

POLICY ON GAMBLING

The EcoJustice Committee proposes the following resolution in an attempt to comply with the wishes of both the Council of General Synod and the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, as explained below. The Committee also recognizes that the resolution represents a significant change to the existing policy on gambling adopted by General Synod in 1949, also explained below.

RESOLVED: This Council of General Synod

1. Stands opposed to any gambling activity that in its scope or form will negatively affect the residents of any community, region, or neighbourhood.
2. Commits General Synod not to receive funds raised from lotteries, casinos, electronic gambling machines, or other activities of the gambling industry, to the extent that such funds can be identified
3. Requests the EcoJustice Committee to
 - distribute educational materials about all forms of gambling to the dioceses
 - maintain a watching brief on government sponsored gambling activities, with input from the dioceses and ecclesiastical provinces
 - collaborate with other denominations in monitoring and responding to gambling expansion in Canada.
4. Building on the position taken by the United Church of Canada in 1998, and on previous ecumenical statements of which the Anglican Church of Canada was part, calls upon the Government of Canada to
 - conduct a public and independent review of legal and illegal gambling in Canada and of its social, economic, and legal impact
 - make recommendations for public policy and for effective oversight of the gambling industry within the requirements of the Criminal Code, especially regarding electronic gambling
 - establish national standards for assessing gambling proposals, including economic, legal, and social-impact assessments

establish a single format for provinces to provide information on gambling and gambling-generated revenues to the Government of Canada and to the Canadian public, and require full annual disclosure of such information

establish an independent review of provincial gambling commissions and issue a public report on the findings, with particular attention to public decision-making about allocation of gambling-generated funds, public accountability, and standards of governance that serve the public interest.

BACKGROUND

In November 2002, the EcoJustice Committee proposed a gambling policy to the Council of General Synod that included a Statement on Gambling from ACIP, dated May 2002. CoGS requested the EcoJustice Committee to work with ACIP on a statement on gambling and to reconsider the "Request to Government" (section 4 above).

Consultation with the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples. In responding to the request from COGS, we discovered that one implication of a covenant relationship between the ACIP and the Anglican Church of Canada is to acknowledge the different histories, cultures, perspectives, and priorities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Anglicans.

The EcoJustice Committee considered whether to try to integrate its position with the ACIP Statement, or to submit parallel statements from each body. They decided to develop a parallel statement and try to identify points of commonality with ACIP. When ACIP was consulted at their February 2004 meeting, they did not find that they were in sufficient agreement with the statement and policy proposed by EcoJustice. It was their preference not to co-present a gambling resolution to COGS with EcoJustice, and to withdraw the ACIP Statement on Gambling at this time, and to consider future recommendations regarding responses to gambling abuses.

Therefore, the EcoJustice Committee proposes this policy on gambling in fulfilment of the work assigned to it by General Synod and CoGS over the past two triennia:

In November 1997, Council of General Synod referred the gambling issue to the Eco-Justice Committee, the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, and the Faith, Worship, and Ministry Committee "for discussion, assimilation of resource material, and submission of a preliminary report..." This request was the result of widespread concern about gambling expansion, changes in the

gambling industry, and its negative social and economic effects on our communities.

From 1998 to 2001, the EcoJustice Committee, in consultation with FWM staff, did a substantial amount of research on the gambling issue, prepared educational materials for diocesan and parish use, and drafted a resolution for consideration by General Synod. That resolution was deferred in order to give the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples more opportunity to develop its own position on gambling from an Indigenous perspective.

In July 2001, General Synod commended ACIP and EcoJustice for their commitment to consult and work jointly on the gambling policy and related educational materials, and supported their aim “to present to COGS by November 2002 the completed report and policy recommendations.”

In May 2002, the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples prepared a Statement on Gambling, based on careful reflection and a process of consensus. The EcoJustice Committee prepared a revised policy that included the ACIP Statement.

In November 2002, COGS considered the proposed policy in four sections. They received the “Statement on Gambling” of ACIP, requested the EcoJustice Committee to work with ACIP to develop a statement on gambling for the Anglican Church of Canada, and requested the EcoJustice Committee to monitor gambling activities and their social and economic impact on Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. The Context. Since 1946, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada has been consistently and unequivocally opposed to:

any form of gambling as a means of raising money for church purposes (GS 1949)

any extension of gambling opportunities in the public sector

any changes that exempt gambling for charitable or religious purposes from the Criminal Code.

There have been **significant changes in the gambling industry** in recent years:

In 1985, authority for gambling devolved from the federal to the provincial level, giving provincial governments and the charitable sector a veritable monopoly to operate and manage charitable activities.

Gambling was originally considered to be a criminal activity, regulated in the Criminal Code by the federal government. Over time, it was exempted in a limited way for charitable purposes. Under provincial legislation, however, “exemptions” have been broadly interpreted and gambling has rapidly expanded. Provincial governments now regard gambling as a painless source of revenue, and aggressively market it to the public.

