



Give Thanks. Give Life.

## Religious Resources

This section contains sample sermons, biblical passages, hymns, and inspirational poems. Their purpose is to assist faith leaders in preparation for donor events and memorial ceremonies.

### SAMPLE SERMON - CATHOLIC

#### "Eulogy of an owl"

##### *Scriptural texts*

A. Resurrection passages: Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:9-20; Luke 23:35-48;

John 20:1-29

B. Healing miracles of Jesus: John 5:19, 9:1-12; Luke 5:12-26, 6:6-11

Depending on the occasion for this sermon, your introduction and your lead into the opening story may vary. For example, for a funeral: "My eulogy today for (the deceased) will begin with a story, titled 'Eulogy of an Owl.'"

If used at Easter, one might start by saying "I wonder if anyone thought about what would have been appropriate to engrave on a tombstone for Jesus. I wonder if anyone has thought about a eulogy for Him. Maybe the best eulogy we can find for Jesus is the entire New Testament, which reveals His wisdom, His generosity and sensitivity, His strengths, and His accomplishments. This Easter morning I would like to begin by

reading an interesting eulogy that relates to today's celebration. It is titled "Eulogy of an Owl" and is taken from [the book] *Paul Harvey's The Rest of the Story*".

His name was Walter Elias, a city boy by birth, the son of a building contractor.

Before Walter was five, his parents moved from Chicago to a farm near Marceline, Missouri. And it was there on the farm that Walter would have his first encounter with death.

Walter was only seven that particular lazy summer afternoon, not much different from other afternoons. Dad was tending to farm chores; Mother was in the house.

It was the perfect day for a young fellow to go exploring.

Now just beyond a grove of graceful willows lay an apple orchard. There Walter could make believe to his heart's content that he was lost, which he never was, or that he had captured a wild animal, which he never had. But today was different. Directly in front of him, about thirty feet away, perched in the low-drooping branch of an apple tree and apparently sound asleep--was an owl.

The boy froze. He remembered his father telling him that owls rested during the day so they could hunt by night. What a wonderful pet that funny little bird would make. If only Walter could approach it without awakening it and snatch it from the tree.

With each step, the lad winced to hear dry leaves and twigs crackle beneath his feet. The owl did not stir. Closer...closer...and at last young Walter was standing under the limb just within range of his quarry. Slowly he reached up with one hand and grabbed the bird by its legs. He had captured it! But the owl,

waking suddenly, came alive like no other animal Walter had ever seen. In a flurry of beating wings, wild eyes and frightened cries, it struggled against the boy's grasp. Walter, stunned, held on.

Now it's difficult to imagine how what happened next, happened. Perhaps the response was sparked by gouging talons or by fear itself. But at some point the terrified boy, still clinging to the terrified bird, flung it to the ground and stomped it to death.

When it was over, a disbelieving Walter gazed down at the broken heap of bronze feathers and blood. And he cried. Walter ran from the orchard but later returned to bury the owl, the little pet he would never know. Each shovelful of earth from the shallow grave was moistened with tears of deep regret. And for months thereafter, the owl visited Walter's dreams.

Ashamed, he would tell no one of the incident until many years later. By then, the world forgave him. For that sad and lonely summer's day in the early spring of Walter Elias' life brought with it an awakening of the meaning of life. Walter never, ever again, killed a living creature. Although all the boyhood promises could not bring that one little owl back to life, through its death a whole world of animals came into being.

For it was then that a grieving seven-year-old boy, attempting to atone for a thoughtless misdeed, first sought to possess the animals of the forest while allowing them to run free—by drawing them.

Now the boy, too, is gone, but his drawings live on in the incomparable, undying art of Walter Elias ... Disney. Walt Disney.

And now you know the rest of the story.

