Common Misconceptions about Organ Donation

1. Myth: My religion does not support organ donation.

   **Fact:** A majority of scholars from all major religions support organ donation as a selfless, individual choice. Please see the following list of position statements and feel free to consult with your spiritual leaders for further insight and guidance.

   **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.

   **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 supersedes 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**

Lutheran Church (ELCA) endorsed the practice of organ donation in 1984, calling such acts “expressions of sacrificial love for a neighbor in need.”

**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.

**THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS:**

The donation of organs and tissue 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 tissue is made after prayerful consideration by the individual or the deceased member’s family.

**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.”
2. **Myth:** I need all my organs to get into Heaven.

**Fact:** The idea of body wholeness being required for a soul to pass on is not backed up by any major religious texts. The Apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 15:50 that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." The Hebrew Bible also stresses that, in eternity, we will not have or need our earthly bodies. Old things will pass away and all things will be made new.

The Book of Mormon prophet Alma teaches in Alma 40:23 that when we are resurrected "the soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be stored to their proper and perfect frame."

The Koran states that if someone can save the life of just one person, they have saved all mankind. A single organ donor can save up to eight lives and be a blessing and inspiration to so many others.

Buddhist principles stress focus on spiritual health and wholeness rather than that of a physical nature. It further encourages us to not feel attachment to our physical bodies, as they are a fleeting and temporary shell for our spirit.

Life after death is a strong belief of Hinduism along with 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 where the old clothes are shed for new ones in each life. Organ donation is a selfless act to achieve higher spiritual purpose and accrue good Karma in the next life.

From these spiritual texts, it is indicated that bodily “wholeness” is not a factor after death. Choosing to be an organ donor can serve as a beautiful final testament of one’s faith and love of others.

3. **Myth:** If I am an organ donor and get sick or injured, my doctors will not try to save me.

**Fact:** No one becomes a donor until all lifesaving measures have been exhausted. Extensive testing and rigorous procedures ensure that organ donation is only an option once a patient is brain dead. Up until this point, there is absolutely no difference in care. Not everyone dies in a way that allows vital organ donation. In fact, only a small percentage of people who die are eligible to be organ donors. If the decision ever becomes ours to consent for organ donation, we should consider why God has allowed such an opportunity.

4. **Myth:** I am too old to be an organ donor.

**Fact:** There is no set age limit for organ and tissue donation. At the time of death, trained medical professionals will evaluate patients on a case-by-case basis to determine which organs and tissues are suitable for donation. Therefore, people of any age wishing to become organ and tissue donors should indicate it on their driver’s license, join the organ donor registry at DonateLife.net and inform their family of their wishes. You never know what a huge difference you could make, regardless of your age!

5. **Myth:** I can’t be a donor because of my medical history.

**Fact:** A person’s suitability for organ or tissue donation is always determined at the time of death. Clinical professionals from the organ and tissue donor program will review medical and social histories with the donor’s family at the time of death, on a case-by-case basis to determine if the donor is medically suitable. Even if some organs or tissues cannot be used because of an existing medical condition, others may be viable and your decision to donate could still make a huge impact!
6. Myth: If I become an organ donor, I will not be able to have an open casket funeral.

Fact: Organ donors can absolutely still have an open casket funeral. There may be a slight delay in transport to the funeral home, but donation will not impact your funeral service otherwise. Transplant surgery is done with the utmost respect and dignity to ensure that your family can still have the service of their choosing.

7. Myth: My family will have to pay surgical costs if I choose to be an organ or tissue donor.

Fact: Donor families never have to pay any donation-related expenses. You can make the decision to give without worrying about putting a financial obligation on your family.

8. Myth: The organ donor list is biased.

Fact: Wealth and status are not factors in the organ allocation process. The length of time it takes to receive a transplant is governed by many factors including blood type, length of time on the waiting list, severity of illness and other medical criteria.

It is important to note that transplant success rates increase when organs are matched between members of the same ethnic background and does factor into the organ distribution system for that reason. For example, African Americans have high rates of diabetes and high blood pressure and, thus, have high rates of complications resulting in the need for a transplant. However, African Americans are less likely than Caucasians to be organ donors, making it more challenging to find compatible matches for those on the waiting list. The only way to improve success rates for those awaiting a lifesaving transplant is to increase the number of potential organ donors.

9. Myth: The recipient will know who I am.

Fact: The anonymity of the organ donor is fully maintained unless they choose otherwise. Patient privacy is of the utmost importance for both donor and recipient, and identities are only disclosed when permission is given.

10. Myth: I have signed my driver’s license and/or put my decision to donate in my will, so there is no need to discuss this with my family.

Fact: Even if you have signed your driver’s license to be an organ and/or tissue donor, you still need to enroll on the Donate Life Registry. This is also true of including your decision in your will. By the time your will is consulted, the opportunity for donation will have passed. It is also crucial to discuss your decision with family. Talking about donation doesn’t mean talking about death, but about the opportunity to give another person a second chance at life. While discussing organ and tissue donation can be uncomfortable, it can also be the difference between heartbreak and hope for other families just like yours.

Losing a loved one is an emotional time for family members, and deciding to donate a loved one’s organs can be overwhelming. Thanks to the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act, registered donors can rest assured that their decision to become a donor will be carried out. If your family is aware of your decision, it will avoid confusion, while offering comfort to your family that your wishes will be fulfilled. It is also important to tell family members about your decision because medical and social history is needed at the time of death, and the next-of-kin will be approached for that information.