



Give Thanks. Give Life.

## Theological Perspective on Organ and Tissue Donation

When someone we know dies, it can call attention to the importance of the spiritual dimension of life. And when faced with the decision of organ and tissue donation during the trauma of a loved one's death, a person's religion suddenly becomes very important. As the decision is being made, the question often arises, "What is my religion's stance on organ and tissue donation?" Most people are not aware of their religious group's doctrine or position regarding organ and tissue donation. As a result, the decision maker often looks to a faith leader or hospital chaplain for an informed answer.

**FACT: Nearly all religious groups support organ and tissue donation and transplantation as long as it does not impede the life or hasten the death of the donor.**

Research into the positions of various religious groups reveals the underlying attitude that unless the group has taken action to prohibit organ or tissue donation and transplantation, it is usually assumed that such donation is permissible. Donation is encouraged as a charitable act that saves or enhances life; therefore, it requires no action on the part of the religious group. Although this is a passive approach to affirming organ and tissue donation and transplantation, it seems to be the position of a large population of the religious community. Some groups have taken a more proactive stance in recent years, feeling that a resolution or adopted position encourages people to seriously consider the matter and to plan accordingly. Donation appears to be growing, with very few religious groups actively opposing it.

All Faith Leaders are encouraged to research his or her religious group's tradition and position on organ and tissue donation and transplantation, as well as other biomedical ethical issues. In addition, each faith leader should keep abreast of any new resolutions or positions adopted at his or her religious group's national assembly. The group's position is also subject to change. It is important to be informed, since the family members who are suddenly faced with making a decision concerning

organ and tissue donation of a loved one may depend on the faith leader to know the position held by their religious group. Inability to make an informed decision could leave the family members with a feeling of guilt regardless of the decision they may make.

The following summary of statements concerning various religious groups' positions on organ and tissue donation and transplantation may be of help to you. Perhaps you can assist your religious group adopt a more clearly defined position. A proactive position does, indeed, help clarify a group's attitude on the subject.

Your knowledge and action may help alleviate the suffering of the thousands of people who die annually for lack of available donor organs. This dilemma itself is an ethical issue.

## **SUMMARY OF STATEMENTS OF VARIOUS THEOLOGICAL GROUPS**

### **AME & AME ZION (African Methodist Episcopal)**

Organ and tissue donation is viewed as an act of neighborly love and charity by these denominations. They encourage all members to support donation as a way of helping others.

### **Amish**

The Amish will consent to transplantation if they believe it is for the well-being of the transplant recipient. John Hostetler,<sup>1</sup> a world-renowned authority on the Amish religion, wrote in his book, *Amish Society*, "The Amish believe that since God created the human body, it is God who heals. However, nothing in the Amish understanding of the Bible forbids them from using modern medical services, including surgery, hospitalization, dental work, anesthesia, blood transfusions, or immunization."

### **Assembly of God**

The answer to the question of organ donation, according to the General Council of the Assemblies of God, is rooted in one's understanding of the doctrine of resurrection, Article 13, "The Blessed Hope," in the council's *Statement of Fundamental Truths*. The council's response is as follows (Office of Public Relations, General Council of the Assemblies of God, November 2, 2005):

The apostle Paul makes it very clear that the mortal bodies we now have cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:35-58; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10). The Bible also makes it clear that to be absent from this body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6-10).

When we go to be with the Lord to await the rapture and resurrection of those left alive until the coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:15), our bodies return to dust (Genesis 2:7, 3:19; 1 Corinthians 15:45-50). We have no more need of the fallen mortal bodies we now bear.

Donating our organs may give the gift of life to someone else long after we have gone home to be with the Lord. If the recipient is a Christian, the resource of the organ has the potential to facilitate continued Christian service and the living witness of a fellow believer here on earth. If the recipient is not a Christian, it may allow the individual additional time and opportunity to accept Christ.

Ultimately, the question comes down to whether or not we view it right for our organs to be candidates for resource.

The realization that organ donations save lives and provide for a continuing witness of God's love and grace does not mean that failure to donate organs would be sinful. All of us should seek God's will for our choices in this matter. It should be discussed fully with one's entire family.

Many considering organ donation will have theological concerns and questions. If we donate our organs to others, will that have any effect on our resurrection? But we must also ask, "Does God need any given molecule or atom from our bodies in order to resurrect us to life?" The apostle Paul said, "No." That which is perishable does not inherit the imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:49-50). The resurrection brings a new spiritual body.

### **Bahá'í**

There is no prohibition in the Bahá'í Faith on organ donation. It is a matter left to the individual conscience (Office of Public Information, Bahá'í International Community, November 10, 2005).

## **Buddhism**

Buddhists believe that organ and tissue donation is a matter of individual conscience, and they place high value on acts of compassion. The Rev. Gyomay Masao,<sup>3</sup> president and founder of the Buddhist Temple of Chicago, said, "We honor those people who donate their bodies and organs to the advancement of medical science and to saving lives." The importance of letting loved ones know your wishes is stressed.

