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# Donating Life

## *Two Arkansas Methodists Raise Awareness for Bone Marrow Registry*

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Rev. Corey Read donates her blood stem cells. The donations that Read made helped to save the life of a 3-year-old girl in New Jersey with acute anemia.

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When most people think of donating bone marrow, they probably conjure up memories from television or movie hospital dramas where doctors use a large and intimidating needle to draw the marrow out of the bones using an injection technique.

But according to the Rev. Corey Read, a recent donor of bone marrow and campus minister at the Wesley Foundation at Southern Arkansas University, the process is nowhere near as scary and painful as what you think.

“There are two options to donate. One is the straight bone marrow donation, which is where you have to have surgery and they go in and scrape the bone tissue. And the second is what I did, which is through peripheral blood stem cells, which is where they hook you up to a machine. But it’s a lot like giving plasma,” Read said.

According to [Cancer Research UK](#), bone marrow transplants are used to treat certain types of cancer, such as lymphoma, leukemia, and myeloma. Although bone marrow transplants were used more often in the past, these days stem cell transplants are a much more common procedure because it’s easier to collect cells from the bloodstream than the bone marrow, more cells can be collected, and blood cell counts recover more quickly following a stem cell transplant.

The process for signing up and adding your DNA to the national registry is even easier, according to Read.

In fact, it was so simple that Read forgot she had even registered until she received a call in 2019 about a possible match between her stem cells and a leukemia patient.

“I actually registered when I was still in seminary at Duke Divinity School. They had representatives from an organization called Be the Match there, and I talked to them and signed up for the registry. The donation process was super easy, they just swabbed the inside of my mouth, I gave them my contact information, and that was it.”

That was in 2017, and it wasn’t until a couple of years later that Read received a call from a representative of DKMS, an international non-profit donor registry organization that works with Be The Match.

“They told me I had matched with a 3-year-old little girl with acute anemia. They’ll ask you if you want to move forward with the next steps in the process, and you have a choice whether you want to or not. And I think in that moment I was just like, ‘Of course I’m going to do this. Of course I’ll go forward with this,’” Read said.

Be The Match is a non-profit organization operated by the National Marrow Donor Program and, according to its website, “manages the largest and most diverse marrow registry in the world.”

The organization works to connect donors with patients in need of a transplant and has been working toward that goal for more than 30 years.

After agreeing to move forward with the process, Read traveled to Houston where she could undergo further testing to make sure that her bone marrow was the best match for the patient.

After some initial testing in the early summer of 2019, they found she was a near-perfect match for the little girl.

Read was able to then continue with the process, and donated her blood stem cells shortly after.

“I’m really fortunate that I work in a career in which my schedule was fairly flexible, especially being in campus ministry in the summer. And so I was able to travel back and forth to Houston a couple of times,” Read said. “And Be The Match covers all of the expenses for travel and hospital expenses. They cover both for you and a friend or a partner to go with you because you can’t drive after the procedure.”

But before Rev. Read connected with the volunteers at Be The Match, another Arkansan had worked with them in the past to organize one of the largest bone marrow drives in the U.S.

Bailey Faulkner, director of the Ozark Mission Project, was good friends with Hardin Bale III of the longstanding Little Rock auto dealership family of Bale Chevrolet.

“Our families were very close, and Hardin was like a brother to me,” Faulkner said.

Bale was unfortunately diagnosed with leukemia and lost his battle with cancer in 2019, but Faulkner said because of the Be The Match donor drive that was organized almost a decade earlier at Bale Chevrolet to help Bale and others, countless families were given a second chance with their own cancer battles.

“I learned so much about Be The Match and how easy it was to join the registry from that experience,” Faulkner said.

Faulkner said she has helped with various bone marrow drives over the years, like at Pulaski Heights UMC in Little Rock, so when she heard about Rev. Read’s experiences registering with Be The Match, she knew that this would be a perfect opportunity to get even more people involved.

Every January, OMP partners with the Wesley College Ministry groups around the state for a service project mission trip. But because of COVID-19, this year’s plans will not be able to

happen like normal.

That hasn't stopped OMP from fulfilling their calling of transforming lives through hands-on mission, however, and this year's college mission trip will instead be a virtual event with a big focus on registering for the Be The Match registry.

"When Corey and I were talking about it, we asked 'what are we going to do?' We can't safely have 80 plus college students together right now. And something like this is so obvious. Like, we're still able to be the hands and feet of Christ and we're still able to love our neighbors and make an impact and transform lives.

"And we're able to recreate that and do it in a whole new way for our college mission trip. And I don't think we're ever going to realize how big this is right now until 10 years from now, like that drive that we did for Hardin 10 years ago," Faulkner continued.

Because COVID-19 makes it difficult to host in-person drives, Be The Match offers an at-home registration kit that is similar to many of the DNA or ancestry kits that are popular right now.

Register online at <https://join.bethematch.org/homeRedirect> and the organization will mail you an at-home kit where you can swab your own mouth, fill out contact information, and mail back your sample.

For Read, the experience of donating has made a life-changing impact on her.

Recently, she was given the incredible opportunity to meet the little girl and her family who received the life-saving donation.

"I donated on Aug. 15, 2019, and I didn't know anything about the little girl until this past August when I got an email with a request to release my information so the patient, or their family, and the donors can make contact with one another. She lives in New Jersey and I connected with them via Facebook. And we actually had our first call last week. And yeah, it's pretty cool."

Read said one thing that she wants people to know about being a donor is that it's not as scary as you think. The process was as easy as donating plasma, and by donating, you have the potential to completely change the trajectory of someone's life.

"It's not just an individual's life, like this was a daughter's life, it was a sister's life, and it was a 3-year-old little girl. When you think about it in a theological way, it's about loving your neighbor. Jesus redefines who our neighbor is and tells us that our neighbor is everyone and that we don't get to create the barriers as to who our neighbor is," Read said.

Faulkner sees it as a way to live out the idea of Methodist connectionalism that people who are in the church know so well.

“The Bishop always talks about what makes Methodists so amazing is our connection to each other. I mean, it is all about this connection and how you’re a part of this bone marrow registry. You might never be called, but you also are connected to something so much larger than yourself.”

To find out more about Be The Match and to register online to be a bone marrow donor, visit [bethematch.org](https://bethematch.org). You can order an at-home swab kit by visiting <https://join.bethematch.org/homeRedirect>.

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