

# GAMBLING

**SERIES: TAKING A STAND**

**EXPLORING THE ARMY'S INTERNATIONAL POSITIONAL STATEMENTS**

*Members of the International Moral and Social Issues Council (IMASIC) reflect on The Salvation Army's International Positional Statements.*

## STATEMENT OF POSITION

The Salvation Army is opposed to gambling. The nature of gambling lends itself to exploitative, deceptive and manipulative practices. It is contrary to Christian principles of love, freedom from oppression and concern for others.

As such it should not be a means of income generation or economic development, whether by government agencies, charitable organisations, churches or commercial interests.

Download the complete International Positional Statement on Gambling at [salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips](http://salvationarmy.org/isjc/ips)

**T**HE GREAT American president George Washington understood the sad effect of gambling and declared, 'Gambling is the child of avarice, the brother of iniquity and the father of mischief'. Gambling in general – whether it is online betting, casinos, raffles or lotteries – has the potential to be addictive, with countless negative behavioural effects on the gamblers and their close contacts.

Gambling is a major problem in many countries around the world. While it appears to be victimless, many families greatly suffer from the effects of gambling. For example, among some 450 million people living in South America and the Caribbean, more than 300 million are eligible to gamble. This enticing market is amassing billions of dollars yearly in revenues while leaving behind a hefty trail of poverty and despair.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a sharp increase in online betting. Millions of people, confined to home and with a lot of free time for leisure, have fallen prey to online gambling and blockchain technology. We must all take heed of the words of Paul to Timothy: 'But mark this: there will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God' (2 Timothy 3:1-2, 4).

Greed is the primary driver of gambling. Casino owners are often caught discussing ways to lure customers. They look for innovative ways to trick and manipulate players to stay longer in the game. In many places, free drinks and inexpensive foods are offered, while the clocks are removed to entice vulnerable people to overspend.

The pleasure of enriching oneself at the detriment of others is condemned in the Bible. We are called to love our neighbour as ourselves. Taking advantage of the vulnerable through tricks and mischief is wickedness at its core.

The Bible instructs us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). We are called to have empathy for others. In gambling we take advantage of those who weep. The words of Paul in Philippians 2:4 admonish us not to look out for our own interests but for those of others. As we seek justice together, let us lift each other up and support each other as members of the divine family. »



**FOR REFLECTION**

- \* In your cultural setting, how can you best communicate the challenges of gambling and betting?
- \* Comment on the fact that the effects of gambling impact not only one person or one family but multiple people and families, even whole communities.
- \* How does 'the priesthood of all believers' relate to 'every Salvationist is a community change agent'?

## “The Salvation Army seeks to support gamblers and their families through the provision of education, counselling and rehabilitation programmes ...”

### THE OASIS PROGRAMME IN NEW ZEALAND

The International Positional Statement on Gambling states: 'The Salvation Army seeks to support gamblers and their families through the provision of education, counselling and rehabilitation programmes.' An outstanding example for that is the Oasis programme of The New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa Territory. Oasis centres across the territory provide information and education, confidential counselling, comprehensive assessment and referrals (if required) to specialist services including legal and budgeting advice and crisis intervention – all free of charge.

People with gambling and related problems are empowered to make positive choices for a healthy lifestyle. Experts deal with the needs of problem gamblers and those affected – family, partners or friends. They offer support and help reduce gambling harm through self-reflection techniques and the use of creative and research-based therapies.

Oasis also runs a website ([oasis.salvationarmy.org.nz](http://oasis.salvationarmy.org.nz)) with many resources, videos and stories of change, and operates a free hotline. A special focus is on online gambling with the offer of tools such as online gambling blockers to help limit access.

Oasis is also involved in community-based approaches to gambling harm. For example, they participate in the Gambling Harm Awareness Week (GHAW), a national campaign that runs each year during the first week of September. The theme for 2019 was 'Take time out from gambling, put time into *whānau* (extended family). GHAW is an opportunity to reflect on gambling behaviour and that of friends, family and community

WATCH AN OASIS VIDEO ON  
[youtu.be/DvtWFghs6g0](https://youtu.be/DvtWFghs6g0)

### SOME KEY GAMBLING STATISTICS

- The global market for online gambling reached around US\$45.8 billion in 2017.
- In the UK, the total gross gambling yield for 2017-18 was estimated at £14.5 billion and in Canada, in 2017, CAN\$17.3 billion.
- According to many studies, the average Australian gambler spends more money on gambling than in any other nation – more than AUS\$1,200 per adult each year. That's not that surprising when you consider that over 80% of Australian adults are said to be gamblers, which is also the highest rate in the world.
- A 2010 study showed that Singapore was close behind Australia. But no other nation spends half as much per adult on gambling, with nations like Ireland, Canada and Italy all spending under US\$600 per adult per year on betting.
- In the UK, studies show that nearly 75% of adults gamble from time to time, and 85% of American adults are said to have gambled at least once in their lifetime.

FOR MORE INFORMATION  
[gambling.net/statistics.php](http://gambling.net/statistics.php)





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### PERSONAL REFLECTION

My experience of growing up in my native land of Haiti in the 1970s and working as a youth leader and community organiser with young people has taught me that gambling is not a godly entertainment, but rather a trap that destroys people, families and society. Countless people, particularly youths, have suffered tremendously from that malady. I remember how one of my best friends in high school was forced to repeat a class because his father had gambled the money earmarked for his school fees and had lost. The setback had lasting effect on the youngster, and it took years for him to recover.