There are no injunctions in Buddhism for or against organ donation. The death process of an individual is viewed as a very important time that should be treated with the greatest care and respect. In some traditions, the moment of death is defined according to criteria which differ from those of modern Western medicine, and there are differing views as to the acceptability of organ transplantation. The needs and wishes of the dying person must not be compromised by the wish to save a life. Each decision will depend on individual circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

Central to Buddhism is a wish to relieve suffering and there may be circumstances where organ donation may be seen as an act of generosity. Where it is truly the wish of the dying person, it would be seen in that light.<sup>4</sup>

If there is doubt as to the teachings within the particular tradition to which a person belongs, expert guidance should be sought from a senior teacher within the tradition concerned.<sup>4</sup>

*When he discovered a monk sick and uncared for, the Buddha said to the other monks, "Whoever would care for me, let him care for those who are sick."  
Mahavagga VIII.26.1-8 (Kucchivikara-vatthu - The Monk with Dysentery, translated from the Pali by  
Thanissaro Bhikkhu)*

## **Church of the Brethren**

The Church of the Brethren<sup>2</sup> commits itself and urges its congregations, institutions, and members to:

- Inform and educate themselves by taking advantage of resources within their region as to organ and tissue donation.
- Support and encourage individuals to be in discussion with clergy and family as to their wishes regarding the use of their organs and/or tissues for transplantation upon death.
- Encourage and support individuals to include within their advance medical directives instructions as to their wishes for organ and tissue donation.
- Support those living donors who, with prayerful consideration, make an organ or tissue gift, provided that such a gift does not deprive the donor of life itself nor the functional integrity of his or her body.
- Encourage our clergy to prepare themselves to respond to the special needs of family and friends at the time of organ and tissue procurement.

## **Catholicism**

Roman Catholics view organ and tissue donation as an act of charity and love, as reported in the Catholic publication *Origins* in 1994.<sup>5</sup>

Transplants are morally and ethically acceptable to the Vatican. According to Father Leroy Wickowski, Director of the Office of Health Affairs of the Archdiocese of Chicago, "We encourage donation as an act of charity. It is something good that can result from tragedy and a way for families to find comfort by helping others." Pope John Paul II has stated, "The Catholic Church would promote the fact that there is a need for organ donors and that Christians should accept this as a 'challenge to their generosity and fraternal love' so long as ethical principles are followed."

Catholic health care institutions should encourage and provide the means whereby those who wish to do so may arrange for the donation of the organs and bodily tissues for the ethically legitimate purposes, so that they may be used for donation and research after death.

The following is taken from the New York Organ Donor Network:<sup>6</sup>

In 1956, Pope Pius XII declared that: "A person may will to dispose of his body and to destine it to ends that are useful, morally irreproachable and even noble, among them the desire to aid the sick and suffering....This decision should not be condemned but positively justified."

In August 2000, Pope John Paul II told attendees at the International Congress on Transplants in Rome: "Transplants are a great step forward in science's service of man, and not a few people today owe their lives to an organ transplant. Increasingly, the technique of transplants has proven to be a valid means of attaining the primary goal of all medicine—the service of human life....There is a need to instill in people's hearts, especially in the hearts of the young, a genuine and deep appreciation of the need for brotherly love, a love that can find expression in the decision to become an organ donor."

In the Summer/Fall 2001 issue of *On the Beat*, a publication of the New York Organ Donor Network, His Eminence Edward Cardinal Egan, Archbishop of New York, wrote that, in thinking about the glorious gift of life God has given each of us, one of the greatest ways an individual can honor that gift is being an organ donor.

In his encyclical letter, *Evangelium Vitae* (On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life), His Holiness Pope John Paul II speaks of society's fascination with a "culture of death." He calls on Catholics and people of good faith everywhere to move from that culture towards a celebration and reflection of the glory of God in a "culture of life. When asked to share my thoughts on the importance of organ donation for this publication, it was *Evangelium Vitae* that immediately came to mind. In thinking about the glorious gift of life God has given each of us, it would seem that one of the greatest ways an individual can honor that gift is by making a conscious decision to be an organ donor—a decision that enables another's life to continue—and in a very real and tangible way promotes 'a culture of life. '"

Organ donation is, as His Holiness has stated, "a genuine act of love." The commitment of one person to give the gift of life to another person mirrors an essential foundation upon which the teachings of Christ and the theology of our Church are based. As Saint John tells us, "For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) By knowingly choosing the donations of one's bodily organs, one is acting as Christ would act—giving life to humanity.

The Catholic Church views organ donation as an act of charity. *The Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, a set of principles that guide the healing mission of the Church, clearly explains the permissibility of organ donations. In *Directive No. 30*, we read: "The transplantation of organs from living donors is morally permissible when such a donation will not sacrifice or seriously impair any essential bodily function and the anticipated benefit to the recipient is proportionate to the harm to the donor." Similarly, *Directives No. 63-66* treat organ donation as follows: *Directive No. 63*: "Catholic health care institutions should encourage and provide the means whereby those who wish to do so may arrange for the donation of their organs and bodily tissue, for ethically legitimate purposes, so that they may be used for donation and research after death." *Directive No. 64*: "Such organs should not be removed until it has been medically determined that the patient has died. In order to prevent any conflict of interest, the physician who determines death should not be a member of the transplant team."

