

A Church Leaders' Letter Regarding Online Gambling

Signed by ELCIC National Bishop Susan C. Johnson, October 2010. Prepared by the Anglican Church of Canada on behalf of the signatories and sent to the leaders of all provincial and territorial governments.

To the Premiers of Canada's Provinces and Territories:

As Church leaders in Canada, we are concerned by an apparent move by several provincial governments towards online gambling as a means to increase revenues.

Atlantic Canada already has online gambling and the B.C. Lottery Corporation launched its online gambling website in July. Loto-Québec is expected to offer online gambling in September. Ontario has announced it will offer it by 2012, and Alberta government officials are watching as other provinces decide to try their luck at running online gambling sites.

While it may seem to be a source of new income for provincial coffers, online gambling is, in fact, a tax on sectors of society that can least afford more taxes. It also condones and promotes a serious form of addiction—one, in fact, that the same tax dollars that are increased by gambling must later be expended to treat.

We stand opposed to any gambling activity that in its scope or form negatively affects residents of any community, region, or neighbourhood.

Our concern focuses on two points:

The first is the detrimental consequences to individuals and our communities of these operations. We recognize the arguments that participation in gambling is a matter of free choice on the part of the individuals who see it as personal entertainment and recreation, and that to curtail these activities by law would limit the freedom of these individuals.

In addition, we do not lightly dismiss the arguments that large-scale gambling operations may bring economic benefits to communities in the form of employment and return on investments to local business owners.

But we must also recognize that gambling can be, and very often is, an addiction with severe consequences to the individuals involved, their families, and their communities. After careful consideration of the balance of these arguments, we find that as Christians we cannot 'wash our hands' of our responsibility to these vulnerable people, their spouses and children, and their neighbours.

We are, moreover, deeply troubled by an approach to generating governmental and charitable revenues from this source. An approach to government which targets a limited and often very vulnerable segment of the population for fiscal exploitation undermines one of the key principles of Christian Stewardship; that we all share a common responsibility to contribute fairly to the Common Good.

We urge provincial governments to:

1. Curtail, and eventually withdraw, the present policy of expanding the use of large-scale organized gambling to fund government and charitable programs;

2. Replace these gambling operations with revenues produced by fair systems of taxation which reflect our common responsibility for the good of the community; and
3. Ensure that the means are in place to deal with the consequences of these gambling operations to individuals, their families, and the community; and to pay for these costs out of the revenues of the gambling operations themselves, and not from the general public funds.

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