

Lottery Funding Briefing, April 2017

St Thomas' Church, Lancaster

St Thomas' Church is currently preparing for a major building project, which we are calling *Building For Mission*. This project is intended to enable many forms of outreach to the community, as well as dealing with many of our conservation issues. The BFM teams and the PCC have asked for a briefing paper on the subject of lottery funding, to enable us as a church to make a decision about whether or not we should apply for grant-funding from lottery sources. We would be very grateful if you could read this briefing prayerfully, and complete and return the response form at the end to the church office by 15th May 2017.

Key Summary:

- The National Lottery is now the main provider of government grants to churches for heritage and conservation work, and community projects.
- Christians have generally been opposed to gambling for many important reasons.
- The official stance of the Church of England is that while it remains critical of the National Lottery, it permits local churches to apply to lottery-sourced grant-making bodies for the purposes of community activities or heritage conservation, but not for worship, witness, evangelism, or pastoral care.
- The key questions for us at St Thomas' Church to consider are: amidst changing attitudes within the wider church, a) can money from sources we oppose be redeemed for God's purposes? and b) what is the most God-honouring way to approach funding for our building project?

Some facts about The National Lottery in the UK today

For every £1 the public spends on National Lottery tickets, 28p goes to the Lottery 'Good Causes' including, arts, charities, heritage, health, education, environment, and sports. A number of church-based community projects are now funded by various Lottery funding streams, including:

- Awards for All – small scale community projects
- Reaching Communities and Reaching Communities Community Buildings
- Heritage Projects – including Learning, Conservation, and Participation
- Repair Grants for Places of Worship – this is now funded through the lottery

Government funding for church-based heritage, conservation, and community projects is now almost entirely funded through the lottery. Many other grant-making trusts will not now consider an application unless an application has first been made to the National Lottery.

Why have Christians generally been opposed to gambling?

Historically Christians have often been opposed to gambling, though not universally so. It is worth noting that there is no verse in the Bible that says, 'You shall not gamble' or 'gambling is wrong.' Indeed, in the Old Testament, lots were often drawn in order to make decisions, and were taken to be a sign of divine guidance, e.g. Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast in the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."

There are many examples in the Bible of lots being used by God's people – e.g. choosing a sacrificial animal, Lev 16.8; dividing up the Promised Land, Joshua 18.6; repopulating the city of Jerusalem, Nehemiah 11.1; revealing Jonah as the on-board culprit, Jonah 1.7. This practice continued into the New Testament, with Matthias chosen by lots as a replacement disciple for Judas (Acts 1.26). However, it is noticeable that this practice stopped being recorded after the Day of Pentecost, which may suggest that the early church came to rely on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for guidance instead of casting lots.

So the Biblical authors were not unaware of the practices of drawing lots or playing games of chance (e.g. Jesus' clothes were divided by lots amongst the Roman soldiers, Matthew 27.35), but the practice of gambling is not expressly forbidden to Christians within the pages of the Bible.

Nevertheless, Christians have historically opposed gambling for many valid reasons. For instance, Archbishop William Temple put it this way in 1944:

'Gambling challenges the view of life which the Christian Church exists to uphold and extend. Its glorification of mere chance is a denial of the Divine order of nature. To risk money haphazard is to disregard the insistence of the Church in every age of living faith that possessions are a trust, and that men must account to God for their use. The persistent appeal to covetousness is fundamentally opposed to the unselfishness which was taught by Jesus Christ and by the New Testament as a whole. The attempt (which is inseparable from gambling) to make a profit out of the inevitable loss and possible suffering of others is the antithesis of that love of one's neighbour on which our Lord insisted.'

To this, Christians have added many other reasons, including:

The Lottery is a Tax on the Poor

Gambling revenues are regressive, unfairly distributing financial burdens to the poor while benefitting the rich. While both poor and rich gamble, the "recreational cost" is a much higher percentage of the poor's overall income than it is for the rich. The money that is spent on gambling is often taken from the family's income which is needed for basic necessities - money that the family can ill afford to lose.

Gambling undermines our work ethic

The Bible is full of references to God's view of economics. In the garden of Eden, even before sin entered the world, God established a work ethic by which humanity was to exist (Gen. 1:28-30). Part of God's creation of humanity in his own image was that humans would work for their food.

