

Religious Views on Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation

A common question that arises when people are asked to consider donation of their organs and tissues after death, or those of their loved ones, is: Does my religion support/approve organ, eye and tissue donation? While the answer to this question varies from one denomination to another, research shows that most major religions support organ, eye and tissue donation and transplantation.

Below, you will find a series of statements from different denominations addressing organ, eye and tissue donation and/or transplantation. We encourage you to talk to your leaders if you have any questions about your religion's point of view on organ and tissue donation. Each of us can save lives by saying yes to organ, eye and tissue donation.

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."

Source: Hostetler, John A. *Amish society*. Baltimore: JHU Press, 1993. Print.

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

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.

Source: Southern Baptist Convention. Resolution on Human Organ Donation. Texas, 1988.

<http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/791>

BRETHREN

According to Pastor Mike Smith, there is a consensus among the National Fellowship of Grace Brethren that organ and tissue donation is a charitable act so long as it does not impede the life or hasten the death of the donor or does not come from an unborn child.

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

Source: Church of Brethren Annual Conference. Organ and Tissue Donation 1993 Annual Conference Resolution. 1993.

To read the full resolution, you can go to

<http://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1993organtissuedonation.html>

BUDDHISM

Buddhists believe that organ and tissue donation is a matter of individual conscience and place a high value on acts of compassion. Reverend Gyomay Masao Kubose, 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.

CATHOLICISM

Catholics view organ and 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."

In addition, Pope John Paul II has 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."

Source: Pope John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae, number 86.

To read the full Evangelium Vitae, please go to

http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html

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.

Source: General Assembly of Christian Church. Resolution #8548 Concerning Organ Transplants. Des Moines, 1985.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

The Church of Christ Scientist does not have a specific position regarding organ donation. According to the First Church of Christ Scientist in Boston, Christian Scientists normally rely on spiritual instead of medical means of healing. They are free, however, to choose whatever form of medical treatment they desire - including a transplant. The question of organ and tissue donation is an individual decision.

EPISCOPAL

The Episcopal Church passed a resolution in 1982 recognizing 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."

Source: General Convention, Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, NOLA, 1982.

EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH

The Evangelical Covenant Church passed a resolution at the Annual Meeting in 1982 encouraging members to sign and carry organ donor cards. The resolution also recommended "that it becomes a policy with our pastors, teachers, and counselors to encourage awareness of organ donation in all our congregations."

Source: Evangelical Covenant Church. Commission on Christian Action; Organ Donor Resolution. 1982.

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 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. Dr. Hargovind Laxmishanker Trivedi, in his book *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 Fourth Conference of the Islamic Fiqh Council determined that transplantation offers "clear positive results" if practiced "...to achieve the aims of sharee'ah which try to achieve all that is good and in the best interests of individuals and societies and promotes cooperation, compassion and selflessness." Provided that "shar'i guidelines and controls that protect human dignity" are met, "It is permissible to transplant an organ from a dead person to a living person whose life or basic essential functions depend on that organ, subject to the condition that permission be given by the deceased before his death, or by his heirs after his death..." Regarding living donation, it is permissible to transplant organs such as a kidney and or a lung "in order to keep the beneficiary alive or to keep some essential or basic function of his body working."

Source: Resolutions of Islamic Fiqh Council of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Fourth Conference, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 18-23 Safar 1408 AH/6-11 February 1988 CE

JUDAISM

Judaism sanctions and encourages organ, eye, and tissue 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" that saves human lives. Source: The Rabbinical Assembly. On Educating Conservative Jews Regarding Organ Donations, 1996.

LUTHERAN

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." Source: The Lutheran Church. Organ Donation: A Resolution of the Lutheran Church in America. 1984.

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 his or 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.

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.

The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints recognizes that "the donation of organs and tissues is a selfless act that often results in great benefit ...The decision to will or donate one's own body organs or tissue for medical purposes, or the decision to authorize the transplant of organs or tissue from a deceased family member, is made by the individual or the deceased member's family."

Source: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Handbook 2: Administering the Church. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010. Print.

PRESBYTERIAN

The Presbyterian denominations encourage and endorse donation. It is an individual's right to make decisions regarding his or her own body. The resolution by one Presbyterian denomination, 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 ..."

Source: Minutes of the 195th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 1983.

SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

In 1988, the Southern Baptist Convention resolved that because "resurrection does not depend on body wholeness" and that "organ transplant technology has transformed many lives from certain death to vibrant productivity," the SBC encourages "voluntarism regarding organ donations in the spirit of stewardship, compassion for the needs of others, and alleviating suffering."

Source: Southern Baptist Convention. Resolution on Human Organ Donations. San Antonio. 1988.

THE CHURCH OF NAZARENE

The Church of the Nazarene encourages members who do not object personally to support donor/recipient anatomical organs through living wills and trusts. Further, they appeal for a morally and ethically fair distribution of organs to those qualified to receive them.

Source: Church of the Nazarene. Manual of the Church of Nazarene 1997-2001, paragraph 904.2 Kansas: Nazarene Publish House, 1998. Print.

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."

Source: United Methodist Church (U.S.). The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church. Nashville: United Methodist Pub. House, 2000. Print.