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Gambling

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Barnes said the Catholic Conference asks a basic question about gambling: "What is good for families and children?"

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany has been the most outspoken of New York's bishops about the casino amendment. Writing in the Jan. 4, 1996, edition of the diocesan newspaper, *The Evangelist*, he called the attempt to pass the measure "part of a nationwide mania" that elected officials see as a magic bullet for development — without seeing increases in crime, including organized crime, more compulsive gambling and actual damage to the economy that have been documented elsewhere.

Studies show, for example, that local revenue from casinos may not be dependable, casinos may require government spending on such services as roads, and some shift money from local businesses to themselves.

Among other outspoken Catholics on gambling have been the Florida bishops, who in 1994 opposed a state proposal to allow expanded gambling. Expressing concerns for low- and moderate-income people and public morality, they called it a "doubtful means to promote tourism" in a state rich in natural beauty.

And the Diocese of St. Cloud, Minn., in 1991 questioned any gambling to raise parish funds, partly because it was more dependent on luck than "the providence of God, the interdependence of membership and the deliberate self-sacrifice of individuals."

More and more state governments, however, are banking on "luck" to add to their coffers.

Robert Goodman states in his 1995 book *The Luck Business* that due to a "desperate political scramble" legalized gambling is proliferating as legislators adopt an "if-we-don't-our-neighbor-will" mentality. The professor directed the United States Gambling Study, funded by the Ford Foundation and the Aspen Institute Released in 1994, the study criticized gambling as a tool to revitalize communities.

"Do we really want our governments so dependent on gambling that they are forced actively to promote an activity that takes disproportionately from those who can afford it least, does great damage to

existing economies, and can be highly addictive?" he wrote.

The gambling movement as a whole "goes in fits and starts," according to William N. Thompson, professor of public administration at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas. In a telephone interview he said today "gambling is moving forward" and there's "no turning back."

More people visit gambling facilities than attend professional sports events, he said. Now gambling is available on the Internet. Recent studies showed 90 percent of the population questioned approved of legalized gambling; only 10-15 percent believe gambling is bad for everyone, he said.

More than \$550 billion is gambled each year in the United States, Thompson wrote in his 1997 book *Legalized Gambling*.

"One of the most profitable casinos in North America is Niagara Falls, Ontario," he said.

Because New Yorkers patronize such casinos outside the state as Casino Niagara, which opened in December 1996, as well as the Oneida Indian Nation's Turning Stone Casino east of Syracuse, which opened in July 1993 and is the only one in the state, he expects a continued push for commercial casinos in New York.

Father Walter Wainwright of St. Mary's in Candandaigua, for one, believes that the existing casinos have affected income from the parish school's bingo.

"It doesn't bring in as much as it used to," he said, "I think, because of the casinos." He added that he hears people talking about going to Turning Point and Niagara Falls casinos.

Although he doesn't have data to show that casino gambling has affected bingo income, Jim Rinefield, chief financial officer for the diocese, said he's been surprised at Turning Stone's draw from the Rochester area. Instinct tells him that if casinos came closer, he said, "we'd see a huge impact."

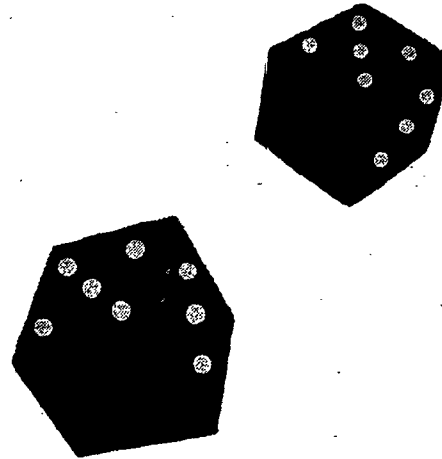
Church teaching

Most mainline Protestant churches oppose gambling, according to Thompson.

Of two main Christian views, he said, the Methodist-Baptist view "is officially totally opposed to gambling of all kinds, everywhere, end of argument."

On the other hand, the Catholic-Episcopal view is more one of situational ethics, he said.

A person may dispose of property how-



ever one wishes, according to the 1967 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, "so long as in doing so he does not render himself incapable of fulfilling duties incumbent upon him by reason of justice or charity."

"Gambling, therefore, though a luxury, is not considered sinful except when the indulgence in it is inconsistent with duty. Thus it can be sinful when a person has no right to risk the money he bets, either because it is not his own, or because he needs it for the support of his family" or other obligations.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that games of chance or wagers "are not in themselves contrary to justice." However, it warns, "They become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others. The passion for gambling becomes an enslavement. ..." (No. 2413)

The Rev. Duane Motley of Rochester, an independent Baptist in the New York anti-casino coalition, sees little good in even the forms of gambling the Catholic Church generally accepts. He describes bingo and lottery as introductions to heavy gambling.

"I certainly would be opposed to any legislation promoting any forms of gambling." He believes the Bible speaks against gambling, for example, in the Ten Commandments, that it is a form of coveting — though scholars note that gambling was often used in biblical stories to determine God's will.

The Rev. Motley also said Catholic pastors he knows seem concerned about their parishes' dependency on gambling.

Such pastors, he said, "realize they've got themselves in a compromising position. I have talked to several priests about it. A lot say they think they should not be involved

at all, but say 'We need to keep our school alive.' They say, 'We've been involved so long, how can we back out?'"

On that point, Father Wainwright acknowledged, "If somebody comes up with a better idea, I'm all for it."

However, he as well as other pastors noted that bingo is a large and enjoyable part of people's social lives.

Compulsive gambling

New York has the highest rate of residents — 7.3 percent — who have experienced a problem with gambling, according to a 1996 study for the New York Council on Problem Gambling. It has the second highest rate — 3.6 percent — of residents with current gambling problems.

They largely gamble weekly on lottery games, Quick Draw and sports; they spend the largest sums, however, on casinos, sports and parimutuel wagering.

A problem gambler can cost society at least \$9,500 a year for welfare aid, jail and court time, debts and bankruptcy, Thompson said.

"This is becoming a national issue. As gambling increases, so do compulsive gamblers," Thompson said. "There are a lot of potential compulsive gamblers but they aren't exposed to gambling."

Hoping for more support for the anti-gambling coalition, Rev. Motley urged, "The whole state has got to be concerned because a casino will draw from an approximate 100-mile radius. Everyone is impacted whether it is in their back yard or not."

The Compulsive Gamblers Treatment Program in Rochester has seen the effects of everything from bingo to casino gambling.

Dan Bertolone, a certified peer counselor associated with that Health Association program, described compulsive gamblers as people "who can't stand to be losing and are always trying to get even."

Even with bingo, the costs can quickly mount, he noted.

"People don't understand," he said. "You can spend \$100 to \$200 on bingo. It's not just buying a board and getting in there."

One Monroe County woman the program assisted had played bingo every day.

"She just couldn't stop," he said. As a result of the costs, she wasn't paying the mortgage, and her family almost lost their house. The woman has stopped gambling, he added, since seeing counselors and attending Gamblers Anonymous meetings.

Gambling is defined as an "impulse control disorder" by the American Psychiatric Association.

"This is one that can't be seen," observed Bertolone, a member of St. Charles Borromeo Church in Greece. But he said people may notice signs of such a compulsion: borrowing sums of money, talking on the phone a lot (with bookies), reading the newspaper (for sporting outcomes), and exhibiting mood swings and denial.

Bertolone said for help people may call the Compulsive Gamblers Treatment Program at 716/423-9490, or the state hotline at 1-800-437-1611.

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