The donation of organs in a morally acceptable manner, at the end of life, offers the gifts of health and life to those who are most vulnerable and who are at times without hope. It is one of the many pro-life positions an individual can choose in order to foster a culture that values life in our world.

As to what criteria constitute a "morally acceptable manner," it is essential that organ transplantation occur in the context of love and respect for the dignity of the human person. There are, of course, parameters in determining when and how organs should be donated. It is the Church's position that transplanted organs never be offered for sale. They are to be given as a gift of love. Any procedure that commercializes or considers organs as items for exchange or trade is morally unacceptable. The decision as to who should have priority in regards to organ transplantation *must* be based solely on medical factors and not on such considerations as age, sex, religion, social standing or other similar standards.

In addition, it is of the utmost importance that informed consent by the donor and/or donor's legitimate representatives be had and that vital organs, those that occur singly in the body, are removed only after certain death (the complete and irreversible cessation of all brain activity) has occurred.

As Pope John Paul II observes in *Evangelium Vitae*, "There is an everyday heroism, made up of gestures and sharing, big or small, which build up an authentic culture of life. A particularly praiseworthy example of such gestures is the donation of organs in a morally acceptable manner."

It is for the betterment of humanity, for the love of one's fellow human beings, that organ donation is undertaken. One of the most powerful ways for individuals to demonstrate love for their neighbor is by making an informed decision to be an organ donor.

## **Christianity**

There is definite evidence for Christian support of organ donation.<sup>6</sup>

The Lord demonstrated with his own life how, even in sorrow, love enables us to embrace the needs of others. We can choose to donate our organs to save the lives of many people. The decision to donate at the end of life is the beginning of healing for many others.

Healing and saving life is a great gift. Jesus sent his 12 disciples out with the imperative to heal disease and illness: "Heal the sick ... freely ye have received, freely give."  
(Matthew 10:8)

*"In eternity we will neither have nor need our earthly bodies: former things will pass away, all things will be made new."*

— Revelation 21: 4-5

*"I hope that Christian people will seriously and positively consider organ donation. The ready willingness to donate an organ is a clear sign of that sacrificial self-giving for others patterned by Jesus Christ."*

— David Ebor, Archbishop of York

*"Every organ transplant has its source in a decision of great ethical value... Here lies the nobility of a gesture which is a genuine act of love. There is a need to instill in people's hearts a genuine and deep love that can find expression in the decision to become an organ donor."*

— His Holiness Pope John Paul II

*"Any act that can save life, such as organ donation, is a great thing and quite acceptable within our faith."*

— Council of African and Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK)

*"The Methodist Church has consistently supported organ donation and transplantation in appropriate circumstances, as a means through which healing and health may be made possible."*

— Methodist Church UK

*"Christians should generally be encouraged to help others in need, and organ donation can be a very concrete and sacrificial way of helping."*

— The Rt Reverend Michael Nazir-Ali, Bishop of Rochester

### **Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

The Christian Church encourages organ and tissue donation, stating that individuals were created for God's glory and for sharing of God's love. A 1985 resolution, adopted by the general assembly, encourages "members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to enroll as organ donors and prayerfully support those who have received an organ transplant."

### **Christian Science**

The Church of Christ, Scientist does not have a specific position regarding organ donation. According to the First Church of Christ Scientist in Boston, Christian Scientists normally rely on spiritual instead of medical means of healing. They are free, however, to choose whatever form of medical treatment they desire, including a transplant. The question of organ and tissue donation is an individual decision.

### **Church of the Nazarene**

The Church of the Nazarene encourages members who do not object personally to support donor and recipient anatomical gifts through living wills and trusts. Further, the Church appeals for morally and ethically fair distribution of organs to those qualified to receive them (Manual, Church of the Nazarene, 1997-2001, paragraph 904.2).<sup>7</sup>

### **Episcopal**

The 70th General Convention of the Episcopal Church<sup>8</sup> recommends and urges "all members of this Church to consider seriously the opportunity to donate organs after death that others may live, and that such decision be clearly stated to family, friends, church and attorney."

### **Evangelical Covenant Church**

The following regarding the Evangelical Covenant Church is from the New York Organ Donor Network:<sup>6</sup> "A resolution passed at the Annual Meeting in 1982 encouraged members to sign and carry organ donor cards. The resolution also recommended 'that it becomes a policy with our pastors, teachers, and counselors to encourage awareness of organ donation in all our congregations.'

## **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:<sup>9</sup>

- Regards the donation of deceased donor organs as an appropriate means of contributing to the health and well-being of the human family.
- Recognizes that the donation of renewable tissue (e.g., bone marrow) and live organs (e.g. kidney) can be an expression of sacrificial love for a neighbor in need.
- Encourages its members to consider the possibility of organ donation and to communicate their wishes to family members, physicians and health care institutions.
- Encourages those willing to donate to make the necessary familial and legal arrangements.
- Calls upon its pastors to acquaint themselves with the ethical and legal issues and clinical procedures involved in order that they may counsel persons and families considering the possibility of donation.
- Urges its pastors, congregations, synods, agencies and institutions to sponsor educational programs on organ donation.
- Calls upon government to establish public policies which will encourage voluntary donations, discourage coercive donation, assure the efficient, equitable distribution of human organs and tissues for transplants, and disallow both the sale and purchase of human organs.

