

News

Donors find religious, spiritual support to become organ donors

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During the holiday season there's a lot of emphasis on spirituality and giving back. Six years ago, a Coventry woman experienced the biggest loss of her life and gave the most precious gift at the same time. Nancy Tyson-Alexander had never thought much about organ donation until the day she lost her husband, Albert.

"I was in the hospital and two representatives from the Donor Services Department approached and asked me if I had considered organ donation? I told them no, I had not heard of organ donation. they explained to me...how many people's lives could be saved," said Nancy Tyson-Alexander. "I thought about how Albert had lived his life as a very loving, giving, active, healthy individual, and I knew that by donating Albert's organs, this would be one of the greatest gifts of life and his legacy would continue to live on in and through others."

As a result of the decision Tyson-Alexander made on her husband's behalf, more than a hundred other lives were saved and improved. Throughout the entire ordeal she leaned on her faith as a support system to get through the hard times. Raised a Baptist, Tyson-Alexander now attends a United Methodist Church.

"My religious views on organ donation are very positive and very encouraging. Some of the members are registered organ donors and feel that donation is one of the greatest gifts that one can give," Tyson-Alexander said. "There are no rules that prohibit one from becoming a donor."

Pastor Mark Baymon, of the Church of God in Christ, is living the benefits of organ donation firsthand. He preaches the importance both on a personal level and from the pulpit.

"Since my lifesaving kidney surgery in 2003, I've worked hard to raise awareness about the need for organ donation, especially among faith constituencies and minorities," said Pastor Baymon. "As a matter of position, the Christian religion believes in the importance of organ donation and I work hard to dispel myths about organ and tissue donation to my congregation."

Rabbi Yitzchok Adler, a leader at Beth David Synagogue in West Hartford agrees.

"It is clearly important that individuals follow doctrines that provide meaningful and comforting guidance," Rabbi Adler said.

According to Halachic Organ Donor Society, the Jewish faith takes a strong stance on donation. In principal, Judaism sanctions and encourages organ donation in order to save lives. 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.

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" which save human lives.

In the case of Tyson-Alexander, making the decision to donate her husband's organs ultimately brought her closer to God.

"I feel that the values of my religion help and guide me and that doing the right thing outweighs all else," Tyson-Alexander said. "I

feel that organ, tissue and eye donation is the right thing to do because it saves lives and gives lives back. By donating Albert's organs I feel that Albert lives on and so does his legacy.”

“We appreciate that the decision to donate an organ is truly sacred,” said Caitlyn Bernabucci, public education specialist for LifeChoice Donor Services. “While religions differ, one of the common points is positive, inspiring messaging. Messaging that provides hope.

By registering to be an organ, eye and tissue donor, you can provide hope to the more than 115,000 men, women and children currently awaiting organ transplants across the United States and the hundreds of thousands more in need of cornea and tissue transplants, according to Bernabucci.

When someone in CT or Western Massachusetts needs an organ transplant, chances are LifeChoice Donor Services is involved. LifeChoice is a federally designated organ procurement organization (OPO) based in Windsor. It serves six counties in CT and three counties in Western MA, with a combined population of 2.2 million people.

LifeChoice Donor Services is based in Windsor, CT. Learn more by visiting www.lifechoiceopo.org.

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