State sponsored gambling places our governments, as both regulators and beneficiaries of the gambling industry, in a conflict of interest position.

Changing technology has contributed to the industrialization of gambling, and an increased capacity to cause harm. Not only are casinos, corner store lotteries, and Video Lottery Terminals occupying our public spaces and public consciousness, but electronic gambling is more efficient at exploiting people’s capacity for addiction.

Popular attitudes toward gambling have shifted from moral condemnation to tolerance or widespread acceptance.

The other concern is about **the social costs of gambling** – to individuals, families, and communities. According to Canadians Against Gambling Expansion (www.ccage.ca/social.htm):

Problem gamblers are estimated to be about 5% of those who gamble: people whose lives, marriages, families, careers are seriously damaged by gambling, and who are at risk of personal bankruptcy, family breakdown, divorce, job loss, depression, crime, suicide. Yet there is evidence that the gambling industry depends on this minority for the majority of its revenues.

Children and young people are especially susceptible. One study shows that gambling rates among youth in BC appear to be rising, and indicates that the prevalence of problem gamblers among adolescents is two to four times higher than that of adults.

The hidden economic costs of legalized gambling expansion are immense. In Canada, these costs include addiction treatment, higher policing and social servicing costs, bankruptcies, substance abuse treatment, and higher insurance costs.

Communities that bear the cost of gambling expansion through job loss and business decline in sectors overshadowed by the economic draw of ca-

sinos, from organized crime in the form of counterfeiting, money laundering, loan sharking, or drug trafficking, or individual crime in the form of theft, forgery, fraud, violence, break and enter.

2. Diocesan and Provincial Policies. Current Anglican diocesan policies on receiving gambling-generated funds range from outright prohibition, to “discouragement” of the practice, to allowing some level of discretion in the use of “small raffles or door prizes” for parish fundraising in a spirit of entertainment and community building.

The ecclesiastical provinces of Ontario and British Columbia have advocated against gambling expansion in their provinces on the grounds of the social cost of gambling addiction, especially given the highly addictive quality of Video Lottery Terminals

the moral dilemma imposed on charities and religious institutions forced to combine their compassionate role with an activity that is associated with greed, exploitation, and addiction

the abdication by provincial governments of their responsibility to “contribute fairly to the common good”.

3. Our Christian Witness. Anglican tradition invites us to reflect on gambling as an issue of public social responsibility, and not simply the moral conduct of individuals. Theological and biblical grounds that may be cited with regard to gambling include:

Stewardship – The resources of this earth and our talents to use them are gifts from God. We are most fully human when we accept and use the gifts with gratitude. Gambling tends to foster a culture of discontent, false desire, greed, and envy.

Community – God made us to live in loving, right relationship with creation and our fellow human beings. Gambling has the power to isolate, to put people in competition with others, to take advantage of human weaknesses and addiction.

Spirit – Gambling tends to appeal to base and selfish motives, exploit the human spirit, and block our creative destiny.

Justice – In scripture we learn that God “executes justice for the oppressed”, and “upholds the orphan and widow”. Gambling is a regressive form of taxation which preys on the vulnerable, and undermines the role of the state to contribute to the common good.

4. Acting Ecumenically. In 1998, the United Church of Canada adopted a landmark policy called “The Gambling Economy”. Their report critiqued federal and provincial law regulating gambling, the conflicted role of governments in driving the expansion of gambling, the involvement of the private sector in gambling, and the shift to using gambling losses rather than tax revenues as a means for funding public services.

That same year, leaders of the churches, including the Anglican Church of Canada, under the auspices of the Canadian Council of Churches, called on the federal minister of justice to conduct an independent review of state sponsored gambling in Canada. Six years later, this has not yet taken place.

5. Proposed Policy Changes

Gambling Expansion. The wording used here is taken directly from the gambling policy of the diocese of New Westminster.

Use of Gambling Generated Revenue. The existing policy of General Synod “stands against the use of gambling practices to raise money for any Church purpose” (GS 1949). The proposed resolution limits this policy to General Synod, identifies the range of gambling activities that generate revenues, and recognizes that the diffusion of gambling revenues does not always make it possible to know its source. The reason for opposing the use of gambling generated revenue is to strengthen the voice of General Synod in addressing the government of Canada on this issue.

The Government of Canada and Gambling. As an advocacy initiative of the national church, this policy deals with gambling as a matter for federal regulation under the Criminal Code. It calls on the Government of Canada to exercise its regulatory role vis-à-vis the provinces, whose aggressive interpretation of the *exemptions* of state-sponsored gambling from the Criminal Code has made the current gambling boom in Canada possible.

6. Pastoral Concerns. Recognizing that the abuse of gambling is also a pastoral issue, the EcoJustice Committee has prepared educational materials for use in dioceses and parishes. They are designed to help raise awareness of the problems posed by gambling and gambling expansion, and form appropriate pastoral responses. A series of discussion papers examine changes and expansion in gambling practices, types and nature of gambling, the effect on families and communities.