## **Greek Orthodox**

The Rev. Stanley S. Harakas, former professor of ethics at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, wrote the following about donation:<sup>10</sup>

“In the case of organ transplants, the crucial ethical considerations are two-fold; the potential harm inflicted upon the donor and the need of the recipient. Historically, the Orthodox Church has not objected to similar, though not identical, procedures, such as blood transfusions and skin grafts. In both cases, no radical threat to the life of the donor is perceived, and the lifesaving consequences for the recipient are substantial. Similar

considerations affect the Orthodox Christian judgment of organ transplants. In no case should a person ignore or make light of the ethical implications of organ donation. Donating an organ whose loss will impair or threaten the life of the potential donor is never required and is never a moral obligation of any person. If the condition of health and the physical well-being of the donor permits, some transplants are not objectionable. Kidney transplants are a case in point. A healthy person may consent to donate a kidney knowing that his or her health is not thereby impaired.

The recipient of an organ transplant should be in otherwise good health, with the expectation of restoring to normal living in order to warrant the risk to the donor.”

### **Gypsies (Roma)**

Gypsies are a people of different ethnic groups without a formalized religion. They share common folk beliefs and tend to be opposed to organ donation. Their opposition is connected with their beliefs about the afterlife. Traditional belief contends that for 1 year after death the soul retraces its steps. Thus, the body must remain intact because the soul maintains its physical shape.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hinduism**

According to the Hindu Temple Society of North America, Hindus are not prohibited by religious law from donating their organs. This act is an individual's decision.

H. L. Trivedi, in *Transplantation Proceedings*, stated that "Hindu mythology has stories in which the parts of the human body are used for the benefit of other humans and society. There is nothing in the Hindu religion indicating that parts of humans, dead or alive, cannot be used to alleviate the suffering of other humans."<sup>11</sup>

The Swamis were universal in their approval of organ donation. They did not accept the concept sometimes heard in India that if one donated [his or her] eyes in this life, they would be blind in the next. Shri Mahant Krishan Nath Ji, based in Haryana, explained, "If someone donates an organ willingly, then there is nothing wrong in that. And it is wrong to say that if you donate eyes in this birth, that in your next birth you would be born without eyes. We have the story of Baba Sheel Nath of Nath Sampradaya who transferred the sight of

one of his eyes to that of a blind lady by his yogic powers. So our Nath Sampradaya has had such realized saints who even made people immortal. To them, eye donation was a very small thing."<sup>11</sup>

Another source reports: "Hindu methodology contains traditions in which human body parts were used for the benefit of other humans and society. There is nothing in the Hindu religion which would prevent living or deceased donation to alleviate suffering."<sup>13</sup>

There are many references that support the concept of organ donation in Hindu scriptures. These include the following:<sup>12</sup>

*Daan* is the original word in Sanskrit for donation meaning selfless giving. In the list of the 10 *Niyamas* (virtuous acts) *Daan* comes third.

*"Of all the things that it is possible to donate, to donate your own body is infinitely more worthwhile."*  
— *The Manusmriti*

Life after death is a strong belief of Hindus and is an ongoing process of rebirth. The law of Karma decides which way the soul will go in the next life. The *Bhagavad Gita* describes the mortal body and the immortal soul in a simple way like the relationship of clothes to a body:

"vasamsi jirnani yatha vihaya  
navani grhnati nara 'parani  
tatha sarirani vihaya jirnany  
anyani samyati navandi dehi."  
*("As a person puts on new garments  
giving up the old ones  
the soul similarly accepts new material bodies  
giving up the old and useless ones.")*

— *Bhagavad Gita chapter 2:22*

Scientific and medical treatises (*Charaka* and *Sushruta Samhita*) form an important part of the *Vedas*. *Sage Charaka* deals with internal medicine while *Sage Sushruta* includes features of organ and limb transplants.

*"The important issue for a Hindu is that which sustains life should be accepted and promoted as Dharma (righteous living). Organ donation is an integral part of our living."*  
— *Hasmukh Velji Shah, International Trustee, World Council of Hindus*

*"Organ donation is in keeping with Hindu beliefs as it can help to save the life of others."*  
— *Mr Om Parkash Sharma MBE, President, National Council of Hindu Temples*

*"I always carry my donor card with me. It says that my whole body can be used for organ donation and medical purposes after my death. I would like to encourage as many people as possible to do the same."*  
— *Dr Bal Mukund Bhala, Co-ordinator Hindu International Medical Mission,  
Former President Hindu Council UK*

## **Independent Conservative Evangelical**

Generally, Evangelical Christians have no opposition to organ and tissue donation. Each church is autonomous and leaves the decision to donate up to the individual.

