Sharing the Gift of Life

What do you tell the people who turn to you for advice?

Life—it is the greatest gift of all. And today, it is also a gift that can be shared.

Through organ and tissue donation, people have the potential to reach out and do good in this world. They can save the lives of those who would otherwise die without help. They can give new hope to their families. They can transform and improve lives, by restoring sight, health, and wholeness.

It is one of the greatest opportunities today for those who seek to do good, pass along life, and help their fellow human beings.

Choosing to become an organ donor reflects one’s deepest beliefs about the sanctity and importance of life. Some find it an easy decision; others want to be assured they’re doing the right thing by their faith. And so they look to you for counsel.

Members of your community may have already sought your advice as a faith leader for inspiration, guidance, and even approval in this decision. They may be unsure about how their faith views donation. Others may need your support and counsel in making the decision to donate the organs of a loved one who did not make a donation designation while alive. Others may enlist your help with spreading the word about sharing the gift of life.

This guide was created to help you help others. Here, you can learn more about organ and tissue donation and National Donor Sabbath. You can learn about ways you can encourage and support your congregation to make informed donation decisions, and about groups you can call for help such as organ procurement organizations (OPPs).

We hope you will participate in National Donor Sabbath to help your congregation make informed life decisions and possibly turn suffering into survival.

What are OPOs?

Non-profit organ procurement organizations (OPOs) are the vital link between donors and recipients. They coordinate organ donation activities including: evaluating potential donors; obtaining authorization for donation; interacting with a donor’s family members; and arranging for the donation process (recovering and transporting donated organs). They also conduct outreach efforts to encourage the public to register as donors (p. 10).

There are 58 federally designated OPOs, each serving a specific area of the United States. To identify your local OPO, check online at organzine.org.

National Donor Sabbath: A Special Opportunity to Make a Difference

For more than 12 years, the weekend in November 2–3 weekends before Thanksgiving has held a special significance—it’s National Donor Sabbath.

National Donor Sabbath is a time when leaders of all major faiths and denominations are invited to join together with organ and tissue donation professionals and organizations and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, to bring attention to the precious gift of donation.

During this 3-day weekend (Friday, Saturday and Sunday), you, as a faith leader, have a special opportunity to involve members of your own community and educate them about sharing the gift of life through organ donation. It’s a time when you can make a real difference for the more than 108,000 people waiting for transplants.*

In this guide, you’ll find information to help you participate, including examples of how others have successfully incorporated the theme of donation into their services, an overview of many religions’ positions on donation, answers to frequently asked questions, and more.

The Need Is Urgent

More than 108,000* men, women, and children in the United States are waiting for life-saving transplants. The help they need can come only from individuals who make the commitment to donate.

A single organ donor has the potential to save the lives of up to eight people. And through tissue donation, a donor can improve the lives of many more.

Donors of all ages and ethnicities are needed—and the need is great. All that is lacking are enough donors willing to pass along the gift of life.

When Kelly Olmo was 2 years old, she became seriously ill and needed a life-saving liver transplant. Her Japanese-American mother Cathy explains, “It has been 21 years since Kelly received her gift of life through a perfect stranger … a hero in our eyes. It is one of the greatest opportunities today for those who seek to do good, pass along life, and help their fellow human beings.

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*As of July 2010
About National Donor Sabbath
Q: What is it? When is it?
A: National Donor Sabbath is a time for faith leaders of all denominations across America to alert their communities to the pressing need for organ and tissue donations to save lives. It takes place two weekends before Thanksgiving (Friday–Sunday, in order to incite a wave of worship for most major religions). The specific dates for the next several years are listed on page three of this brochure.

Q: Who supports it?
A: National Donor Sabbath is supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, together with national, State, and local donation providers, community organizations, and concerned individuals. National Donor Sabbath is a not-for-profit organization.

Q: What can I do to participate?
A: Raise the subject of organ and tissue donation with your congregation and provide members with a clear statement about the position of your religion. Beyond that, there are a great many things you can do (see the outline following the pages) to help provide information and contribute to informed decision making.

Q: Where can I learn more?
A: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides more information about donation at organdonor.gov. This site will guide you to other information sources, such as Donate Life America (donatelife.net) and organ procurement organization (OPO) Web sites which can provide local assistance. Also, view the list of organizations and associations provided at the end of this guide.

Q: Is there information specific to my religion?
A: A list of the known positions of some major denominations is included in this booklet. If you are not already aware of how your particular religion views organ and tissue donation (both for living and deceased donors), we hope this guide will inspire you to find out and share the knowledge with members of your faith community.

Q: Why is my participation important?
A: Your participation is particularly important because people look to their faith leaders for guidance on serious decisions in their lives. Few leaders of all religious denominations, along with other community leaders, can build awareness and help increase organ donation participation by participating in National Donor Sabbath and holding donor enrollment events throughout the year.

