



Does the end justify the means? Churches and their use of revenue from gambling

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We can all agree that it is not conscionable to exploit people, especially those who are poor or less able to protect themselves from exploitation. But sometimes exploitation happens in ways that aren't as direct or apparent as, for example, children working in a sweat shop.

Churches, like many not-for-profit organisations, are often forced to operate and provide services on a shoestring and are usually on the lookout for ways to supplement a tight budget. That tight budget can make funding from pub charities look like mana from Heaven, without realising the price that is paid for receiving it. That price, however, isn't one paid by the church or the organisations that receive it, but by the people who have contributed to it, the people with gambling problems.

Research indicates that as much as 33% of the expenditure on gambling is from people with gambling problems.¹ Most recipients of funding from pub charities are blissfully unaware of where the money comes from, whose pockets it comes out of, and where it actually gets distributed in the community. It is estimated that 32,800 adult New Zealanders struggle with gambling problems.²

Their gambling problem, in turn, affects, conservatively, anywhere between 5-7 other people in their life (family/whanau, friends, co-workers). Electronic

gambling machines (the "pokies") represent the primary mode of gambling problems for between 85%-95% of people with gambling problems in New Zealand.

Churches and religious institutions are in the business of helping people, in a variety of ways, from spiritual issues to often very practical and mundane ones, so do they want to be in the position of accepting and using money that has been taken from those who can least afford it? Would the church accept funding from a tobacco company, knowing the harm caused by those products? Many organisations feel compromised and silenced by the receipt of gambling funds.

Gambling, with its false illusion of hope and riches, can lead to crime; it is addictive; it undermines a health philosophy of work, industry and savings; it attracts low income people who can least afford to lose money; it is another form of taxation on the poor; it can tear families apart; it can lead to suicide, child abuse or neglect, divorce and poverty.

In 2002 religious organisation in New Zealand received \$1.5 million from pokie trusts from six trusts who receive 60% of New Zealand's expenditure from the pokies. Churches are not in the business of contributing to harm, which means that they need to be cognizant of the harm caused by pokies in our communities and to their congregations.

Gambling money, is it morally neutral?

Gambling can lead to crime; it is addictive; it undermines a healthy philosophy of work, industry and saving; is an inappropriate way to earn money as it glamorizes money for its own sake; it attracts low income people who can least afford to lose money; it is another form of taxation on the poor; it goes against the practical requirements of philanthropy.⁵

Arguments used by churches and parishes for using gambling include: the ideology that money is morally

neutral.⁴ Money raised from an immoral activity such as gambling is seen as not in itself morally affected; and how much more so once separated from the immoral activity and transferred into a charitable trust, or the good work of the church requires money, even if the money is morally affected its use can be justified on the basis that it is being put to good use, and by using money from an immoral activity the church is seen to be redeeming it.⁴

The use of pokie money for

religious purposes can not make dirty money clean.

Pokie money comes from poor people and their dream of winning big to get them away from poverty. The hard facts are that it is often families from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are going without because of problem gambling.⁴

So, is it ethically or morally acceptable for churches to accept money which mainly consists of the losses from the poor?

1. R Brown & J Raeburn (2001) *Gambling, harm and health. Two perspectives on ways to minimise harm and maximise health with regard to gambling in New Zealand*. Auckland: Problem Gambling Committee of New Zealand & Gambling Studies Institute of New Zealand.
2. K Mason & R Arnold. Problem gambling risk factors and associated behaviours and health status: results from the 2002/03 New Zealand Health Survey. *NZMJ* 2007, 120(1257) .
3. PJ Adams. Assessing whether to receive funding support from tobacco, alcohol, gambling and other dangerous consumption industries. *Addiction*, 2007. 102: 1027-1033.
4. M Hewat. Should parishes and other bodies affiliated to the diocese of Waikato apply to gaming and liquor trusts for funding? 2004.
5. Seventh-day Adventist Church South Pacific. *A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective* URL <http://www.adventist.org.au> 2007.

For every \$1 that comes into a community organisation from a pokie-funded trust, foundation, society or club, \$3 has been lost from the community

TE RŌPŪ ĀWHINA MATE PETIPETI O AOTEAROA
**Problem Gambling Foundation
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The availability and promotion of gambling has diverted resources from other uses, particularly away from families.

Gambling or playing games of chance becomes morally unacceptable when it deprives people of the ability to provide for the basic needs of themselves or others.

We would prefer that the provision of vital social and community services was not dependent for their operation on income from gambling. The Government could do more to prevent this from occurring. Is winning at the expense of others an appropriate way to raise money?

While some people gamble for fun, those who can't afford to lose money are attracted to gambling as their only chance to obtain a large sum of money. It becomes another form of taxation on the poor. Christian concerns for the vulnerable, the weak, the oppressed and the poor are threatened by receiving pokie money.

Lotto attempts to normalize itself as a normal family activity through its TV advertisements. If families spend money on Lotto tickets, they may not be able to pay the power bill or spend it on 'real' family entertainment.

Gambling creates false hopes of winning big. Christians should not put their hope in wealth. We are careful not to use spiritual beliefs and as

The cost of associated crime, victim support and family breakdown damages our quality of life.

over riding factor in antigambling arguments. We present it as a community issue not a moral one.

Maintaining a roof over our worshippers' heads remains one of our biggest challengers and to date gambling money has been the easiest option.

PGFNZ fact sheets on fundraising show that there are other places to go for funds that are not from pokie trusts (<http://www.pgfnz.org.nz>).

The fact sheets available are:

[Alternative funding to pokie machines](#)

[Pokie machines, sponsorship & alternative funding in NZ](#)

[Who isn't a pokie trust? Funding options in NZ](#)

Church groups who refuse to accept money from poker machines trusts or similar groups where gambling generates the income: Anglican Action (Waikato), Child Poverty Action Group; Downtown Community Ministry (Wellington), Hamilton Combined Christian Foodbanks, Knox ST Columbia Presbyterian Church (Lower Hutt).

Alternative to pokie funding—the No Pokies register

Twenty charities have banded together and refused to accept the takings from pokie machines because they say the impact of gambling undermines their moves to help the needy.

While charities did good work with their share of \$300 million in pokie funds there was a bigger picture to be considered.

The bottom line is that much of this money is sourced from people with a gambling addiction that is likely to have played havoc with their social mental health.

Poor communities are hit hardest by losses on the pokies and other gambling. By choosing not to take 'tainted' money, these charities are acknowledging the harm caused by problem gambling.

NZ Herald 8 September 2006

Join the no pokies register at <http://www.gamblingwatch.org.nz/> and get some stickers to show your support, also you can use this as a fundraising strategy.



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