

# SHARING THE GIFT OF LIFE

A Resource Guide for Faith Leaders on Organ  
and Tissue Donation and National Donor Sabbath.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Health Resources and Services Administration



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**Kelly Olmo**  
Liver Recipient  
Pleasanton, CA

When Kelly Olmo was 2 years old, she became seriously ill and needed a life-saving liver transplant. Kelly's 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. This family said 'yes' to donation when their own child died. They were able to look beyond their own grief and help someone else."

According to Cathy, "It's important to sign up to be a donor and discuss your wishes with your family. You never know whose life you might be saving—it might be another child like Kelly!"

Kelly's story is courtesy of California Transplant Donor Network, Oakland, CA

## 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 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.

## 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. 6).

There are 58 federally designated OPOs, each serving a specific area of the United States. To identify your local OPO, check online at [organdonor.gov](http://organdonor.gov).

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 (OPOs).

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

## National Donor Sabbath: A Special Opportunity to Make a Difference

For more than 12 years, the weekend in November 2 weeks 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.

\*As of July 2010

## 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.

National Donor Sabbath will be observed on the following weekends in the next several years:

- November 12–14, 2010
- November 11–13, 2011
- November 9–11, 2012
- November 15–17, 2013



**Christina Janis**  
Cornea Recipient  
Kyle, SD

Sharing is a way of life for Lakota communities and families and celebrates a deep spiritual link they have with one another. Because of the generosity of a cornea donor, things are much clearer for Christina Janis since her first cornea transplant in 2004. For many years, Christina's vision was deteriorating from eye disease—even glasses could not help her see clearly. A donated cornea restored Christina's sight. She had a second cornea transplant in 2005, and now enjoys being even more active in the outdoors. Christina says, "The giving of oneself is just the ultimate way of saying thank you for being created."

Christina's story is courtesy of South Dakota Lions Eye Bank, Sioux Falls, SD

Call 1.866.99DONATE (993.6628) to learn how to register in your state.



**Manuel Salazar**  
Tissue Recipient  
Denver, CO

In just one instant, Manuel Salazar's life was changed forever when a downed power line struck him and 115,000 volts of electricity were sent through his body. It was a miracle he survived. However, he lost both arms and legs as a result of burns. The Denver Center for Extremities at Risk used human bone from a donor to build Manuel a new shoulder that could be fitted with a prosthetic.

Today, because of the donated tissue and prosthetics, Manuel drives, skis, water-skis, and owns an auto body shop. "Now I am just thankful to be alive," he says, "I want to try new things. I see life in a whole new way."

Manuel's story is courtesy of AlloSource, Centennial, CO

## 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 include the day 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 organizations, faith communities, health providers, community organizations, and concerned individuals. National Donor Sabbath is a nationwide observance and there is no cost to participate.

### 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. Faith leaders of all religious denominations, along with other community leaders, can build awareness and help increase organ donation sign-up by participating in National Donor Sabbath and holding donor enrollment events throughout the year.

### 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 (some are outlined on the following 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](http://organdonor.gov). This site will guide you to other information sources, such as Donate Life America ([donatelife.net](http://donatelife.net)) and organ procurement organizations (OPOs), 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 religions in America 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.

## 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 religion'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 to invigorate participation in donation and educate their congregations about passing along the gift of life.

### Provide a clear statement.

Please share your religion's position on organ and tissue donation. Many people in your congregation or community would welcome having this information. (A number of faiths' positions can be found on pages 7, 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 ceremony** to honor 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 our 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 the subject of donation 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) is an excellent resource for relevant religious references and materials.

### 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. Invite them to share their stories during services. Or, with permission, you might share their stories with your congregation. Their courage would be an inspiring message.

### Acknowledge donation at funeral services.

When you know the deceased was an organ donor, it's inspiring to pass along the good this person has done. Ask the family. Your mention of this generous gift and selfless act would be invaluable if even one other life is saved.

**Utilize mailings, bulletins, Web sites, and newsletters.** Place stories, quotes, and notices about donation and National Donor Sabbath in your mailings or newsletter. Referencing an organ or tissue donor or transplant recipient in your own community adds special significance. Contact your local OPO for articles and stories.

**Share in faith education classes and study groups.** Education and study groups are excellent places to share the importance of organ and tissue donation—what it can mean to the donor's family as well as to recipients and their families. If your faith community is affiliated with a school, consider including donation education in classes such as health, life sciences, or social studies.

### Ask your faith community for volunteers.

You don't have to do it all yourself. You may achieve great success by asking a member of your faith community to lead this effort. Someone may have a personal connection to donation and may want to help observe National Donor Sabbath and increase awareness about donation in any way possible.



**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](http://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 (275.4772)**:

“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](http://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](http://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 though 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 Gyomay 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.



## EPISCOPAL

The 70th General Convention of the Episcopal Church 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.”

## GREEK ORTHODOX

The Greek Orthodox Church supports donation as a way to better human life in the form of transplantation, or research that will lead to improvements in the prevention of disease.

## ISLAM

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 WITNESS

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe that the Bible comments directly on organ transplants; 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.

## JUDAISM

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 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.

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.

## LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Lutheran Church passed a resolution in 1984 stating that donation contributes to the well-being of humanity and can be “an expression of sacrificial love for a neighbor in need.” They call on “members to consider donating and to make any necessary family legal arrangements, including the use of a signed donor card.”

## MORMON

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.

## PENTECOSTAL

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

## PRESBYTERIAN

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... .”

## SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

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.

## 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.

## 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.

## UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

“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.

## UNITED METHODIST

“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,” reports a church policy statement. In a 2000 resolution the Church also “encourages its congregations to join in the interfaith celebration of National Donor Sabbath ... another way that United Methodists can help save lives.”



(With permission from the United Network for Organ Sharing, this information was sourced from their publication: “An Organ Donation Guide for Faith Leaders and Health Care Professionals,” 2008. For a more complete list of various religions’ positions, you can also check [organdonor.gov](http://organdonor.gov).)









[organdonor.gov](http://organdonor.gov)

1.866.99DONATE (1.866.993.6628)