Working and investing for a living is based on a win/win scenario, but gambling is always win/lose. God put his stamp of approval on commerce and work. When a carpenter builds a cabinet and gets paid, both parties win. One of them gets the cabinets she wanted, and one of them gets the money he desired. They can both feel good about the transaction. Not so with gambling. Someone always loses and pays a price.

Gambling feeds the love of money

The Bible warns us to keep our lives free from the love of money (1 Timothy 6.10; Hebrews 13.5). If we are honest, we must admit that gambling is motivated by greed. The desire to

get something for nothing is really another name for covetousness, which is spiritually destructive, and goes against the Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20.17).

Gambling can become addictive

According to the British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2010, there are 593,000 problem gamblers in the UK, with a further 3.5 million at risk of becoming so. 73% of adults gamble every year in the UK, but there are also 60,000 problem gamblers in the UK between the ages of 11-15. 1 in 30 of the UK workforce consistently gamble more than they can realistically afford. It takes less than 12 seconds to log onto a digital device and place a bet.

State-sponsored gambling such as the National Lottery makes it harder for the compulsive gambler to reform. Christian concern for 'the weaker brother or sister' (1 Corinthians 8) should cause Christians to oppose the lottery in order to help those with an addiction to gambling.

Gambling feeds false hopes

The lottery offers a false hope of escaping poverty through an astronomically unlikely event occurring. According to an article in *The Independent*, 6 Jan 2016:

- Chance of winning an Oscar: 1 in 11,500
- Chance of winning an Olympic gold medal: 1 in 662,000
- Chance of being killed by lightning strike: 1 in 10 million
- Chance of giving birth to identical quadruplets: 1 in 13 million
- **Chance of winning National Lottery draw: 1 in 45 million**

Gambling can destroy families – win or lose!

Even for those who win, gambling is problematic. About one third of lottery jackpot winners will end up bankrupt. Many will end up divorced or estranged from family and friends, as winning the lottery brings many pressures that the winners were unprepared for.

What have the national churches said about applying for Lottery Funding?

In essence, many of the main national churches express opposition to the National Lottery, while permitting local churches to apply to lottery-funded sources if they wish to, and passing responsibility for this decision to local churches.

The Church of England in its *Funding Guide 11: The National Lottery*, says:

'Some parishes may question whether they should have anything to do with the National Lottery. Each parish is free to make its own decision. The policy agreed nationally in 1995 by the House of Bishops is as follows:

'Throughout the debate on the establishment of the National Lottery, the Church of England, along with other churches, has made known its reservations. Its reservations were not based on some kill-joy instinct, but on the belief that worthy causes meriting public funding should be funded through ordinary taxation rather than through a form of nationally sponsored gambling designed to encourage false hopes and over-indulgence. The main contributors to the national lottery are those least able to afford it, and some families suffer as a result.

We accept freely our own financial responsibility in worship, witness, evangelism and pastoral care, and see no basis on which Lottery money should be used by the Church in these areas.

However, it is clearly the Government's intention that the Church's heritage responsibilities should attract grants from public funds made available through the Lottery. The repair and maintenance of its historic churches and cathedrals... are responsibilities which the Church of England undertakes on behalf of the nation as a whole. Of its 16,364 ecclesiastical buildings, 12,970 are listed.

Sometimes the Church resists proposed changes in our society, but when the decision is made we have to live with it. In this instance, we recognise that the Government has made it clear that the Lottery is the way it will increasingly fund heritage and charitable and other matters. The Church will continue to need help from the nation in maintaining its large part of the national heritage and it seems inevitable that help from the public funds raised through the lottery will be seen by some parishes as necessary in fulfilling their share of that responsibility.

The decision whether or not to apply for such help is a matter for the responsible body in each case. A decision to apply should not be seen as lessening the criticisms the Church has about the lottery, or about the nation's heritage and other worthy causes being supported by this as opposed to other sources of public funding.'

It should be noted that whilst lottery providers will not provide money for worship, witness, evangelism, or pastoral care, many will fund the additional work of the parish, such as community activities or heritage conservation and learning.'

So what should we do at St Thomas' Church?

In 2014, Krish Kandiah, while President of the London School of Theology, put together two contrasting lists giving 9 reasons that churches should apply for lottery funding, and 9 reasons why they shouldn't. See <https://krishk.com/tag/lottery-funding/> for a really helpful summary of the arguments for and against.