How Can Faith Leaders Support Donation and National Donor Sabbath?
Some individuals in your congregation may not know what your religion’s position is concerning donation, or they may simply not have considered the good they can do through donation.

As a faith leader, you can help them find the answers. Knowing your church’s position concerning donation should help members of your faith community make an informed decision about registering to be organ donors.

Here are some ways in which faith leaders can reach out to communities in meaningful participation in donation and education their congregations about passing along the gift of life.

Provide a clear statement.
Point your congregation’s position on organ and tissue donation. Many people in your congregation or community would welcome having this information. A number of faith’s positions can be found on pages 5, 8, and 9 of this brochure.

Share the need and urgency.
Members of your congregation may be unaware of the great need for donors. You can educate them about their ability to enhance and save the lives of people waiting for transplants.

Hold a candle-lighting or other appropriate event to recognize those who have donated the gift of life, including both living and deceased donors.

Host a prayer breakfast or other appropriate event to recognize the men, women, and children in your country who are currently waiting for an organ or tissue donation.

Offer support to patients waiting for a transplant. Encourage members of your congregation to do so as well. Find out the best ways you can help—from visiting, to transportation, to assistance for their families.

Address the subject in sermons, prayers, and homilies. On National Donor Sabbath, and at other times during the year, many faith leaders include a message of support in their sermons and prayers. The concept of giving to others— even after one’s own life has come to a close—is a compelling and memorable theme. Your local organ procurement organization (OPO) can provide current information and resources.

Share information within your community. In your congregation, there may be someone who needs a transplant, someone who is a living donor, a family whose loved one was a donor, or someone who has received a transplant. Encourage them to share their stories during services. Or, with permission, you might share the subject with your congregation. Their courage would be an inspiring message.

Q: What is it? When is it?
A: National Donor Sabbath is the first weekend in October, a whole new way. "I want to try new things. I see life in new ways now, " he says, "because I skis, and owns an auto body shop. "Now I am just thankful to be alive," he says, "because I..."}

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Anne Laumer
Organ Donor
Vadnais Heights, MN
Shortly after her 32nd wedding anniversary, 53-year-old Anne Laumer collapsed from a brain aneurysm. As her family waited in the hospital, they overheard another family decide to donate the organs of their child who had died. Anne’s family made the same decision, to realize some good from their tragedy.

Anne’s kidneys, liver, heart and eyes helped people to lead better lives. Countless others will benefit from research enabled by her other donated organs. A year later, Anne’s widower Ronald met Ruth Lovegren, who had also donated her spouse’s organs and eyes. Ronald and Ruth, now married, volunteer on behalf of the Donate Life mission.

Anne’s story is courtesy of LifeSource, Minneapolis, MN

Resources and Expert Assistance are Available Year-Round

Raising the subject of donation is important at any time during the year. Your local organ procurement organization (OPO), Donate Life America chapter, and the Health Resources and Services Administration, Healthcare Systems Bureau, Division of Transplantation, are excellent resources for appropriate support and materials. Here are a few of the ways they can help:

Arrange workshops: Your local OPO will be able to provide information or set up a program for faith community members and their families to discuss this sensitive subject.

Organize donor drives: Your local OPO can help your faith community organize a donor drive that makes it easy for members and others to learn the facts, sign up to become donors, and share their decision with their families.

Provide information and brochures: Your local OPO has brochures and additional information about donation. (Others are available at organdonor.gov.) These printed pieces can be enclosed in bulletins, mailed to your congregation, or simply be available in a convenient place for members to pick up.

Provide films for screenings: Two videos are available at no charge from the Division of Transplantation by calling 1.888.ASK.HRSA (757.7775): “A Science of Miracles” and the EMMY™-award-winning film “No Greater Love.” Others may be available from your local OPO or other donation organizations.

Donation Services Are Helpful at Any Time.

While National Donor Sabbath is observed in November, any time is a good time to hold a donation service or sermon. Feel free to contact your local organ procurement organization for assistance and support throughout the year.

Web site links, notices and information about organ and tissue donation for your Web site can be found at organdonor.gov.

The Positions of Some Religious Denominations

Most major religions practiced in the United States have stated positions on the subject of organ and tissue donation for their congregants. There is general agreement among these religions, listed in alphabetical order, that this type of donation is an act of charity in support of human life.

For a more complete list and more detailed information, visit organdonor.gov.

AME and AME ZION (African Methodist Episcopal)
Organ and tissue donation is viewed as an act of neighborly love and charity, and members are encouraged to support donation to help others.

ASSEMBLY OF GOD
Donation is supported through no official policy has been stated. The decision is left up to the individual.

BUDDHISM
Buddhists believe organ and tissue donation is a matter that should be left to an individual’s conscience. Reverend Gyomy Masao, 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.

CATHOLICISM
Organ and tissue donation is considered an act of charity and love, and transplants are morally and ethically acceptable to the Vatican.