## **Islams**

Based on the principles and the foregoing attributes of a Muslim, the majority of Islamic legal scholars have concluded that transplantation of organs as treatment for otherwise lethal end stage organ failure is a good thing. Donation by living donors and by deceased donors is not only permitted but encouraged.<sup>3</sup>

Organ donation should be considered as an expression of the believer's altruism and Islam encourages the virtuous qualities which are supportive of organ donation: generosity, duty, charity, co-operation, etc. Accordingly, the Islamic Code of Medical Ethics stresses that human life is sacred and it must be preserved by all possible means. It is permissible within the Shariat to remove the organ from one person and transplant it into another person's body in order to save the life of that person on the condition that such a procedure does in no way violate the dignity of the person from whose body the organ was removed.<sup>13</sup>

One of the basic aims of the Muslim faith is the saving of life:

This is a fundamental aim of the Shariah and muslims believe that Allah greatly rewards those who save others from death.

Violating the human body, whether living or dead, is normally forbidden in Islam. The Shariah, however, waives this prohibition in a number of instances: firstly in cases of necessity; and secondly in saving another person's life. It is this Islamic legal maxim *al-darurat tubih al-mahzurat* (necessities overrule prohibition) that has great relevance to organ donation.

*"Whosoever saves the life of one person it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind."*  
— Holy Qur'an, chapter 5 vs. 32

*"If you happened to be ill and in need of a transplant, you certainly would wish that someone would help you by providing the needed organ."*  
— Sheikh Dr MA Zaki Badawi, Principal, Muslim College, London

UK Transplant<sup>14</sup> also gives this summary of the lifesaving Fatwa (a religious edict):

The Muslim Law (Shariah) Council of Great Britain resolved that:

- The medical profession is the proper authority to define signs of death.
- Current medical knowledge considers brain stem death to be a proper definition of death.
- The council accepts brain stem death as constituting the end of life for the purpose of organ transplantation.
- The council supports organ transplantation as a means of alleviating pain or saving life on the basis of the rules of the Shariah.
- Organ donation must be given freely without reward.
- Trading in organs is prohibited.

*"Whosoever helps another will be granted help from Allah."  
— Prophet Muhammed (pbuh)*

Muslim scholars of the most prestigious academies are unanimous in declaring that organ donation is an act of merit and in certain circumstances can be an obligation.

These institutes all call upon Muslims to donate organs for transplantation:

- The Shariah Academy of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (representing all Muslim countries).
- The Grand Ulema Council of Saudi Arabia.
- The Iranian Religious Authority.
- The Al-Azhar Academy of Egypt.

Gatrad and Sheikh<sup>15</sup> write this about the Fatwa in 1995 by the Muslim Law Council in support of organ donation: "Organ transplantation is now encouraged in many Arab Muslim countries, and considered by some as a 'perpetual' charitable act."<sup>14</sup>

## **Jehovah's Witnesses**

Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that the Bible comments directly on organ transplants; hence: decisions made regarding cornea, kidney, or other tissue transplants must be made by the individual. The same is true regarding bone transplants.

Jehovah's Witnesses are often assumed to be opposed to donation because of their belief against blood transfusion. However, this merely means that all blood must be removed from the organs and tissues before being transplanted. (Office of Public Information for Jehovah's Witnesses, October 20, 2005.)

## **Judaism**

According to Solomon,<sup>16</sup> three Jewish principles govern the treatment of the body after death: respect and dignity to a cadaver, not benefiting from a corpse, and immediate burial.

Rabbi Elliott N. Dorff writes that saving a life through organ donation supercedes the rules concerning treatment of a dead body. Transplantation does not desecrate a body or show lack of respect for the dead, and any delay in burial to facilitate organ donation is respectful of the decedent. Organ donation saves lives and honors the deceased.<sup>16</sup>

The Conservative Movement's Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards has stated that organ donations after death represent not only an act of kindness, but are also a "commanded obligation" which saves human lives. Refusal to participate in organ donation violates the commandment: "Do not stand idly by your neighbor's blood (Leviticus 19:16) which directs we use any resource possible to save a life."<sup>16</sup>

UK Transplant<sup>17</sup> reports:

In principle Judaism sanctions and encourages organ donation in order to save lives (*pikuach nefesh*).

This principle can sometimes override the strong objections to any unnecessary interference with the body after death, and the requirement for immediate burial of the complete body.

It is understandable that there will be worries about organ donation. At a time of

stress and grief, linked to sudden unexpected illness and death, reaching a decision about donation can be difficult for a family. It is at this time that *halachic* guidance is so important.

Judaism insists that no organ may be removed from a donor until death—as defined in Jewish law—has definitely occurred. This can cause problems concerning heart, lung and similar transplants where time is of the essence. Judaism insists that honor and respect are due to the dead (*kavod hamet*). After donation, the avoidance of unnecessary further interference with the body, and the need for immediate interment, are again of prime concern.

### **Lutheran Missouri Synod**

The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod encourages organ donation as an act of Christian love, but this choice is entirely up to the individual and/or his or her family, and should not be a cause of guilt or regret no matter what decision is made. The Bible has nothing specific to say regarding this issue. Therefore, it is a matter of Christian freedom and personal (or family) discretion.