The life of Jesus was sacrificial and from his teaching we received the mandate to love not only our friends and close relatives, but all those we meet, regardless of race, creed or aspirations. Gambling tends to erode our love for our neighbours and compels us to rob them for selfish gains.

My love for service as a Christian and a Salvation Army officer has led me to study the life of Frederik Derby from Suriname. Derby was devoted to the fight against the forces of darkness in his country. This fight included the rejection of gambling. It was not an easy decision for this trade unionist and politician. Along with 15 other freedom fighters, Derby was arrested for his beliefs on the night of 7 December 1982. All were executed the very same night except Frederik Derby, who miraculously escaped. This outstanding public servant died

of a heart attack on 19 May 2001, shortly before he was scheduled to stand as a star witness against his captor.

Derby immortalised his passion by saying, 'We do not want a country that believes in gambling and does not believe in hard work.' His devotion to human dignity and his character have impressed and influenced me greatly, to the point that when I visited Suriname in 1995, shortly before I entered training to become an officer, I inquired further about his work.

The Bible warns us against greed: 'Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears; wealth from hard work grows over time' (Proverbs 13:11, *NLT*). Despite this, many churches are using some of these 'schemes' for fundraising purposes on the pretext that it is for charitable causes. This is counterproductive and can lead people to addiction which is difficult to overcome.

In our first overseas appointment, one year after our wedding, my wife Joan and I were sent to Sint Maarten, Netherlands West Indies, a beautiful Caribbean island, to pioneer the work of The Salvation Army. We spent five years of fruitful ministry as servants of Jesus. One of our great challenges was to stand against betting activities that were justified in the name of fundraising. As a freshly commissioned young couple, we had to stand our ground through the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit in order to lay a strong foundation for the Army, based on biblical principles and Christian ethics, which prevails to this day.

### PERSONAL REFLECTION

As I think of my personal perspective on gambling, it strikes me that I know personally of no one who suffers from addiction to gambling. That says something about the privileges and somewhat isolated world that I live in as a Salvation Army officer. A bit more than four per cent of the Swedish population have problems related to gambling. On top of that, there are far more family members who are co-dependent and suffer from someone else's addiction.

It has hardly escaped us that the isolation, and perhaps boredom, caused by COVID-19 has triggered abusive and harmful behaviour. Restricted to their homes people have discovered the world of gambling sites online. Although our government wants to limit deposits on gambling accounts to 5,000SEK (about £430 or US\$540) per week, this will only make the road to ruin longer.

While Salvationists hopefully stay true to their covenant and keep out of obvious gambling offers, we need to be aware of the deceptive approaches that are all around us. The wolf of gambling is clothed in sheepskin in various ways. Two deceptive examples are most obvious to me.

- Entertainment on TV. Winning large amounts of money by answering questions still triggers the hope of gaining a lot for a small cost. I personally don't want to watch these programmes, as they build the whole drama around the fact that people are attracted to money. It is the enticement of Mammon.





**COLONEL DANIEL RAJU DASARI**  
Territorial Commander  
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- Buying lottery tickets to support a good cause. The Postcode Lottery exists in several countries in Europe and elsewhere. In Sweden, there are 56 organisations who receive funds from this lottery. The company wants it to look as if you buy a ticket to support these fine organisations and, on top of supporting this good cause, you can become rich. But the Postcode Lottery is first of all a profit-making company. The owner and the managing directors earn huge amounts of money.

I assume that there are Salvation Army ministries in the world whose mission is to help people be free from the addiction of gambling. I admire that and we could probably do more. However, I personally see an important mission for each one of us: to help people see through the deceptive introduction to gambling which presents itself as entertainment and support for a good cause.

### PERSONAL REFLECTION

In India, gambling exists in many forms and it may be surprising to know that many people are involved in betting, but they think what they are doing is not gambling. Some look at it as a game, fun or a leisure activity, unaware that it is a slow poison which bankrupts their families.

In most villages in India, groups of people secretly meet to play cards, hold cockfights, pigeon races and various other local games and put their money, properties, assets, house, etc, up for betting. Cockfights are very popular in several parts of India and a lot of money changes hands.

Such gambling is a dangerous habit, but some people are involved more widely and in bigger ways by betting on horse and bullock racing, football and cricket, or even on election results. Many are also regular gamblers at casinos. This social evil leads to money laundering, corruption, murder, kidnapping and other crimes, and to fights between individuals, families and groups. With the active participation of politicians, millions of rupees are believed to change hands in the gambling industry.

In India, Salvation Army ministry is very strong in villages. The corps officer is a well-known and respected person in every village. Their ministry is considered sacred and their influence in the community as change agents can be huge. When we were serving as corps officers in a village, one evening a young man offered chicken curry to us. I asked him,

'What is special today?' He said, 'Sir, today we won the cockfight and got an extra cock. We cooked it and share some of it as you are our corps officers. Please take it, it is very tasty.' I said, 'I'm sorry, we won't accept it. How can you give this to God's servant?' Then I explained to him about betting and its consequences. He started to look at it differently. He said sorry to me and changed his life by giving his heart to Jesus. Now he is working as a software engineer in a big city and still testifies: 'Daniel sir refused our chicken curry; that changed my life.' Praise be to God!

Not only the officer, but every believer can be a community change agent. We believe in the priesthood of all believers.