▼ Call 1.866.99DONATE (993.6628) to learn how to register in your state. 7organdonor.gov
The Greek Orthodox Church supports donation and transplantation, or research that will lead to improvements in the prevention of disease.

Islamic legal scholars have concluded that 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 and deceased donors is not only permitted but encouraged. 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.

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe that the Bible comments directly on organ transplantation; hence, decisions made regarding cornea, kidney, and other tissue and organ 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.

In principal Judaism sanctions and encourages organ donation in order to save lives. Rabbi Elliott N. Dorff wrote that saving a life through organ donation supercedes the rules concerning treatment of a dead body. Transplantation does not desacrate 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.

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.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have an official statement on organ donation; however, donation and transplantation are strongly encouraged. In fact, there are numerous Seventh-day Adventist transplant hospitals.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes the decision to donate is an individual one to be made in conjunction with family, medical personnel, and prayer. The Church does not oppose donation.

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

Presbyterians encourage and endorse donation. It is an individual’s right to make decisions regarding his or her own body. The resolution states “the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognizes the life-giving benefits of organ and tissue donation, and thereby encourages all Christians to become organ and tissue donors as a part of their ministry to others…”.

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.

“United Church of Christ people, churches, and agencies are extremely and overwhelmingly supportive of organ sharing,” writes Rev. Jay Litner, Director, Washington office of the United Church of Christ Office for Church in Society.
What You Need to Know About Donation

This basic information answers some of the most common questions people have about organ and tissue donation. If you’d like additional information to pass along to your congregation, feel free to contact your local organ procurement organization or organandonor.gov.

How to become an organ and/or tissue donor:
Enroll in your State’s donor registry. Visit organandonor.gov or call 1.866.99DONATE (993.6628) to learn how to register in your State. Designate your decision on your driver’s license. Tell your family and friends—make sure that your family knows your wishes so they can support your decision.

What can be donated:
Decedent donors can donate multiple organs and tissues.
- Organs: heart, kidney, pancreas, lungs, liver, and small intestine.
- Tissues: corneas, bone, heart valves, connective tissue, skin, and other tissues.

There is no age limit to donation:
People of any age, from infants to people in their 80s, 90s, and beyond, have been organ donors. The condition of your organs is more important than your age. Even people with chronic conditions can donate. That is why it is so important for people of any age or health condition to sign up.

Your quality of medical care is the same, whether or not you are a donor:
Signing up as a donor does not affect the quality of medical care you receive in a hospital. The medical team that treats you as a patient is dedicated entirely to saving your life. A separate transplant team is called in once death has been declared or is imminent and this team recovers donated organs.

Traditional funeral arrangements are not affected by donation (but could be slightly delayed):
Donation does not interfere with traditional funeral arrangements, including open-casket services.

There is no cost to donate:
The donor’s family does not pay for the cost of organ and tissue donation. Costs are covered by the recipient, the recipient’s insurance company, Medicare, or Medicaid.

Sources for More Information

American Association of Blood Banks
301.367.8977
aab.org

American Association of Tissue Banks
703.847.8292
aab.org

America’s Blood Centers
888.LSIBLOOD
americasblood.com

American Red Cross
800.338.3739
redcross.org

American Red Cross (including regional centers)
800.448.3443
redcross.org

Arbor Research Collaborative for Health
850.580.3661
arborentersearch.org

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850.580.3661
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Association of Organ Procurement Organizations
703.356.6424
aopo.org

Donate Life America
1.877.480.4000
donatelife.net

Eye Bank
Association of America
800.773.4009
restoresight.org

National Kidney Foundation
800.622.9010
kidney.org

National Marrow Donor Program
800.MARROW2
marrow.org

Organ and Procurement and Transplantation Network
800.448.3543
opnt.transplant.hrsa.gov

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800.448.3543
opnt.transplant.hrsa.gov

United Blood Services
404.945.4101
unitedbloodservices.org

United Network for Organ Sharing
800.784.4300
unens.org

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Healthcare Systems Bureau, Division of Transplantation
301.444.5727
organandonor.gov

Please Participate in National Donor Sabbath

And help your congregation share the gift of life.
It is natural for individuals and families to turn to their faith leaders, as well as medical professionals, when considering the serious subject of organ and tissue donation. Your knowledge about the facts of donation and transplants, combined with an understanding of the beliefs of your faith, will enable you to serve your congregation and your community with confidence.

The subject of donation is filled with compassion, courage, and charity. These virtues are of central significance to every religion. This makes it highly appropriate to make use of a religious medium to bring to the attention of your faith community.

You can play a part in clearing away myths and misconceptions, help members of your faith make informed life decisions, and turn suffering into survival. That is what we are invited to do by promoting donation during National Donor Sabbath and all year-round.

*This publication lists non-federal resources in order to provide additional information to consumers. The views and content in these resources have not been formally approved by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Listing these resources is not an endorsement by HHS or its components.***
NOTES: