A DIFFERENT KIND OF HOPE:

THE ROLE OF FAITH LEADERS IN GAMBLING AWARENESS AND PREVENTION



MANY PEOPLE TURN TO A FAITH LEADER DURING LIFE'S HARDEST MOMENTS.

The conversation might begin with stress, financial struggles, relationship challenges, or simply feeling overwhelmed. It may not seem like gambling has anything to do with those concerns, but sometimes it's quietly part of the bigger picture.

Today's gambling environment is more pervasive than many people realize and can be highly influential. **Sports betting, online gambling, fantasy sports for money, esports betting, gambling-like gaming features, social media, mobile apps, and constant advertising have made gambling more accessible and increasingly normalized in everyday life.** [2]

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As gambling opportunities become more integrated into daily routines, gambling-related problems can be difficult to recognize. Unlike alcohol or other substance use disorders, problem gambling often has no obvious physical signs, which is why it is frequently referred to as "the hidden addiction." It can quietly affect a person's emotional, relational, financial, spiritual, occupational, and physical well-being long before it is recognized. [1] As gambling becomes increasingly normalized, conversations about gambling awareness should become increasingly normalized as well.

Research suggests that gambling often keeps people chasing the anticipation of "maybe": the possibility that the next bet will change everything.

The brain often responds more strongly to the anticipation of a possible reward than to the reward itself. [3] In many ways, gambling invites people to place their hope in chance.

Faith, regardless of tradition, invites people to anchor hope in meaning, purpose, resilience, community, healing, forgiveness, and restoration.

Faith leaders are not expected to diagnose gambling disorders. They are uniquely positioned to provide encouragement, solace, empowerment, spiritual direction, guidance, prayer, and practical support. Their trusted presence creates a safe space where people feel seen, heard, and valued. They can ask compassionate questions such as "What has been weighing on your heart lately?" or "What do you think may be contributing to the stress you're carrying?" that can encourage reflection without shame. Faith leaders can also connect individuals with behavioral health providers, problem gambling programs, and community resources. [4] Together, spiritual care and professional treatment allow the person to receive holistic support.

Faith leaders can help individuals realize that gambling often asks people to place their hope in chance, while faith invites them to anchor their hope in something greater than themselves such as a life of purpose, meaningful relationships, community, healing, restoration, and transformation. [5] It is a hope that reminds people they are more than their struggles and losses—and their future is not determined by chance.

REFERENCES

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[5] Koenig, H. G., King, D. E., & Carson, V. B. (2023). Handbook of Religion and Health

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