

General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church

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I thank the Committee on Human Resources for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church. The United Methodist Church has for many years expressed its opposition to gambling. Our doctrinal statements known as The 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. As an act of faith and concern we call Christian to abstain from gambling and to minister to those victimized by the practice.”* Furthermore we call *“The Church to promote standards =and personal lifestyles that would make unnecessary and undesirable the resort to commercial gambling as recreation, as an escape, or as a means of producing public revenue or funds for support of charities or government.”* (United Methodist Social Principles ¶162G)

We are alarmed at the expansion of gambling and, more specifically, the proliferation of off-reservation casinos and casino proposals. We believe that off-reservation casinos are having devastating effect on intertribal relations, tribal to community relations.

In addition, to our historic position on gambling we have strongly supported the self-determination of American Indian people and continue to support good legislation that supports American Indian people. Gambling and legislation to expand it is a grave moral concern. Because of the United Methodist’s public witness on gambling we are on countless mailing lists for groups opposed to gambling. We believe that off-reservation casinos have fostered an anti-sovereignty climate, which is growing. We find the increase in anti-sovereignty and anti-Indian racist rhetoric by some of these groups alarming. We do our best to counteract the positions of these groups at every opportunity, but, the careless disregard for communities and children in promoting off-reservation casinos, some in the poorest of areas, makes this very difficult. It is simply unacceptable that tribes propose to build casinos with little or no regard for their social cost on a community.

I am a United Methodist and also a Seneca. These proposals are antithetical to my tribe’s traditional beliefs. My grandmother taught me that I am a member of an immediate family, I as a member of an extended and tribal family, and I am a member of a global family. This concept is not foreign to most American Indian people. Yet, when did we stop caring about the rest of the world, and only care about ourselves and our best interests alone? It is not in the best interest gamblers to gamble away their hard-earned dollars. The numbers of people who gamble are disproportionately poor, lower income, or seniors on fixed incomes. Gambling takes money away from the people who need it the most. Is this the way states, communities, and tribes want to balance budgets. Is this good stewardship of the gifts God has given us?

Furthermore, there are other American Indian opposed to the off-reservation and even on-reservation casinos but they fear retribution. This has happened in my own family. Our family

opposed the casinos our tribe proposed. My family endured death threats, bodily harm, intimidation tactics and outright ostracization for our public stand. The struggle of our tribe is not unique from other tribes. The split between pro and anti-casino groups splits the community, divides churches on the reservation, and even divides families. In my own home church it has even physically split the church. When we worship, anti-casino people sit on one side of the church and the pro-casino people sit on the other side of the church. Is it any wonder that American Indian people opposed to Indian gambling are afraid to speak up?

The United Methodist Church believes that American Indian people bring gifts to the world. They have taught people who came to this country how to live, how to survive, how to care for the earth and its people. It is critical, at this time, American Indian people/tribes not allow the temptation of greed overwhelm the gifts that have allowed American Indians the ability to survive and maintain their traditions.