

Minister's Message – October 2007

No Horses, No Pokies, No Raffles

The lot of the gambler has not been a happy one in recent days. The gaming 'industry' is at a low ebb; even the government is worried that state revenue will be down. A microscopic virus has stopped the horses from racing, leaving gamblers up in the air. Where will they spend their money next weekend?

Even the iconic Melbourne Cup is under a cloud. The horse race that brings our nation to a halt, the horse race for which we get a public holiday, may not go ahead. We are the only nation on earth that has a public holiday for a horse race. We are the greatest gamblers on earth. The majority of our population will gamble on Melbourne Cup day – yes even the 'harmless' office sweep is gambling.

Many who call themselves Christians think nothing of having a bet on the 'big race'. Lack of discernment with regard to gambling is rife in many churches. However, the Anglican Church has recently called for church raffles to cease – a belated but welcome move. Many continue to fund church activities through raffles, bingo and other 'games of chance' or gambling. Gambling often starts with the church or school raffle, or the small slot machine at the supermarket. Many a problem gambler will tell you this.

Those who run the gambling industry are always ready to defend their 'industry'. It is difficult to call gambling an industry for it produces nothing and destroys many lives. Yet some also seek to make prostitution respectable by calling it the 'sex industry'. Trafficking of poor women is part of this industry.

One Sydney sport's club has decided to remove hundreds of poker machines from its club. But how will it survive as a business without these machines? Many think it will not be possible. How shameful it is if a business cannot survive without gambling. Clubs get millions of dollars from poor people through their poker machines and turn around and say that they are helping the community. They give money back to the community because they have to by law. They fund facilities that are often accessed by richer people. Truly gambling is a means of transferring money from the poor to the rich!

What about our government? Gambling is condoned and promoted by the government because we have come to rely on lotteries, scratchies, and the like for state revenue. To cover up the epidemic of personal and family destruction caused by gambling they fund 'help lines' for 'problem' gamblers. When will we stop to consider the immense benefits that would flow to our society if gambling was discouraged and even outlawed? After all it is illegal to play 'two-up' except on one day of the year!

Most societies in the world exist without the level of gambling that we have. Of course there are many that are ravaged by bribery. We vigorously condemn any form of bribery, but the effect of bribery is the same as gambling. The poor suffer as their money is siphoned off to the rich.

The second commandment that Jesus gave is 'love your neighbour as yourself'. To love your neighbour means you seek to help, not harm, the other person. The money you **by chance** gain from gambling has come from someone else's loss. You do not know that person and so feel no concern, but it is someone nevertheless. The Bible tells us to *work and eat our own bread* (II Thessalonians 3:12). Extortion through bribery is sin (Exodus 23:8), as is extortion through a game of chance.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon