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Faith and Donation: The Time is Now

National Donor Sabbath is Nov. 13 - 15

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By Alan Cochran

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Most churches teach regularly on financial stewardship and giving—it's an essential spiritual discipline, as well as the lifeblood of any congregation.

For three days in mid-November, faith communities throughout the United States will join to focus awareness and encouragement on a different sort of gift—The Gift of Life—during National Donor Sabbath, two weekends prior to Thanksgiving.

During National Donor Sabbath, faith leaders join with local organ procurement organizations such as ARORA, governmental agencies like the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and each other to encourage organ and tissue donation.

Many donor families lean heavily on their faith and spirituality to comfort them about their loss of a loved one. Some recipients, struggle with a sense of guilt for having received a life-saving organ transplant following the death of their donor. Some turn to a higher power for understanding. All major religions in the U.S. support organ donation as the ultimate act of charity and self-sacrifice.

The United Methodist Church recognizes the life-giving benefits of organ and tissue donation. A 1992 resolution of the Church states, "Donation is to be encouraged, assuming appropriate safeguards (are put into place) against hastening death and (that the) determination of death (is declared) by reliable criteria." The resolution further states, "Pastoral-care persons should be willing to explore these options as a normal part of conversation with patients and their families."

National Donor Sabbath provides an opportunity for faith communities to share their views and join in the conversation.

At ARORA, we encourage Arkansas' faith leaders to consider ways they can join and foster the conversation. We have assembled a page of useful resources at <https://www.arora.org/NDS>, and I'd like to share a few of these simple, actionable ideas to grow The Gift of Life in Arkansas, paraphrased from the comprehensive resource guide on our website:

Provide clarity. Please share your religion's position on organ, tissue, and eye donation. Please contact us to learn more about your faith group's position on organ donation. Share the need and urgency.

Hold a candle-lighting or prayer breakfast to honor those who have donated the gift of life, including both living and deceased donors. Recognize and pray for those awaiting organs.

Offer support to patients waiting for a transplant. Encourage members of your congregation to do so as well—from visiting, to transportation, to assistance for their families.

Address the subject in sermons, prayers, and homilies. On National Donor Sabbath, and at other times during the year, many faith leaders include the subject of donation in their sermons and prayers. The concept of giving to others— even after one's own life has come to a close—is a compelling and memorable theme.

Share information within your community. In your congregation, there may be someone who needs a transplant, someone who is a living donor, a family whose loved

one was a donor, or someone who has received a transplant. Invite them to share their stories during services.

Acknowledge donation at funeral services (with the donor family's permission).

When you know the deceased was an organ or tissue donor, it's inspiring to pass along the good this person has done.

Utilize mailings, bulletins, Web sites, and newsletters. Place stories, quotes, and notices about donation and National Donor Sabbath in your mailings or newsletter. Referencing an organ, tissue, or eye donor or transplant recipient in your own community adds special significance.

Ask your faith community for volunteers. You know that getting others involved amplifies the impact and deepens the reward. Someone may have a personal connection to donation and may want to help observe National Donor Sabbath and increase awareness about donation in any way possible.

Becoming an organ and tissue donor can be an act of faith. It expresses belief about the sanctity and importance of life, about the need to care for one another, about fundamental tenets. This November 13-15, we encourage you and your community of faith to explore The Gift of Life during National Donor Sabbath. For extensive resources and connections to our people, please visit arora.org/nds.

Alan Cochran is President and Executive Director of ARORA, the agency charged with managing donation and tissue recovery for most of Arkansas. ARORA's work facilitates some 500 organ transplants and tens of thousands of tissue and eye transplants every year. Reach him at acochran@arora.org.

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