

STATEMENT ON COMMERCIAL GAMBLING

BY

LOUISIANA'S CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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We the Catholic Bishops of Louisiana have repeatedly opposed the recent proliferation of legalized commercial gambling. In 1986 and 1992 we voiced strong opposition because of the inevitable, moral consequences for individuals, families and community which result from easy access to gambling, such as casinos and video poker machines.

The recent special session of the Louisiana Legislature was not successful in adopting legislation that would automatically eliminate or curtail commercial gambling. It did, however, pass legislation that enables us as citizens to determine whether we want this type of business in our own communities. Gambling issues will appear on election ballots on Sept. 21 and Nov. 5, 1996.

Our opposition to commercial gambling is clear. Some people wonder whether we are consistent when we tolerate church-based games of chance. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* helps us to highlight the difference: "Games of chance (card games, etc.) or wagers are not themselves contrary to justice. They become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others. The passion of gambling risks becoming an enslavement . . ." Thus, *recreational games of chance* which provide social entertainment as well as fund-raising for charitable and educational purposes are morally acceptable when practiced in moderation.

As Bishops, we have stated in 1986 and again in 1992 the difficulty with commercial gambling: "We fear casino gambling will have a particularly detrimental effect on family life which has already suffered severely from other factors in our society. The financial benefits in terms of tax revenues from casino gambling also must be weighed against other factors. These factors include the financial drain on families and the community, the erosion of industriousness and responsibility of individuals." A recent report to the Legislature by the Louisiana Compulsive Gambling Study Committee has validated our concern. More than 150,000 of our citizens have gambling problems and more than 50,000 are "pathological gamblers." Results such as these must certainly involve personal tragedy and the disruption of family life. Moreover, recent exposés provide ample evidence that video poker opens the door to the corruption of our public officials. Commercial gambling also makes us vulnerable to organized crime.

As Bishops, therefore, we give our support and endorsement to any legislative proposal which would effect the elimination or curtailment of gambling in the form of casinos or video poker machines.

Bishops of Louisiana

The Most Rev. Francis B. Schulte

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