

Problem Gambling Awareness Week Goes to Church

I just could not let this week pass without telling you that today is the final day of National Problem Gambling Awareness Week. Yes I realize that this is a “Faith Column,” but sadly nearly every problem in society impacts the church. The church is often a hospital for the hurting.

This year the WV Problem Gamblers Help Network mailed out over 3,000 brochures to churches across the state to address this issue. There is a trend nationally to include the church in health messages. Sometimes gambling addicts are sitting in the pews. Often the gambler’s loved ones are speaking with clergy about how to help their addicted relative.

Clergy are regularly called upon to provide for the addict’s family financially. They are also a regular provider of emotional support. Clergy also preach funerals for those who have lost all hope and commit suicide from this or other addictions.

Many churches across the state offer places for 12-step programs such as Gamblers Anonymous to meet. Locally Mt Olivet United Methodist Church, Wheeling Jesuit University, and the Unity Center offer meeting places for G.A. Metropolitan Baptist Church in Wheeling and the East Richland Friends Church in St. Clairsville also offer Christ centered recovery programs for addictions.

Pathological Gambling is a strange disorder. Those with this addiction are triggered by money. When a pathological gambler has money in their possession it is much like an alcoholic having a refrigerator full of beer. One difference in these addictions is that an alcoholic doesn’t expect the next beer to literally fix his or her problem. Gamblers chase their losses and expect their next hit to repair the financial devastation.

I’m constantly encouraging those new in their recovery to not carry cash or ATM cards. I encourage them to purchase gas and grocery gift cards instead. Some of my clients gamble away every dollar and do not even have gas money to get to work at times.

Do you or your loved one have a gambling problem? The Problem Gamblers Help Network of WV invites you to take quiz below:

1. You have tried unsuccessfully to control, cut back or quit.
2. After losing money, you return as soon as possible to get even.
3. You lie to family members, friends, or others about your gambling.
4. You need to bet more and more money each time you gamble.
5. Gambling helps you escape your problems or bad feelings.
6. Others have provided you money as a “bail out” for financial problems.
7. You often think about gambling.
8. You have jeopardized relationships, educational or career opportunities.
9. You have committed illegal acts such as forgery or theft, to get money to gamble.
10. You feel restless or irritable when you try to cut back or quit.

If you or a loved one have experienced any of these symptoms, you may have a gambling problem. Free confidential help is available for both the gambler and their loved ones. I invite you and/or your loved one to call my office directly at 304-214-1234 to receive a free NLT Life Recovery Bible at your first appointment. There is healing in God's Word. For additional help you may call 1-800 GAMBLER in WV or 1-800-522-4700 outside of WV or visit www.ncpgambling.org.

Although gambling addictions can cause many heart aches for the gambler and their families, I've seen good things happen in recovery. Some in recovery have richer family relationships. Most importantly, many have realized that they cannot recover in their own strength and they finally embrace Christ as Lord.