

27 November 2020

Dear friends across our Synod,

The reason for a Pastoral Letter is often a profound and particular event, such as the bushfires which ravaged the end of last year and the beginning of this one. Many scars remain, up and down our state and beyond. Our church – and our community – responded, with mercy and generosity.

Not all the challenges we face are so self-evident, or so sudden. There are issues that despite being hidden, still have a devastating impact in our communities. Gambling is one such issue.

Australians lose more in gambling per person than any other country in the world and by far the biggest losses - \$12.5 billion every year – is through poker machines.

Yet gambling is often hidden, shrouded in shame, wounding our communities.

Social problems that are fuelled or exacerbated by gambling problems – relationship breakdown, children going hungry, depression and sometimes domestic violence and suicide – have all been made worse during this pandemic. People are even more isolated.

We need to act. This is why we have joined with Wesley Mission and the Alliance for Gambling Reform to urge and equip people in our Congregations to learn more about this issue, how it impacts your neighbours, your community and how you can respond.

I am encouraging you to pray and to consider how your Congregation can be part of the effort to break this cycle of silence and shame. We can be havens for people struggling with gambling and their families; we can send our political leaders a message demanding gambling reform that cannot be ignored.

Friends, this is a long game. Acting on gambling in your local community will be new and challenging for many Congregations and you may not always be praised for speaking out. Notwithstanding this, Churches from all denominations are engaging right now.

I am reminded of Paul's exhortation in Galatians 6:9, "Let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

As you learn more about this issue, I would ask that your church does four key things.

PRAY: Please commit this issue and your church's involvement in it to prayer

SPEAK: Be prepared to speak out on this issue, to break the cycle of silence and shame and to become a welcoming place for those suffering as a result of gambling problems.

ENGAGE: Speak to people in your community, approach your local council to share together the impact gambling is having in your community.



Uniting Church
SYNOD OF NSW & ACT

CAMPAIGN: Write to, or visit, your local State parliamentarian to urge them to act. There are details on how your congregation can do this here.

https://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/nsw_unitingwesley_act .

I encourage you and your church to join with me in this important effort. I look forward to sharing more information on this effort with you shortly

We are not serving our communities if we don't raise our voice. This is about families, about community, about justice, about healing. This is about living out our hope.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Rev. Simon Hansford

Moderator

Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW & ACT

We are providing resources for church to learn more about this issue here:

https://www.pokiesplayyou.org.au/nsw_unitingwesley

You can watch the conversation between Rev. Keith Garner, Rev. Tim Costello and me, when we discuss this important issue here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAybXEmXPQA&feature=youtu.be>