$13,200

(Lotto Fever: We All Lose" *MONEY*, May 1996)

Also, gambling takes money away from existing businesses. This siphoning of dollars does not apply only to "entertainment" dollars. The addictive nature

of gambling leads people to spend more than their normal entertainment dollars. Moreover, studies show that businesses prefer to locate in communities without gambling. (*The Economic Impacts of Gambling*, Dr. John Warren Kindt.)

things. The habit of gambling is one of those ‘getting’ distractions whose allure the Christian will want to resist.”

-- James S. Sullivan, Bishop of Fargo

Who opposes Measure Five?

A growing number of civic and religious groups including the North Dakota Republican Party, the North Dakota Democratic-NPL Party, the North Dakota Conference of Churches, the North Dakota Catholic Conference, and the North Dakota Christian Coalition.

Are Catholics Required to Vote Against Measure 5?

No. Catholic believers are expected to form their own conscience and make a prudential judgment on the issue. In forming our conscience, we are expected to educate ourselves on the issues, to understand applicable Church teaching, and turn to God in prayer.

Want to Help Defeat Measure 5?

Volunteers are needed for many activities, including the delivery of thousands of brochures. Call the NDCC office for information on how to help.

“Gambling is one of life’s distractions that stems from our preoccupation with ‘getting’ as distinguished from ‘giving,’ as we allow the living out of the Christian life to be deflected by the blandishments of consumerism and inordinate attachments to material

A Call to Political Responsibility . . .

“Is present-day America becoming less sensitive, less caring toward the poor, the weak, the stranger, the needy? It must not! . . . Both as Americans and as followers of Christ, American Catholics must be committed to the defense of life in all its stages and in every condition.”

-- Pope John Paul II, New York, October 6, 1995

“Democracy serves what is true and right when it safeguards the dignity of every human person, when it respects inviolable and inalienable human rights, when it makes the common good the end and criterion regulating all public and social life. . . I say to you again, America, in the light of your own tradition: Love life, cherish life, defend life, from conception to natural death.”

-- Pope John Paul II, Baltimore, October 8, 1995

Facts About Measure Five (the Gambling Initiative)

- Measure Five permits much more than a “state lottery.”
- It permits any establishment with an on-site alcohol license to have up to 25 gambling machines.
- These gambling machines could play virtually any game, including:

- slots
- poker
- craps
- blackjack
- keno
- parimutuel and simulcast betting

- sports and Calcutta pools
- pull-tabs
- raffles
- punchboards
- paddlewheels
- pai gai

Measure 5 defines "lottery" as including any "electrical mechanical device . . . able to play or operate any game of chance allowable within the boundaries of North Dakota including but not limited to Indian reservations." The games listed above are presently allowable within North Dakota, including the reservations.

•Measure Five permits and encourages the use of video gambling, one of the most addictive forms of gambling.

The measure encourages the use of gambling machines over the types of gambling by giving the operators of the gambling machines a greater percentage of the proceeds than they can receive through other types of gambling.

•The measure "legislates" into the state constitution a number of provisions including who can operate the gambling machines, how proceeds will be distributed, and whether gambling operations can be taxed. These provisions could only be changed by another constitutional amendment.

•It allows for-profit entities to receive a substantial amount of the gambling proceeds.

•It places no limits on wagering or hours of operation.

•The measure does not set aside any monies for treating gambling addiction or other social consequences.

•The measure requires the attorney general to perform certain regulatory and licensing functions but does not raise or specifically designate any monies to pay for such activities. Therefore, the measure forces the state to have a vested interest in the success of gambling in the state, if only to pay for the regulatory activities required by the law.

•In lieu of the 25% that goes to the state treasury, the measure prohibits any taxes based on the gambling machines, except taxes on "manufacturers." This prohibition applies no matter what burden the gambling machines place on the state and local communities.

North Dakota June Primary Ballot Measures

Measure 1: Constitutional amendment to remove the lieutenant governor as presiding officer of the state senate.

NDCC Position: None.

Measure 2: Constitutional amendment to allow the state Board of University and School Lands to swap land and mineral interests with private landowners and Indian tribes.

NDCC Position: None.

Measure 3: Constitutional amendment to remove outdated language, including an agreement on how North and South Dakota would assume territorial debts.

NDCC Position: None

Measure 4: Changes the constitution's executive branch article. Removes the treasurer's two-term service limit; requires the attorney general to be a licensed North Dakota lawyer; expands governor's line-item veto power.

NDCC Position: None

Measure 5: Constitutional amendment to permit gambling machines in businesses licensed to sell alcoholic beverages.

NDCC Position: Opposed

Measure 6: New law to prohibit private North Dakota trash dumps from accepting hazardous waste. Toughens insurance requirements for private landfills. Gives local voters power over a private dump's operating permit.

NDCC Position: Monitor in light of Church's teaching on Creation, property rights, the common good, and subsidiarity. For more information on these teachings, see the Winter NDCC newsletter.*

Vote June 11

Measure 7: New law that revises workers compensation system and repeals changes made by the Legislature.

NDCC Position: Monitor in light of Church's teaching that medical assistance in cases of accidents at work should be "easily available for workers and that as far as possible should be cheap or even free of charge" (Laborem Exercens No. 93) and that the state should contribute to the achievement of such goals according to the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. (Centisimus Annus, No. 15.)*

Measure 8: New law that would create an exception to the moratorium on new long term care beds in North Dakota by authorizing the construction of new long term care facilities in Stanley and Grafton for veterans.

NDCC Position: Monitor in light of Catholic health care's emphasis on a continuum of care, emphasizing community care when possible.*

Measure 9: Repeals a workers compensation law approved by the 1995 Legislature that makes it more difficult for injured workers to qualify for impairment benefits.

NDCC Position: Monitor for reasons stated regarding Measure 7.*

** "Monitor" means that NDCC takes no position for or against the measure. However, since the issue concerns Catholic teaching, NDCC will monitor its passage or failure.*

It is the duty of citizens to work with civil authority for building up society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom.

-- Catechism of the Catholic Church

**“We Preach Family Values, But Do We Value
Families?”**

A look at the importance of families in the development of public policy

**Speaker: John Huebscher, Executive Director
Wisconsin Catholic Conference**

October 2, 1996October 3, 1996

Doublewood Inn, BismarckDoublewood Inn, Fargo

The North Dakota Catholic Conference has invited John Huebscher, the executive director of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, to be the main speaker at two one-day conferences on in the importance of families in the development of public policy. Registration will begin at 9:30 and the conference will end at 3:30 p.m.

The registration fee is \$25, which includes coffee and the luncheon. Group, senior citizen, and student rates, and scholarships available. For more information, contact the office of the North Dakota Catholic Conference, 227 West Broadway, Suite 2, Bismarck, North Dakota 58501. (701) 223-2519