I'm sure that all of you recognize the name Paul Harvey, a radio commentator from Chicago who uncovers a lot of fascinating background information on famous people and uses captivating words and phrases to tell us "the rest of the story." I'm sure you all recognize the name Walt Disney. You probably all have a favorite movie of Walt Disney's and probably a favorite Walt Disney character. Mine happens to be Peter Pan. I dream a lot about flying. Flying with my arms outstretched, not in front of me, like Superman, but to the sides, like Peter Pan. I think I fantasize about being eternally youthful and always taking care of those who are in need. I have to be careful though, especially lately, because of that new book *The Peter Pan Syndrome*. But I do enjoy Walt Disney and his work. As Paul Harvey wrote, "All the boyhood promises could not bring that one little owl back to life, through its death a whole world of animals came into being." From a tragic event in the early days of Walt Disney came life, and Walt Disney left a legacy of fantasy, laughter and joy."

#### *Closing comments for Easter*

We are reminded of that this weekend. The death of Good Friday's crucifixion resulted in the life of ... Sunday's resurrection. From sin comes salvation, from the negative comes the positive, from the destructive comes the creative. To Christians throughout the world, Easter Sunday means life. Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead so that all people could be given a new life. Easter belongs to the season of new life, to the season of spring. Organ and tissue donation also means new life for thousands of men, women and children who are awaiting organ transplants. Therefore, it is fitting that this year, National Organ and Tissue Donor Week begins today, Easter Sunday.

Organ and tissue donation is an opportunity to make a positive, valuable contribution out of a tragic death. It is considerable comfort for families to realize that their loved one has given others a new life. Our local community, as you know, has a growing interest and involvement in donation programs. You might even know of someone near you who can see again because of new corneas or work again because of a bone transplant or function normally because of a new kidney. I encourage you today to think about your decision regarding organ and tissue donation. I would encourage you to discuss it with your families and sign your driver's license. In fact, 10 minutes after our service began this morning all of the church doors were automatically locked. You can't leave until you sign your driver's license, and I will witness it. Now, if any of you succeed in breaking free, the consequences will be severe. I mean, God spoke to me last night about this very item (*pause*). She said (*pause for a laugh—I hope*), "If they don't sign up during services, their beautifully decorated Easter eggs will turn out soft boiled, and their chocolate bunnies will have melted by the time they arrive at home."

There has been a great deal of publicity about the great needs of people all over the United States. I appeal to you to make a positive life-giving decision to donate the organs and tissues of you and your family so that others might live or live more fully. I encourage you today to consider your involvement in organ and tissue donation programs, so that like our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, [and] like Walt Disney, we might be able to bring life out of death.

Sermon by Father Michael J. Lynch, DMin

## BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES SUPPORTING DONATION

Organ and tissue donation is not specifically mentioned in the Bible. However, the timeless content of the scriptures speaks to donation in principle. The following Scriptures can guide our thinking and actions on organ donation:

Genesis 2:20-30	The first transplant: a rib taken from Adam to create Eve.
Ezekiel 37	The Valley of Dry Bones, "These bones shall live."
Matthew 5:7	Blessed are the merciful.
Matthew 7:7	Ask ... seek ... knock.
Matthew 7:12	"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them."
Matthew 10:8	"Heal the sick, ... freely ye have received, freely give."
Leviticus 1:7	"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."
Mark 9:47	We can enter heaven without having every part of our bodies present.
Luke 6:37-38	Give and it shall be given unto you.
John 3:16-17	God so loved the world that he gave ...
John 10:10	Give life that others may live more abundantly.
John 15:12-13	Greater love has no man ...
I John 4:11	"If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."
Revelation 21:4-5	In eternity we will not need our earthly bodies: "Former things will pass away, all things will be made new."

Contributed by Mid-America Transplant Services

## **Suggested Hymns**

The following list of hymns is a start in your efforts to locate appropriate hymns from your own religious tradition that bring the message of hope and giving that organ and tissue donation and transplantation provide.

- "I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath"
- "Amazing Grace"
- "Bless Me Now"
- "Come, Sinners, To the Gospel Feast"
- "Jesus, Lover of My Soul"
- "Have Thine Own Way, Lord"

## ***Prayer***

Here is a sample prayer that clergy members may like to incorporate in a service on the donor recognition program. It can also be included as a written prayer in a weekly bulletin.

