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GAMBLING AND THE CHURCH

The members of the Pastoral Council and Presbyteral Council of the Diocese of Winona have addressed the advisability of gambling-related activities in the church and church-related institutions. After reviewing a considerable amount of material and spending many hours discussing this issue, they have recommended that I issue the following statement:

Traditionally the church has said that in itself gambling is morally acceptable, assuming that there is no fraud involved and no laws are broken. Gambling is acceptable if it does not render one incapable of fulfilling one's duty to oneself or to others, if the money being risked is not needed for the support of one's family and if one's gambling is not contributing to a compulsion that is personally and socially damaging. When such a condition is present, then what was permissible becomes wrong, because of the circumstances.

In former times, gambling in church-related institutions was generally a recreational activity. It has escalated, however, to a point where proceeds from regularly-scheduled gambling activities have become a part of church budgets. The result is a situation of undesirable dependency.

We Catholics have a sacred responsibility and also a privileged opportunity to participate in the church's mission with loving, self sacrificing gifts of time, energy, talent and treasure which represent a share of our substance.

As a diocesan church, we are supportive of festivals, gatherings and celebrations which build community and raise funds. We consider gambling as a regular source of church income to be inappropriate. Dependence on gambling as a regular fund-raising activity detracts from the spiritual blessings received from sacrificial giving.

With the support of the diocesan Pastoral Council and Presbyteral Council, as your Bishop, I challenge the Catholic people of the Diocese of Winona to embrace sacrificial giving in our efforts to meet the financial and pastoral requirements of comprehensive ministry. This will require proportionate contributions by all members of our faith community. I invite our Catholic people to consider seriously the termination of all gambling operations which provide a substantial, ordinary income for religious and charitable ministries. Please consider seriously the termination of even those occasional activities in which there has been an attitudinal shift from recreation to profit.

To support the needs and missionary responsibilities of the church is only part of the reason we are asked to give. More important is the spiritual need of church members to make a genuine sacrifice to the Lord. Our gifts of money to the church are not simply financial responsibilities. They are spiritual ones. God, the Giver of all good gifts, shares His blessings abundantly with us. As stewards of those gifts, we respond in faith by returning a sacrificial portion for the works of God's kingdom on earth. Recreational gambling is not the answer to good stewardship. Stewardship with a dependency on gambling activities is not good stewardship.

Given at Winona, August 19, 1994.
Most Reverend John G. Vlazny
Bishop of Winona