Given the many excellent reasons for us as Christians to maintain our historic opposition to all forms of gambling, including the National Lottery, some fundamental questions for us to consider include:

1. Changing Attitudes

Clearly Christian attitudes have changed to many things over the years, from cards and dice games and dancing to the slave trade to women in leadership to Sunday trading. Should our attitude to the lottery change as well?

Many churches are now applying for lottery funding for building projects, including some churches that would share many of our evangelical convictions. For instance:

- Holy Trinity, Platt in Manchester – for church spire repairs
- St Peter's Brighton (an HTB plant) – recently received £250,000 in Heritage Lottery funding towards £1 million repairs to spire.

Locally, Lancaster Priory has received Heritage Lottery Funding for its organ appeal, and Bolton-le-Sands Parish Church has received £214,400 from the Heritage Lottery Fund for roof repairs.

Should we join these other churches in applying to lottery funded sources, at least for the heritage / conservation work required of us by the government (since we're not allowed to knock our spire down!) but perhaps also for community projects to be run from our new church centre – e.g. a Family Life Centre, or new pre-school premises?

2. Can money from a source we oppose be 'redeemed' for God's purposes? Many will argue that there is no 'clean money' but is it acceptable for us as a church to apply to this source of funding knowing full well that the money comes directly from losses suffered by many millions of people, many of whom can ill afford it?

In the past, God provided for the Israelites with the gold from their Egyptian overlords, and provided for Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem with the wood from the royal forests of the Persian emperor. These precedents might justify the church applying to the government for funding from normal taxation, but do they justify the church applying to the lottery?

The woman with the alabaster jar offered this to Jesus as a sign of her repentance – can the same be said of the church's approach to the National Lottery with requests for funding? To redeem something (in theological terms) means to change its nature. By using the proceeds of the lottery, are we actually redeeming the money, or just 'laundering' it?

If we accept money from lottery funding, what happens to the church's moral authority to speak against the lottery?

3. What is the most God-honouring decision to make?

Many of us will know the story of the man stranded on the roof of his flooded house who rejected the offer of rescue from a neighbour's canoe, a police boat, and finally a rescue helicopter, because he was waiting for God to save him... and so he eventually drowned. Ushered into God's throne room he said, 'Lord, why am I here in heaven? I prayed for you to save me from that flood.' 'Yes you did my child.' replied the Lord. 'And I sent you a canoe, a boat and a helicopter. But you never got in.' Is Lottery Funding one of the means by which God will provide for us in 21st Century Britain, which we should not reject?

Or is applying to lottery-sourced funding an admission that we do not believe that God can provide for us in God-honouring ways? If God is sovereign, and no man's debtor, should we not trust him to be able to provide for all that he calls us to, without resorting to trying to build his kingdom on earth in ways that undermine his kingdom's values? Can God truly be honoured in a church-building project that is at least partially financed by money from a source such as the lottery?

Response

These questions are not easy to answer, but we as a church need to consider them prayerfully in order to give guidance to the PCC. We will have an open discussion at the Annual Church Meeting on 23rd April, and then invite you to complete the attached anonymous response form and return it to the church office by 15th May 2017.

Lottery Funding: 'Expression of Opinion' Response Form

To help the PCC reach a decision as to whether or not St Thomas' Church should approach lottery-sourced grant-making agencies, we would be grateful if you could complete and return this anonymous response form to the church office by Monday 15th May 2017. Please note, this is not a referendum or a vote. It is a non-binding expression of opinion to help guide the PCC, who as the elected representatives of the church will still need to be guided by their own consciences, and a shared discernment, as well as by this consultation.

Please circle one answer that most closely expresses your response to each statement.

1. I can support any application by St Thomas' Church to lottery-sourced funding that the PCC deems fit and proper.

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Not sure* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

2. I can support applications by St Thomas' church to lottery-sourced funding for heritage and conservation or maintenance work on the buildings – e.g. spire repairs, roof repairs, upgrades to heating and electrical systems, etc.

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Not sure* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

3. I can support applications by the church to lottery-sourced funding to enable the church to develop projects to benefit those in need in our community– e.g. develop the pre-school, start a Family Life centre, etc.

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Not sure* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

4. I cannot support any application by St Thomas' church to lottery-sourced funding.

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Not sure* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*