O God,

We thank Thee for the gift of life. May we always cherish this gift and protect it in the cradle of responsibility.

May we understand that our bodies are the houses of Thy infinite spirit.

The mortal house is a temporary abode, but within is the brilliant light of eternity.

Every chamber is a repository of vitality. Each is a place of life. Together, they form a temple of God.

Amen.

## ***Benediction***

Here is a sample benediction a clergy member may like to include at the end of a donor recognition program.

As we go from this House of Worship, may we take with us the words and the spirit that our faith offers us.

Here, we learn of and sing praises for the gift of life. We declare that while we live, our bodily form is the vessel that receives God's light. May we be worthy bearers of that light in bodies which are strong and healthy.

From our eyes, may the light shine brightly so that in the darkness we may see the needs of others.

Through our ears, may we hear beyond the noise of self-interest to the calls for help from those in need.

May our hearts beat with compassion and our arms be strong in reaching out to lift up those who stumble.

And after life has gone from us, may we still remain the messengers of Thy light. May the sparks housed within us, because of our offering of love, become the flame of life for others.

Amen.

## INSPIRATIONAL WRITINGS

### To Remember Me

The day will come when my body will lie upon a white sheet neatly tucked under four corners of a mattress located in a hospital busily occupied with the living and the dying. At a certain moment a doctor will determine that my brain has ceased to function and that, for all intents and purposes, my life has stopped.

When that happens, do not attempt to instill artificial life into my body by the use of a machine. And don't call this my deathbed. Let it be called the Bed of Life, and let my body be taken from it to help others lead fuller lives.

Give my sight to the man who has never seen a sunrise, a baby's face or love in the eyes of a woman.

Give my heart to a person whose own heart has caused nothing but endless days of pain.

Give my blood to the teenager who was pulled from the wreckage of his car, so that he might live to see his grandchildren play.

Give my kidneys to one who depends on a machine to exist from week to week.

Take my bones, every muscle, every fiber and nerve in my body and find a way to make a crippled child walk.

Explore every corner of my brain. Take my cells, if necessary, and let them grow so that, someday, a speechless body will shout at the crack of a bat and a deaf girl will hear the sound of rain against her window.

Burn what is left of me and scatter the ashes to the winds to help the flowers grow.

If you must bury something, let it be my faults, my weaknesses and all prejudice against my fellow man.

Give my sins to the devil.

Give my soul to God.

If, by chance, you wish to remember me, do it with a kind deed or word to someone who needs you.

If you do all I have asked, I will live forever.

Robert N. Test

## Bequest

So white.  
Now I lay me down upon a sheet so white.

No more.  
My brain can hear your voice no more.

But wait.  
These eyes,  
This heart,  
This kidney,  
These bones, skin, blood, nerve  
Still can serve.  
As Christ gave His body and His blood for me,  
Now let me give this gift to thee.  
Take these eyes and let them see.  
Let this skin feel again and be.  
Accept this organ to make her whole,  
This blood to speed him on his way,  
Then Blessed Lord, receive my soul.

Herbert Nelson

Interview by Cardinal Ratzinger, *Zenit*, February 4, 1999

The text of the quote is as follows: *"To donate one's organs is an act of love that is morally licit as long as it is free and spontaneous. To be an organ donor means to carry out an act of love toward someone in need, toward a brother in difficulty. It is a free act of love, of availability, that every person of good will can do at any time and for any brother. As for myself, I have agreed to give my organs to whomever might be in need."* **Pope Benedict XVI**

Pope's Encyclical: For a New Culture of Human Life (Par..86)

The text of the quote is as follows: *"Over and above such outstanding moments, there is an everyday heroism, made up of gestures of sharing, big and small, which build up an authentic culture of life. A particularly praiseworthy example of such gestures is the donation of organs, performed in an ethically offering a chance of health and acceptable manner, with a view to offering a chance of health and even life itself to the sick who sometimes have no hope."* **Pope John Paul II**