



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH AND ISSUE 3 CASINO GAMBLING

For the fifth time in 19 years, The United Methodist Church and the Ohio Council of Churches are successfully mobilizing tens of thousands of voters from many faith communities to vote against casino gambling in Ohio. The gambling industry has mounted a well funded and deceptive marketing campaign to introduce predatory gambling into our neighborhoods. Issue 3, on the ballot in November, is a dangerous proposal which inserts new language into the Ohio Constitution, and creates a monopoly to run casinos in four Ohio communities. We call for an extensive effort to stop casino gambling from harming our citizens for these reasons:

Our position on gambling is consistent with our beliefs as United Methodists.

The United Methodist Church is very clear. Our Social Principles state that “gambling is a menace to society, deadly to the best interests of moral, social, economic and spiritual life and destructive of good government.”—2008 United Methodist Discipline, Paragraph 163.G. We also live by these Three Simple Rules from the founder of Methodism, John Wesley – Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God. Gambling does harm to families, economies, business and changes the fabric of life in communities.

Casinos create an illusion of free money.

The lingering economic downturn in our state and around the globe is frightening and devastating to individuals, families and institutions. There is incredible pressure on our state and community leaders to turn to the lure of casino gambling as the answer to our economic woes. We understand this. Noted economists call this “casino capitalism.” Casino capitalism contributes to an illusion of free money by preying on those least able to afford it. Across America, predatory gambling has helped create a culture based on financial gimmicks, false hopes and pure chance. This culture has led to and perpetuates the massive economic crisis we find ourselves in today.

Casinos do not bring positive economic development or create additional jobs.

This fact is documented once again in a report on the statewide economic and social factors of Issue 3 recently published by Ohio’s Hiram College. Casinos have the opposite effect by ultimately pulling money out of the local economy. This harms existing businesses and causes thousands of hard working citizens to lose their current jobs. The out of state companies that will operate these casinos will deplete the Ohio economy further as they take their profits elsewhere. Casinos ultimately lead to the loss of jobs and small businesses in the communities in which they are located.

Casinos are predatory by their very nature.

Casinos make windfall profits for their owners from the gambling losses of our most vulnerable neighbors, deriving much of their profits from the poor who spend more than they can afford to lose. Proximity to a casino also increases the levels of addiction. National studies indicate that people who live within 50 miles of a casino are twice as likely to become gambling addicts.

The social costs as a result of casino gambling will exceed revenue 3 to 1.

Let this sink in – for every dollar gambling generates, it will cost the taxpayers of Ohio three dollars in social costs. Problem gamblers ruin their lives and harm their families through increased debt, bankruptcy,

home foreclosures, divorce, spousal abuse, child abuse and suicide. Casino gambling always does more harm than good to families. This amendment is economic nonsense in a time when we most desperately need sound, sustainable economic policies.

Law enforcement will need increased budgets & manpower to manage higher crime rates.

Nationwide, studies of existing casinos and surrounding communities have consistently found that crime rates increase by 10% each year after a casino opens, including violent crimes against people. In addition, 40% of all white collar crime is rooted in the gambling industry.

The casino owners do not care about our state or our citizens.

The proponents of Issue 3, just like their predecessors, allege they want to operate casinos in order to help the citizens of Ohio. Nothing could be further from the truth. Their well crafted promises of economic development, jobs and millions in revenue are motivated by greed, not by good will. In reality, they are seeking extravagant profits for themselves and are fear-mongers, not benefactors.

It is bad public policy to allow for-profit casino interests to write their own section of the Ohio Constitution.

Yet, this is precisely what they have done. They wrote the language in the proposed amendment and they paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to gather signatures to place their self-serving proposal on this November's ballot. Their language not only grants them an exclusive monopoly on casino gambling for all time, it also dramatically limits the ability of the Ohio General Assembly to regulate their activities. The amendment specifically prohibits our state government from controlling the days or hours of operation, the size of the bets or even the types of gambling that will be allowed.

The language of the constitutional amendment is frightening and has loopholes.

In fact, the language states these monopolies can inflict on our citizens any type of gambling that is currently allowed in any other adjoining state or any new types of gambling these states may experiment with in the future, including live sports betting. These casino interests even dictated the maximum amount they will pay in taxes and wrote in an amount that is dramatically lower than in some of the surrounding states. Other language in the amendment creates a loophole stipulating they will not pay any taxes when cash is directly used to place the bets.

We understand that the gambling industry is well organized and well funded to exploit the current economic pain and fear experienced by so many Ohioans. Issue 3 is not about jobs. It is about altering the very fabric of our life together. That is why Ohio citizens have voted consistently and overwhelmingly against bringing predatory casino gambling into our communities each of the previous four times this has been on the ballot.

We urge every United Methodist congregation in Ohio to be a public witness against Issue 3. There is no legal prohibition against churches taking a stance on ballot issues. Please join us in this endeavor as we abide by our Social Principles and live out our Three Simple Rules – Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God.

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