

Sept. 19, 2008

Archbishop's commentary on gambling on Guam

For Pacific Daily News Editorial Page

Attention Dion Tamondong

(572 words)

By Archbishop Anthony Sablan Apuron  
Metropolitan Archbishop of Agana

Proponents of the recent gambling initiative continue to dress up something ugly in our community with promises of “good” things for Guam. However, one simply cannot cleanse the damaging allure of organized gambling by attaching phrases like “responsible gaming” to this vice.

I repeat what I have said in numerous public messages in the past: Gambling is and has long been an ugly problem that stains our beautiful island.

One just has to look at the many gambling parlors that have taken root in our community and the people who flock to them squandering their money often into the early morning hours.

We all know gambling is a problem on our island. Why feed this beast? Why increase gambling even more?

Instead of spending resources, time and energy trying to strengthen gambling on Guam, we should work to decrease this debilitating social vice.

Today, when so many people are suffering hardships ranging from physical illness, economic difficulties, domestic disputes and psychological problems such as depression and suicide, our society needs to look within its heart and examine its collective conscience for ways to help – not further harm its people.

Caring for our brothers and sisters means caring for ALL people. Not just our immediate neighbors, not just ourselves!

If we know that gambling brings heartache, loss of money, domestic fights and crime to our residents, should we merely look the other way as we subject tourists to the same threats and say, “it’s OK, because after all they are only visitors ... it’s their problem?”

The visiting priest/economist that pro-gambling people brought to Guam himself cited negative social effects that come with gambling such as addiction, crime, and divorce.

What price tag does one put on a broken marriage? What percentage of addiction is acceptable for our community ... or for the visitors we welcome to our island?

Should we also become complacent and allow new gambling institutions to establish footholds here with so-called premises that they would restrict participation to tourists only? Crime, addiction and other problems that big time, organized gambling generate do not make distinctions between locals and visitors.

Is this the image we want? Is positioning our beautiful island as a gambling paradise of the Pacific really the reputation and legacy we want to forge for our future generations and ourselves?

Gambling is not a wholesome, family-oriented activity. Not for our people. Not for our guests. That is why youth and minors are not allowed. It is a vice, an ugly one.

Today, I reiterate what I have stated in the past. After the defeat of an earlier gambling initiative in the last general election, in a full-page open letter published in the Pacific Daily News Nov. 15, 2006, I urged our newly elected officials to introduce legislation for discussion, passage and signage which would make Guam a “gambling free” community.

I also called for strict enforcement of existing laws on illegal gambling machines. In 2007 and 2008 I repeated those statements and last July commended our new Attorney General for her courage in shutting down existing illegal machines.

I again call upon our leaders to take action to stop the increase of organized gambling on island and pass legislation to diminish existing gambling on island.

We need to decrease organized gambling on Guam, not increase it! The Catholic Church on Guam stands steadfast against the further growth and proliferation of this ugly problem.

Most Rev. Anthony Sablan Apuron, OFM Cap. D.D.  
Metropolitan Archbishop of Agana