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RELIGIOUS VIEWS ON ORGAN/TISSUE DONATION  
AND TRANSPLANTATION

A common question that arises when people are asked to consider donation of their organs and tissues, or those of their loved ones, is: Is donation compatible with my religious beliefs? Though the answers vary from one denomination to another, research has found that the vast majority of religions do support donation and transplantation. Please contact your clergyperson for more information. The following are some of our findings:

**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 transplantation 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. The importance of letting loved ones know your wishes is stressed. Many families will not give permission to donate unless they know their loved one wanted to be a donor.

## **CATHOLICISM**

Catholics view organ/tissue donation as an act of charity and love. Transplants are morally and ethically acceptable to the Vatican. According to Father Leroy Wickowski, Director of the Office of Health Affairs of the Archdiocese of Chicago, We encourage donation as an act of charity. It is something good that can result from tragedy and a way for families to find comfort by helping others.

## **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**

The Church of Christ Scientist does not have a specific position regarding organ and tissue donation. According to the First Church of Christ Scientist in Boston, 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. The question of organ/tissue 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 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 are a people of different ethnic groups without a formalized religion. They share common folk beliefs and tend to be opposed to organ and tissue donation. Their opposition is connected with their beliefs about the afterlife. Traditional belief contends that for one year after death, the soul retraces its steps. Thus, the body must remain intact because the soul maintains its physical shape.

## **HINDUISM**

According to the Hindu Temple Society of North America, Hindus are not prohibited by religious law from donating their organs. This act is an individual's decision. H.L. Trivedi, in *Transplantation Proceedings*, stated that, Hindu mythology has stories in which the parts of the human body are used for the benefit of other humans and society. 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 their National Headquarters, the Watch Tower Society, Jehovah's Witnesses believe 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. In addition, it would not be acceptable for an organ donor to receive blood as part of the organ recovery process.

## **JUDAISM**

All four branches of Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist) support and encourage donation. According to Orthodox Rabbi Moses Tendler, Chairman of the Biology Department of Yeshiva University in New York City and chairman of the Bioethics Commission of the Rabbinical Council of America, 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, even required, from brain-dead

patients. Both the Reform and Conservative movements also have policy statements strongly supporting donation.

## **LUTHERAN**

In 1984, the Lutheran Church in America (Missouri-Synod) 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 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/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.

## **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. To this day it is difficult to obtain consent from bereaved families for organ donation or dissection for medical education or pathological anatomy. . . the Japanese regard them all in the sense of injuring a dead 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. 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 in 1984 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 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 that, Pastoral-care persons should be willing to explore these options as a normal part of conversation with patients and their families.

## **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. They also support research and in 1989 noted in a task force on public morals and social concerns that one of the ways that a Christian can do good is to request that their body be donated to a medical school for use in teaching.

**Compiled by Christine Gallagher, MAR in June 1997.**