In 1981, the Synod adopted the following resolution: To Encourage Donation of Kidneys and Other Organs Resolution 8-05:

Whereas, we accept and believe that our Lord Jesus came to give life and to give it abundantly (John 10:10); and

Whereas, through advances in medical science we are aware that at the time of death some of our organs can be transplanted to alleviate pain and suffering of afflicted human beings (see Galatians 6:10); and

Whereas, our heavenly Father has created us so that we can adequately and safely live with one kidney and can express our love and relive the unnecessary prolonged suffering of our relative; and

Whereas, we have an opportunity to help others out of love for Christ, through the donation of organs; therefore be it

Resolved, that our pastors, teachers, and Directors of Christian Education be encouraged to inform the members of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod of the opportunity to sign a Universal Donor Card (which is to authorize the use of our needed organs at the time of death in order to relieve the suffering of individuals requiring organ transplants); and be it further

Resolved, that we encourage family members to become living kidney donors; and be it further

Resolved, that the program committees of pastors and teachers conferences be encouraged to include "organ and tissue transplants" as a topic on their agendas; and be it finally

Resolved, that the Board of Social Ministry and World Relief seek ways to implement this program so that the entire Synod may join in this opportunity to express Christian concern.<sup>18</sup>

### **Mennonite**

Mennonites have no formal position on donation but are not opposed to it. They believe the decision to donate is up to the individual and/or his or her family.<sup>6</sup>

### **Moravians**

The Moravian Church has made no statement addressing organ and tissue donation or transplantation. Robert E. Sawyer, president, Provincial Elders Conference, Moravian Church of America, Southern Province, states, "There is nothing in our doctrine or policy that would prevent a Moravian pastor from assisting a family in making a decision to donate or not to donate an organ." It is, therefore, a matter of individual choice.

### **Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)**

The donation of organs and tissues is a selfless act that often results in great benefit to individuals with medical conditions. The decision to will or donate one's own body organs or tissues for medical purposes, or the decisions to authorize the transplant of organs or tissue from a deceased family member, is made by the individual or the deceased member's family.

The decision to receive a donated organ should be made after receiving competent medical counsel and confirmation through prayer.<sup>6</sup>

### **Pentecostals**

Pentecostals believe that the decision to donate should be left up to the individual.

## **Presbyterians**

Therefore, be it resolved that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognize the life-giving benefits of organ and tissue donation, and thereby encourage all Christians to become organ and tissue donors as a part of their ministry to others in the name of Christ, who gave life that we might have life in its fullness;

Whereas selfless consideration for the health and welfare of our fellows is at the heart of Christian ethic; and

Whereas organ and tissue donation is a life-giving act since transplantation of organs and tissues is scientifically proven to save the lives of persons with terminal disease and improve the quality of life for the blind, the deaf, and the crippled; and

Whereas organ donation may be perceived as a positive outcome of a seemingly senseless death and is for maintaining the dignity of the deceased; is conducted with respect and with the highest consideration for maintaining the dignity of the deceased and his or her family; and

Whereas moral leaders the world over recognize organ and tissue donation as a[n] expression of humanitarian ideals in giving life to another; and

Whereas thousands of people who could benefit from organ and tissue donation continue to suffer and die due to lack of consent for donation due primarily, to poor public awareness and lack of an official direction for the church.

## **Protestantism**

Because of the many different Protestant denominations, a generalized statement on their attitudes toward organ and tissue donation cannot be made. However, the denominations share a common belief in the New Testament. (Luke 6:38: "Give to others and God will give to you") The Protestant faith respects individual conscience and a person's right to make decisions regarding his or her own body. In addition, it is generally not believed that resurrection involves making the physical body whole again.<sup>6</sup>

In the Winter/Spring 2002 issue of *On the Beat*, a publication of the New York Organ Donor Network,<sup>6</sup> the Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes Jr, senior minister, The Riverside Church of New York City, wrote:

Medical technology which has made organ and tissue transplantation possible opens up new opportunities for human beings to become partners with God in sustaining and extending the precious gift of life. The fact that we can donate an organ while we live without compromising our health should lead us to exclaim: "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." (Psalm 139:14 New Revised Standard Version) Even death cannot prevent us from making a magnanimous offering of new hope for those desperately clinging to life until an appropriate donor has been identified.

Some of the most touching moments of human compassion are associated with organ and tissue transplantation: a mother to a child, a sister to a brother, a neighbor to a neighbor, and stranger to a stranger. Dr. Wyatt T. Walker, Pastor of the Canaan Baptist Church of New York City and former Chief of Staff for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., loves to preach about such an event, which for him became a moment of revelation. He tells of an interview he saw on national TV following a fatal mass shooting at a school in Paducah, Kentucky. The reporter asked the mother of one of the slain students what her first thoughts were after being informed of the shootings. The mother said she rushed to the hospital hoping that her daughter had survived. "And after you were told that she had passed, what was your next thought?" The mother said, "I hoped that it would be possible for someone to receive the gift of life from her through an organ donation." The little girl was white. Interestingly, the best friend of the little white girl was a black girl. They called each other "my twin sister." It turns out that the little girl's heart was donated to a black man. When the mother was finally able to visit the gentleman who had received her daughter's heart, she had one request: "May I place my ear on your chest so that I can hear the heart of my wonderful daughter?" Perhaps heaven was also monitoring that episode of sublime human love.

