

Knox Church Policy on Gambling

Preamble

The gambling continuum is far reaching – from raffles through to high stakes gambling in casinos. The problem gambler is susceptible to any form of ‘game of chance’ – the illusion of a quick way to gain wealth. Gambling for some is merely a source of entertainment using discretionary funding but increasingly those who become addicted to gambling are those who don’t have that discretionary funding and are therefore using money which should be used for supporting and providing for families or in some cases is stolen in order to support the addiction. Increasingly our society is becoming one based on cash-less technology. The degree of credit card debt is a significant issue and some use credit cards to take part in the lower forms of gambling such as lotto tickets and raffles. Should the church be party to encouraging this?

The Presbyterian Church has a strong tradition of advocating for initiatives which strengthen families and communities. With that philosophy in mind, the social and financial cost to the problem gamblers and their families would therefore outweigh any form of funding received from gambling irrespective of how minor.

We may or may not agree or like that Government appears to encourage gambling through its support for casinos, the trusts which exist to make funding available through grants financed from gambling, through to the low key practice of sweepstakes, lotto, and raffles but that is the way life is.

Where the church comes into conflict is where financing through grants from Gambling or raffles is used not for helping others, or education but for the glorification of its own buildings, and financing its existence. Just because the funding is available doesn’t mean we make use of it without giving careful thought and consideration to the message we, as part of the Presbyterian Church, are sending.

One doesn’t have to read the scriptures in any depth to discover numerous references to using ‘unjust’ money for the work of God. Such examples are Jesus’ actions on entering the temple to confront the tax collectors or the various references of taking from another to furnish one’s own requirements.

We at Knox have offered assistance to such groups as Gamblers Anonymous. We openly publicise that we accept all people which means we accept people into our midst who could have an issue with gambling addiction. Should we put temptation in their way? What message are we sending if on the one hand we support such groups as GA and then take money through ‘games of chance’ or funding from Gambling financed grants for our own use? It can be argued that raffles for instance are harmless but it is still a form of gambling.

However, funding assistance from Government departments is now nonexistent. Agencies such as the Lotteries Commission now handle the awarding of funding for projects. It is acknowledged that their source of finances is drawn from gambling related activities. While the church can take a stance about applying to organisations for assistance where the funding is derived from gambling pursuits, it has to be acknowledged that the Lotteries Commission funding is given to well deserving projects – medical research, and historic building maintenance. The funding supports projects which all people can benefit from. It is therefore suggested that Lotteries Commission Grant applications should be seriously considered for larger scale projects such as building development where a wide group of people can benefit.

Policy

1. That Knox will be sensitive to the serious problems gambling causes to vulnerable people and the effect on their families.
2. That Knox will continue to offer assistance to organisations who work to support problem gamblers to overcome their addiction
3. That Knox will not offer any 'games of chance' to those who attend functions held in its grounds/buildings or hosted by Knox.
4. That Knox will not receive funding derived from gambling to fund its day to day activities or property construction and maintenance.
5. That Knox should consider applying to the Lotteries Commission for funding for its large scale developmental projects which will benefit a wide range of people.