

*Contact your local news media to place local stories on the Bishops' letter, and write letters to the editor and op-ed pieces on the legislation and The United Methodist position.*

*Encourage members of your congregation, neighbors, family, and friends to contact their legislators*

## **PA Methodist Bishops Oppose Rendell's Video Poker Proposal: Urge Church Members to Contact, Governor, House Members**

HARRISBURG - Pennsylvania's United Methodist bishops are urging more than 450,000 church members to send legislators and Gov. Edward Rendell messages opposing video poker in restaurants, taverns and private clubs.

"Contact your legislator and Gov. Rendell. Tell them video poker goes against God's best intentions for Gods children," the bishops wrote in a pastoral letter to the denomination's 2,400 congregations in Pennsylvania. They released the letter today.

"Tell them to find better, more equitable ways to fund education. Tell them more gambling only hurts Pennsylvania," the bishops said, criticizing House legislation that would allow video poker and similar gambling in restaurants, taverns and clubs.

The bishops are Thomas J. Bickerton of Pittsburgh, Jane Allen Middleton of Harrisburg, Peggy A. Johnson of Philadelphia, and Susan W. Hassinger, of Albany, N.Y., whose area includes Northeastern Pennsylvania.

"The United Methodist Church believes 'gambling is a menace to society, deadly to the best interests of moral, social, economic, and spiritual life, destructive of good government and good stewardship,'" the bishops wrote, citing long-standing church law and scripture.

"Gov. Rendell's proposal to use profits from video poker to fund college scholarships is a terrible lesson to be teaching our young people... They gain from the government-sponsored losses of millions of persons. We expect more from our governmental leaders," the bishops wrote.

The letter will be read in churches, distributed in newsletters and posted on congregational and denominational Web sites, said Stephen Drachler, executive director of A United Methodist Witness in Pennsylvania.

"The church is like David versus Goliath on this issue," Drachler said of the bishops' effort. "We know we are up against many powerful and influential interests who want to place video lottery - video poker - machines in thousands of restaurants and taverns across the state. Goliath towers over us. The odds - pun intended - are against us. Like David, we're up for the battle."

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**See text of Bishops' letter below.**

**May 27, 2009**

**Grace and peace to all Pennsylvania United Methodists:**

As followers of Jesus Christ, committed to the principles of peace and justice that he sacrificed his life for, we come to you with this urgent concern and call to action. The General Assembly is considering legislation to dramatically change the character of communities across the Commonwealth. House Bill 1317 would allow video poker and similar forms of gambling in thousands of restaurants and taverns across the state.

We urgently ask all United Methodists and persons of good will to contact their legislators and Gov. Edward Rendell to oppose this legislation, as well as any other effort to expand gambling in Pennsylvania.

The United Methodist stance on gambling is clear: "Gambling is a menace to society, deadly to the best interests of moral, social, economic, and spiritual life, destructive of good government and good stewardship." (Paragraph 163.G 2008 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church)

Scripture tells us gambling is the wrong path to success. In 1Timothy, Chapter 6, verses 9-10, Paul writes: "Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble. Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after." (The Message)

Most gambling addicts begin betting innocently, but there is nothing innocent about gambling. From lotteries to horse racing, to slots casinos, gambling is state-regulated theft. Gambling pits people against each other, with many more losers than winners. Because of the computer-generated lure of fast-paced action, video poker is often called the crack cocaine of gambling. These machines are designed to trap players into getting in over their heads. Gambling addiction breaks down families, forcing bankruptcies, job losses, and crime.

Jesus' greatest commandment is to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. If we live this, then how can we let a neighbor lose everything to gambling? Research shows proximity to gambling increases the potential for gambling addiction. Imagine then, the negative effects of 20 mini casinos in nearly every neighborhood?

Gov. Rendell's video lottery proposal is a cynical approach to funding education. He has proposed using the profits from video poker to provide scholarships to Pennsylvanians attending our state-owned universities and community colleges.

This is a terrible lesson to be teaching our young people. It offers our students and their parents a false choice. They gain from the government-sponsored losses of millions of persons. We expect more from our governmental leaders. Unfortunately, too often they turn to gimmicks, or poor choices like gambling to fund basic state services.

This is the second time the governor has moved to use gambling as a major source of revenue for education. We strongly opposed Act 71 of 2004, which allowed the state to create slot machine casinos around the state, and use the proceeds to reduce property taxes.

Since the passage of Act 71, there seems to be a sense that more gambling is inevitable in Pennsylvania. We disagree. Speaking clearly with a united voice from across Pennsylvania, we believe our elected representatives will listen and act responsibly.

**Please contact your legislator and Gov. Rendell.** Tell them video poker goes against God's best intentions for God's children. Tell them to find better, more equitable ways to fund education. Tell them more gambling only hurts Pennsylvania.

Thank you for speaking out on behalf of all Pennsylvanians, whom are all God's children.

In Christ's Service,

*Thomas J. Bickerton*  
*Pittsburgh Area*

*Jane Allen Middleton*  
*Harrisburg Area*

*Peggy A. Johnson*  
*Philadelphia Area*

*Susan W. Hassinger*  
*Albany Area*

# *United Methodists and Gambling*

The United Methodist Church opposes gambling in any form.

The church's position is clear in the Social Principles (§ 163G of the 2008 Book of Discipline):

- v Gambling is a menace to society, deadly to the best interests of moral, social, economic, and spiritual life, destructive of good government and good stewardship. As an act of faith and concern, Christians should abstain from gambling and should strive to minister to those victimized by the practice.
- v Where gambling has become addictive, the Church will encourage such individuals to receive therapeutic assistance so that the individual's energies may be redirected into positive and constructive ends.
- v The Church's prophetic call is to promote standards of justice and advocacy that would make it unnecessary and undesirable to resort to commercial gambling-including public lotteries, casinos, raffles, Internet gambling, gambling with an emerging wireless technology and other games of chance - as recreation, as an escape, or as a means of producing public revenue or funds for support of charities or government.

Message Points adapted from 2008 General Conference Resolution on Gambling:

- Gambling is a menace to personal character and social morality.
- Gambling encourages the belief that work is not important, that money can solve all our problems, and that greed is the norm.
- Gambling fosters greed and stimulates the fatalistic faith in chance.
- Gambling breeds crime and poverty.
- Gambling destructs the interests of good government.
- Gambling serves as a regressive tax on those with a lower income.
- Gambling is bad economics and bad public policy.
- Gambling does not improve quality of life.

Pennsylvania is a prime example of the concerns that come from the rapid growth of gambling. Gambling offers a false choice to government - easy money without raising taxes. The lack awareness of the negative impact of gambling feeds the public's apathy.

The Church has a key role in helping persons to break free from unhealthy and damaging addictions such as gambling.

United Methodists should refrain from all forms of organized gambling - legal and illegal - carried on in our communities and should work to influence community organizations to develop forms of funding that do not depend upon gambling.

(Much of this material is adapted from the 2008 Book of Discipline, and 2008 Book of Resolutions)