As wonderful as such moments are, some persons are still not sure if offering an organ is compatible with the demands of their faith. Is it pleasing to God to give part of oneself in this way? Shouldn't we strive at any cost to keep intact all of the parts of the body God gave us? Will we be less whole if a part of us is missing in the "great getting up morning"? Is it mutilation of the flesh to allow someone to take one kidney when the Lord gave us two?

It may be surprising to some to learn that with only a few exceptions all of the major religions affirm and celebrate the godliness of organ and tissue transplantation. Words like caring, sharing, compassion, and sacrifice are at the heart of true religion. The cross, a central Christian symbol, is about Jesus giving himself for the salvation of the world. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that God gave his only son..." With this understanding, becoming a donor takes on sacramental meaning. Organ and tissue donation is considered to be the ultimate humanitarian act of benevolence.

As a Protestant minister, I think of the following perspectives as I respond to questions regarding organ and tissue donation:

1. Each person of faith needs to order his or her behavior to confirm to a spirit-guided and biblically nurtured conscience. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14:23) It is helpful for members of our congregations to discuss the issue with their leaders and to form a solid sense of what is appropriate. Theological discussions in our communities of faith tend to lead to a strong encouragement of organ and tissue donation.
2. One should not expect proof text from the Bible on this issue. Transplantation was not even a possibility at the time the gospels were being written. There were many things Jesus did not address directly. It is the Holy Spirit who leads us into the ways of enlightenment on matters which have surfaced in our time. The spirit of generosity and sacrifice are encouraged in all seasons. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Holy deeds of generosity are to be commended.
3. The opportunity to donate organs and tissue may be one of the most effective ways to counteract the pervasive selfishness of these modern times. The golden rule urges us to think and act from the perspective of what we would desire of others if we were similarly situated.
4. Christian commitment calls us to show respect for the sanctity of the body. A loving sacrificial offering of the gift of life is a holy honoring of our flesh and blood. To be able to live as good stewards of our bodies, then to extend the lives of others reveals something of the nature of our heavenly parent and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

5. Romans 8:28 reminds us that in everything God is at work to bring good out of whatever happens. It is not appropriate to claim that God wills all the tragic events, which result in the death of any of us. Nevertheless, in such tragic circumstances, there is the good of organ and tissue donation, which upstages the evil, which has occurred.

Finally, so much of life is lived as if our own individual well-being is of ultimate significance. Before God, each life is precious and deserving of respect and care. But we are not only individuals before God. We are a family bound by love and mutual care. Organ and tissue donation gives dramatic witness to our interconnectedness. The first citizens of our nation, Native Americans, understood this [interconnectedness]. Perhaps we will be willing to sign a donor card and make an organ and tissue donation when we recover the spirit of Chief Seattle who inspired Ted Perry to write:

*This we know.  
All things are connected  
Like the blood  
Which unites one family...  
Whatever befalls the earth,  
Befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.  
Man did not weave the web of life;  
He is merely a strand in it.  
Whatever he does to the web,  
He does to himself.*

### **Salvation Army**

The Salvation Army finds organ donation and transplantation acceptable.<sup>6</sup>

### **Seventh-day Adventist Church**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have an official statement on organ donation. However, the church does have a statement on the care of the dying, which includes the following excerpts:<sup>20</sup>

1. God's plan is for people to be nourished within a family and a faith community.
2. Decisions about human life are best made within the context of healthy family relationships after considering medical advice (Genesis 2:18; Mark 10:6-9; Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 5-6). When a dying person is unable to give consent or express preferences regarding medical intervention, such decisions should be made by someone chosen by

the dying person. If no one has been chosen, someone close to the dying person should make the determination.

3. Christian love is practical and responsible (Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13; James 1:27, 2:14-17). Such love does not deny faith nor obligate us to offer or to accept medical interventions whose burdens outweigh the probable benefits. For example, when medical care merely preserves bodily functions, without hope of returning a patient to mental awareness, it is futile and may, in good conscience, be withheld or withdrawn. Similarly, life-extending medical treatments may be omitted or stopped if they only add to the patient's suffering or needlessly prolong the process of dying.

Additionally, Loma Linda University Medical Center, a Seventh-day Adventist institution, described as "integrating health, science and Christian faith" and specializes in organ transplantation. Loma Linda's Transplant Institute provides adult and pediatric heart, kidney, liver, and pancreas programs, and performed a combined total of 138 deceased and living donor transplants in 2005.

