

ORGAN
AND
TISSUE
DONATION:

A CATHOLIC
PERSPECTIVE



**New York
Organ Donor
Network** *Saving lives through
organ & tissue donation*

Q:

Does the Roman Catholic Church approve of organ and tissue donation?

A:

Yes, the Catholic Church regards donation as being an act of charity, fraternal love and self-sacrifice. Transplants are ethically and morally acceptable to the Vatican.

OVERVIEW

As medical science helps to advance transplantation techniques, the number of Americans awaiting transplants has also accelerated. Sixteen Americans die each day because of the critical shortage of organs.

Recognizing the desperate need to save lives, the Roman Catholic Church has long supported organ and tissue donation. In this context, donation is seen as an opportunity for individuals to foster a culture that values life.

Catholicism maintains that organ and tissue donation allows an individual the freedom to bestow on others the most valuable gift of all, the gift of life.

While donation is viewed as being "a genuine act of love," the Vatican clearly states that it must be performed in an ethically acceptable manner. As such, donation may not commercialize human organs or consider them as items of exchange or trade.

POPE PIUS XII

In May 1956, Pope Pius XII declared that:

"A person may will to dispose of his body and to destine it to ends that are useful, morally irreproachable and even noble, among them the desire to aid the sick and suffering...this decision should not be condemned but positively justified."



POPE JOHN PAUL II

In August 2000, Pope John Paul II told attendees at the International Congress on Transplants in Rome:

"Transplants are a great step forward in science's service of man, and not a few people today owe their lives to an organ transplant. Increasingly, the technique of transplants has proven to be a valid means of attaining the primary goal of all medicine — the service of human life.... There is a need to instill in people's hearts, especially in the hearts of the young, a genuine and deep appreciation of the need for brotherly love, a love that can find expression in the decision to become an organ donor."



"One way of nurturing a genuine culture of life is the donation of organs, performed in an ethically acceptable manner, with a view to offering...life itself to the sick who sometimes have no other hope."

— Pope John Paul II,
Evangelium Vitae No. 86.

EDWARD CARDINAL EGAN, ARCHBISHOP OF NEW YORK

In the summer of 2001, in an article written for the New York Organ Donor Network, Cardinal Egan wrote:

"The commitment of one person to give the gift of life to another mirrors an essential foundation upon which the teachings of Christ are based. As Saint John tells us:

For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16).

By knowingly choosing the donation of one's bodily organs, one is acting as Christ would act — giving life to humanity."



"It is for the betterment of humanity, for the love of one's fellow human beings, that organ donation is undertaken. One of the most powerful ways for individuals to demonstrate love for their neighbor is by making an informed decision to be an organ donor."

— Cardinal Edward Egan,
Archbishop of New York,
Summer 2001.



ENROLL IN THE NEW YORK STATE ORGAN AND TISSUE DONOR REGISTRY

By enrolling in the New York State Organ and Tissue Donor Registry, you can make a difference. You can make the decision that upon your death you will give "the gift of life." We ask that you be a proponent of (in the words of Pope John Paul II) a "culture of life."

The registry is a confidential database administered by the New York State Department of Health. It declares your intent to donate your organs and tissues after your death.

It will ensure that your wishes to become a donor will be honored by family members and health care providers.

Signing the registry is only the first step. Because family consent is requested by the New York Organ Donor Network from the patient's next-of-kin in the case of a potential organ or tissue donation, we urge you to discuss your decision with your close family members.

Please fill out the enrollment form on the reverse side and mail it in. Thank you.

**NEW YORK STATE ORGAN AND
TISSUE DONOR REGISTRY**

ENROLLMENT FORM

To register, please complete and mail this enrollment form in a sealed envelope to:

NYS Organ and Tissue Donor Registry
New York Organ Donor Network
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1244
New York, NY 10115

PLEASE PRINT

DATE: ___/___/___

9 digit Motor Vehicle license or non license ID:

Last Name: _____

First Name: _____ MI _____

Date of Birth: ___/___/___

Sex: Male Female

Height: _____ feet _____ inches

Eye Color: _____

Address: _____

City, State: _____

Zip: _____

I wish to be listed in the New York State Organ and Tissue Donor Registry maintained by the State Department of Health to record my intent to donate my organs and tissues in the event of my death. I authorize the State Department of Health to share this information with federally regulated organ procurement organizations and New York State-licensed tissue banks and hospitals at the time of my death.

Signature _____ CI2001

**WHAT THE CATHOLIC
CHURCH HAS TO SAY
ABOUT...**

✦ **FREEDOM TO CHOOSE DONATION**

Individuals may choose whether to be an organ or tissue donor. The free and informed consent of the donor or the donor's family is imperative.

✦ **SAVING THE LIFE OF THE PATIENT**

Donation cannot endanger the donor's own life. Organs and tissues should be removed only when there is sufficient reason to justify such an action. To avoid conflict of interest, the patient's doctor(s) should be distinct from the transplant team.

✦ **BRAIN DEATH**

The "complete and irreversible cessation of all brain activity, if rigorously applied" is an acceptable approach to ascertaining death (John Paul II, August 29, 2000). Death of the whole brain must be established with medical certainty.

✦ **TRANSPLANT WAITING LIST**

Who should have priority in regards to organ transplantation must be based solely on medical factors and not on such discriminatory considerations as age, sex, race, religion, social standing or similar standards.

✦ **LIVING DONATION**

"The transplantation from living donors is morally permissible when the anticipated benefit to the recipient is proportionate to the harm done to the donor, provided the loss of such organ(s) does not deprive the donor of life itself nor of the functional integrity of his body" (The United States Bishops Conference, 1977).



The New York Organ Donor Network is the federally-designated nonprofit organ procurement organization in the Greater New York metropolitan area, serving 12 million people.

The Donor Network is dedicated to the recovery of suitable organs and tissue for people in need of transplants and to assure that families are offered the option of donation with respect and compassion. We are committed to the creation of a greater awareness and understanding among health care professionals and the community, to ensure that families are able to make an informed decision about the life-saving benefits of organ and tissue donation.

475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1244
New York, NY 10115-1244

Phone: 212-870-2240

24 Hour Referral Line/Public Information:

800-GIFT-4-NY

Fax: 212-870-3299

Web site: www.nyodn.org



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— Edward Cardinal Egan, Summer 2001