

RELIGIOUS VIEWS ON ORGAN DONATION AND TRANSPLANTATION

Most religions support organ and tissue donation as a charitable act of love and giving. This information is provided to help answer some of your questions.

Adapted from: *Organ and Tissue Donation: A Reference Guide for Clergy, 1995.*

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 consent to donation if they know it is for the health and welfare of the transplant recipient. They believe that since God created the human body, it is God who heals. However, they are not forbid from using modern medical services, including surgery, hospitalization, dental work, anesthesia, blood transfusions or immunization.

Assembly of God -- The Church has no official policy regarding donation. The decision to donate is left up to the individual. Donation is highly supported by the denomination.

Baptist -- Though Baptists generally believe that organ and tissue donation and transplantation are ultimately matters of personal conscience, the nation's largest Protestant denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, adopted a resolution in 1988 encouraging physicians to request organ donation in appropriate circumstances and to '...encourage voluntarism regarding organ donations in the spirit of stewardship, compassion for the needs of others and alleviating suffering.' Other Baptist groups have supported organ and tissue donation as an act of charity and leave the decision to donate up to the individual.

Buddhism -- Buddhists believe organ 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 and a practicing minister, says, '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 -- Catholics view organ donation as an act of charity, fraternal love and self sacrifice. Transplants are ethically and morally acceptable to the Vatican. Pope John Paul II 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.'

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) -- The Christian Church encourages organ and tissue donation, stating that we were created for God's glory and for sharing 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.'

The Church of Christ Scientist -- Christian Scientists do not take a specific position on transplants or organ donation. They normally rely on spiritual, rather than medical means for healing. Organ and tissue donation is an issue that is left to the individual church member.

Episcopal -- The Episcopal Church recognizes the life-giving benefits of organ, blood and tissue donation. All Christians are encouraged to become organ, blood and tissue donors "as part of their ministry to others in the name of Christ, who gave His life that we may have life in its fullness.'

Greek Orthodox -- According to Reverend Dr. Milton Efthimiou, Director of the Department of Church and Society for the Greek Orthodox Church of North and South America, "The Greek Orthodox Church is not opposed to organ donation as long as the organs and tissue in question are used to better human life, i.e., for transplantation or for research that will lead to improvements in the treatment and prevention of disease.'

Gypsies -- Gypsies tend to be against organ donation. Although they have no formal resolution, their opposition is associated with their belief in the after-life. Gypsies believe that for one year after a person dies, the soul retraces its steps. All parts of the body must remain intact because the soul maintains a physical shape.

Hinduism -- Hindus are not prohibited by religious law from donating their organs, according to the Hindu Temple Society of North America. In fact, Hindu mythology includes stories in which parts of the human body are used for the benefit of other humans and society. The act is an individual decision.

Independent Conservative Evangelical -- Generally, Evangelicals have had no opposition to organ and tissue donation. Donation is an individual decision.

Islam -- Muslims believe in the principle of saving human lives, and permit organ transplants as a means of achieving that noble end.

Jehovah's Witnesses -- Jehovah's Witnesses believe donation is a matter best left to an individual's conscience. All organs and tissue, however, must be completely drained of blood before transplantation.

Judaism -- All four branches of Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist) support and encourage donation. Said Orthodox Rabbi Moses Tendler, "if one is in the position to donate an organ to save another's life, it's obligatory to do so, even if the donor never knows who the beneficiary will be. The basic principle of Jewish ethics - 'the infinite worth of the human being' - also includes donation of corneas, since eyesight restoration is considered a life-saving operation.' In 1991, the Rabbinical Council of America (Orthodox) approved organ donations as permissible, and even required, from brain-dead patients. The reform movement looks upon the transplant program favorably. Rabbi Richard Address, Director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations Bio-Ethics Committee, stated that, 'Judaic Responsa materials provide a positive approach and by and large the North American Reform Jewish community approves of transplantation.'

Lutheran -- In 1984, the Lutheran Church in America passed a resolution 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 organs and to make any necessary family and legal arrangements, including the use of a signed donor card.

Mennonite -- Mennonites have no formal position on donation, but are not opposed to it. They leave the decision to the individual or his/her family.

Moravian -- 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.

Mormons -- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints considers the decision to donate organs a personal one. Individuals must weigh the pros and cons of transplantation and make a decision which will bring them peace and comfort. The Church does not interpose any objection to an individual decision in favor of organ and tissue donation.

Pentecostal Pentecostals leave the decision to donate up to the individual.

Presbyterian Presbyterians encourage and endorse donation. It's an individual's right to make decisions regarding his or her own body.

Protestantism -- Protestants encourage and endorse organ donation. They believe that Jesus Christ came to give life and to give life abundance. Donations and transplants enable more abundant life, alleviate pain and suffering, and are an expression of love in times of tragedy.

Seventh-Day Adventist -- Donation and transplantation are strongly encouraged. Seventh-Day Adventists have many transplant hospitals, including Loma Linda in California, which specializes in pediatric heart transplantation.

Shinto -- In Shinto, the dead body is considered impure and dangerous, and thus quite powerful. In folk tales, injuring a dead body is a serious crime. It is difficult to obtain consent from bereaved families for organ donation or dissection for medical education or pathological anatomy because Shintos relate donation to injuring a dead body. Families are concerned that they not injure the *itai*, the relationship between the dead person and the bereaved people.

Society of Friends (Quakers) -- Quakers do not have an official position. They believe that organ and tissue donation is an individual decision.

Unitarian Universalist -- Organ and tissue donation is widely supported by Unitarian Universalists. They view it as an act of love and selfless giving.

United Church of Christ -- Reverend Jay Lintner stated, 'United Church of Christ people, churches and agencies are extremely and overwhelmingly supportive of organ sharing. 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 -- The United Methodist Church issued a policy statement regarding organ and tissue donation. In it, they state that, "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.'