### **Shinto**

In Shinto, the deceased's body is considered to be impure and dangerous, and thus quite powerful. "In folk belief context, injuring a dead body is a serious crime," according to E. Namihira in his article, "Shinto Concept Concerning the Dead Human Body." "To this day it is difficult to obtain consent from bereaved families for organ donation or dissection for medical education or pathological anatomy ... the Japanese regard them all in the sense of injuring a dead body." Families are often concerned that they not injure the *itai*, the relationship between the dead person and the bereaved people.<sup>6</sup>

## **Sikhs**

The Sikh philosophy and teachings place great emphasis on the importance of giving and putting others before oneself:<sup>21</sup>

*"Where self exists, there is no God  
Where God exists, there is no self."*

— Guru Nanak, Guru Granth Sahib

The Sikh faith stresses the importance of performing noble deeds. There are many examples of selfless giving and sacrifice in Sikh teachings by the 10 Gurus and other Sikhs.

*"The dead sustain their bond with the living through virtuous deeds."*

— Guru Nanak, Guru Granth Sahib

*"The Sikh religion teaches that life continues after death in the soul, and not the physical body. The last act of giving and helping others through organ donation is both consistent with and in the spirit of Sikh teachings."*

—Dr. Indarjit Singh OBE, Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations UK

*"The true servants of God are those who serve Him through helping others."*

Guru Nanak, Guru Granth Sahib

Sikhs believe life after death is a continuous cycle of rebirth but the physical body is not needed in this cycle—a person's soul is [the] real essence.

*"In my family we all carry donor cards and would encourage all Sikhs to do so"*

— Dr. Indarjit Singh OBE, Director, Network of Sikh Organisations UK

## **Southern Baptist Convention**

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has no official position on organ donation. Such decisions are a matter of personal conscience, writes Dr. Steve Lemke, provost of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and fellow of the Research Institute of The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (January 20, 2006). Dr. Lemke further writes:

However, the SBC did pass a nonbinding resolution in its 1988 convention that endorsed organ donation in certain situations. Citing the positive, lifesaving contribution of organ donation, the resolution encouraged "physicians to request organ donation in appropriate circumstances." The resolution denied that the bodily resurrection required the wholeness of the body at death, and praised the selflessness, stewardship, and compassion,

and alleviation of suffering associated with organ donation. The resolution also recognized the validity of living wills and organ donation cards, and the right of next-of-kin to make organ donation decisions in some circumstances and as allowed by statute. The SBC resolution on organ donation emphasizes that such action be life-affirming; for that reason the convention does not condone euthanasia, infanticide, abortion, or harvesting of fetal tissue for procurement of organs.

While Southern Baptists entrust the ultimate decision about organ donation to individual conscience, biblical principles such as the sanctity of human life, sacrificial and selfless Christ-like love, and the compassionate alleviation of suffering would appear to justify organ donation.

#### **Society of Friends (Quakers)**

Organ and tissue donation is believed to be an individual decision. The Society of Friends does not have an official position on donation.

#### **Unitarian Universalist**

Organ and tissue donation is widely supported by Unitarian Universalists. They view it as an act of love and selfless giving, according to the Unitarian Universalist Association, or UUA (Erika Nonken, public information assistant, UUA, October 26, 2005).

The UUA has no official position on organ and tissue donation. It is up to each person to decide what is appropriate for [him or her]. Unitarian Universalist are free to make their own decisions about their bodies and their end-of-life arrangements. There are no spiritual or theological beliefs in Unitarian Universalism that would prevent an individual from choosing to donate [his or her] organs, as Unitarian Universalism is a creedless religion.

One of the principles of Unitarian Universalism is respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. This principle often encourages Unitarian Universalists to choose have their organs donated after their death, and to otherwise use their bodies, lives, and deaths to help others whenever possible.

## **United Church of Christ**

"United Church of Christ people, churches, and agencies are extremely and overwhelmingly supportive of organ sharing," writes the Rev. Jay Lintner, director, Washington Office of the United Church of Christ Office for Church in Society. He adds:

The General Synod has never spoken to this issue because, in general, the Synod speaks on more controversial issues, and there is no controversy about organ sharing, just as there is no controversy about blood donation in the denomination. While the General Synod has never spoken about blood donation, blood donation rooms have been set up at several General Synods. Similarly, any organized effort to get the General Synod delegates or individual churches to sign organ donation cards would meet with generally positive responses.

## **United Methodist Church**

The United Methodist Church issued a policy statement regarding organ and tissue donation. It states, "The United Methodist Church recognizes the life-giving benefits of organ and tissue donation, and thereby encourages all Christians to become organ and tissue donors by signing and carrying cards or driver's licenses, attesting to their commitment of such organs upon their death, to those in need, as a part of their ministry to others in the name of Christ, who gave his life that we might have life in its fullness."

A 1992 resolution states, "Donation is to be encouraged, assuming appropriate safeguards against hastening death and determination of death by reliable criteria." The resolution further states, "Pastoral-care persons should be willing to explore these options as a normal part of conversation with patients and their families."

"We are pro-organ donation," said the Rev. Blaine Bluebaugh of the Graham United Methodist Church in Falls Church, Virginia. "It's a major thing for us. It's one of our official days in the calendar. We just believe in it. God has given us the ability to do this, and we should share."<sup>22</sup>

The United Methodists, as with several religions, believe that organ and tissue donation is an act of charity and that preserving life takes precedence over any beliefs that govern the treatment of the dead.<sup>22</sup>

## Acknowledgement

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