

Religious Views on Organ and Tissue Donation

Most major religions support organ and tissue donation. The underlying thought connecting various denominations is that organ and tissue donation represents one of the highest forms of loving, giving, and caring - the principles upon which all religions are based. Please contact your clergy for more information.

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 all share 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.

ROMAN CATHOLIC

Catholics view donation as an act of charity, fraternal love and self-sacrifice. Transplants are ethically and morally acceptable to the Vatican. Pope Benedict XVI is a registered organ and tissue donor.

JUDAISM

Judaism teaches that saving a human life takes precedence over maintaining the sanctity of the human body. Organ donation is the only *mitzvah*, or good deed, an individual can perform after death. According to Moses Tendler, Ph.D., an Orthodox Rabbi and Chairman of the Bio-Ethics Commission of the Rabbinical Council of America, "If one is in the position to donate an organ to save a life, it's obligatory to do so, even if the donor never knows who the beneficiary will be."

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 donation if they believe it is for the well-being of the transplant recipient. John Hostetler, world renowned authority on Amish religion and Professor of Anthropology at Temple University in Philadelphia, says 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 Church has no official policy regarding organ and tissue donation, but the decision to donate is left up to the individual. Donation is highly supported by the denomination.

BAPTIST

Donation is supported as an act of charity and the church leaves the decision to donate up to the individual.

BRETHREN

The Church of the Brethren's Annual Conference in 1993 developed a resolution on organ and tissue donation supporting and encouraging donation. They wrote that, "We have the opportunity to help others out of love for Christ, through the donation of organs and tissues."

BUDDHISM

Buddhists believe that organ/tissue donation is a matter of individual conscience and place high value on acts of compassion. Reverend Gyomay Masao, President and Founder of the Buddhist Temple of Chicago, says, "We honor those people who donate their bodies and organs to the advancement of medical science and to saving lives."

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 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

Christian Scientists normally rely on spiritual means of healing instead of medical. They are free, however, to choose whatever form of medical treatment they desire -- including a transplant. Donation is an individual decision.

EPISCOPAL

The Episcopal Church passed a resolution in 1982 that recognizes the life-giving benefits of organ, blood, and tissue donation. All Episcopalians are encouraged to become organ, blood, and tissue donors.

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."

HINDUISM

According to H.L. Trivedi, in *Transplantation Proceedings*, "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."

INDEPENDENT CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICAL

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

ISLAM

The religion of Islam strongly believes in the principle of saving human lives. According to A. Sachedina in his *Transplantation Proceedings*' article, "Islamic Views on Organ Transplantation," ". . . the majority of the Muslim scholars belonging to various schools of Islamic law have invoked the principle of priority of saving human life and have permitted the organ transplant as a necessity to procure that noble end."

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

According to the Watch Tower Society, donation is a matter of individual decision. 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.

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 encourage members to "...consider donating organs and to make any necessary family and legal arrangements, including the use of a signed donor card." In 1989, the church's assembly action calls upon congregations to "...lift up this need and encourage members to consider organ donation as part of their stewardship of life's resources."

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 their family.

MORMON (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints)

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

MORAVIAN

The Moravian Church does not have an official policy 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."

PENTECOSTAL

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

PRESBYTERIAN

Presbyterians encourage and support donation. They respect a person's right to make decisions regarding their own body. During their General Assembly in 1995, they wrote a strong support of donation and commented that they "encourage its members and friends to sign and carry Universal Donor Cards. . ."

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

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

SHINTO

In Shinto, the dead 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." Families are often concerned that they not injure the *itai* - the relationship between the dead person and the bereaved people.

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (Quaker)

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

Unitarian Universalists affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person and respect the interdependent web of all existence. They affirm the value of organ and tissue donation, but leave the decision to each individual.

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Reverend Jay Litner, Director, Washington Office of the United Church of Christ Office for Church in Society, states that "United Church of Christ people, churches and agencies are extremely and overwhelmingly supportive of organ sharing."

UNITED METHODIST

The United Methodist Church issued a policy statement in 1984 stating, "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 as part of their ministry to others in the name of Christ, who gave his life that we might have life in its fullness."

WESLEYAN CHURCH

The Wesleyan Church supports donation as a way of helping others. They believe that God's "ability to resurrect us is not dependent on whether or not all our parts were connected at death."