

What's On Your Mind?

May congregations or church courts apply for grants from the gaming industry?

Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office

Every now and then I'm asked if it is permissible for Presbyterians to apply for grants from the gaming industry.

In Ontario, for example, people apply to the provincial government's Trillium Foundation that is funded by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation (OLG). According to the OLG website, over \$100 million is distributed annually through the foundation. The British Columbia Lottery Corporation provides what it calls "gaming grants." Other provinces have similar gaming and lottery corporations with grant application opportunities.

Sometimes I sense those asking the question are hoping I'll say, "Sure, go ahead!" because they know the grants can be substantial and go a long way toward financing worthwhile projects.

In 2002, the General Assembly was asked to clarify "if it is appropriate for congregations to apply for and receive funds from foundations/agencies whose income comes from gambling." The request was referred to the Life and Mission Agency (Justice Ministries) in consultation with the Committee on Church Doctrine. (See *Acts and Proceedings 2002*, p. 523, 23.)

In 2003, the report to the General Assembly noted that the church's position on gambling and lotteries was set out in 1954 (80th General Assembly), 1973 (99th General Assembly), 1990 (116th General Assembly) and 1999 (125th General Assembly). Each Assembly stated the church's opposition to lotteries and all forms of gambling. Ultimately the following recommendation was adopted by the 2003 General Assembly:

That congregations and all courts of the church be urged to resist participation in

gambling through applying for and receiving funds from government foundations or agencies whose primary source of funds are revenues from gambling; the 129th General Assembly reaffirms The Presbyterian Church in Canada's opposition to lotteries and gambling in all its forms and instructs congregations to resist vigorously participation in gambling through applying for or receiving funds from government foundations or agencies whose primary source of funds are revenues from gambling. (See *Acts and Proceedings 2003*, p. 368, 43.)

Most would acknowledge three realities. (1) There is a dangerous and addictive risk associated with gambling. (2) Many can buy an occasional lottery ticket or visit a casino for fun without becoming addicted. (3) It is impossible, in our society, to live untouched by lottery money. For example, most hospitals have benefited from lottery-funded grants.

Is there a distinction between actively participating in gambling and passively benefiting from lottery money invested in our society? That's something to ponder. Meanwhile, the church has stated that Presbyterians are to resist applying for or receiving funds from government foundations or agencies whose primary source of funds are gambling revenues.

Blessings,

Don Muir

*For Further Information, see
Social Action Handbook - Book Three:
Community - Gambling and Lotteries*

What's on your mind?

Do you have a question about the polity of our church? Are you confused by something that happened at session, presbytery, synod, or General Assembly? Puzzling over a section of the *Book of Forms*?

Send your questions to The Rev. Don Muir and he will strive to answer them in future issues of *Equipping for . . . Elders* in a manner that maintains confidentiality and seeks to be helpful to the church at large.

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