

Life goes on...

The statistics are daunting. Close to 80,000 individuals – mothers, sons, uncles, grandfathers, friends and neighbors – each waiting on a potentially life-saving transplant. Close to 2,000 sit on the LifeGift waiting list.

These people are the reason that LifeGift exists and aims to ethically, effectively and efficiently recover appropriately transplantable organs and tissue to give the gift of life. Established in 1987, LifeGift is a not-for-profit organ procurement organization (OPO) dedicated to increasing organ and tissue donation for the purpose of transplantation.

LifeGift blends the talents and dedication of physicians, hospital administrators, donor families, organ recipients, community members and staff. Its service area includes 109 Texas counties – more than a third of the state of Texas – recovering organs for some of the country's leading transplant centers. Its offices are located in Houston, Fort Worth, Lubbock and Amarillo.

The mantra – “every donor, every time” – is taken seriously at LifeGift. We continually seek new and innovative methods for increasing donation rates, including the highly effective in-house coordinator's program. Initially a pilot project, the grant-funded program has been modeled in other areas of the country to recover as many donors and organs as possible and, ultimately, save more lives.

LifeGift staff members and volunteers never forget the individuals who make saving lives possible – donors and their family members. For them, LifeGift provides information on the donation process, the placement of organs and progress of recipients, and the bereavement process. This includes contact for at least one year after donation and access to a referral service to help meet specialized needs of donor families.

Public education plays a vital role at LifeGift. Several hundred volunteers work alongside staff members to promote organ donation, often relating their own experiences as donor family members and organ recipients as part of the LifeGift Speakers Bureau. Outreach programs aimed at the African American and Hispanic communities are key LifeGift initiatives. In addition, schoolchildren are served by a variety of programs, including scheduled activities at Houston's Museum of Health & Medical Science.

For more information, volunteer opportunities or a free donor card,

Call LifeGift at 713-523-GIFT or click on www.lifegift.org

Let all things be done decently and in order.

I Corinthians 14:40

In I Corinthians 14, the Apostle Paul emphasizes the ethics involving the worship experience. He emphasizes conducting matters that will benefit everyone concerned and serve their highest good. The apostle sets in place an ethical standard, not only for worship, but also for any public outreach, using clear and concise communication to reach out to the ill-informed and the unbeliever.

Likewise, ethics plays a central role in organ donation. The major focus of organ and tissue donation has centered on deceased donors, which currently are the largest source of transplantable organs. The American donation system operates under a legal and moral framework, which does not discriminate based on gender, ethnicity or celebrity. Our current national transplant laws and transplant community policies set a foundation for donation that is altruistic and voluntary. Organ donation has achieved its current level of success in the U.S. because ethics has become a primary concern.

The donation decision process for families can be simplified into two essential elements: the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes that families bring with them into a crisis situation, and the experiences they have during that crisis. The degree to which someone is committed to donation, indifferent, or opposed is a product of their spiritual beliefs, culture, knowledge, views on altruism, prior experiences, and other personal factors. Increasingly, the American public is favoring donation and is inclined to donate.

Our efforts through legislation and coalitions for all ethnic groups are to ensure that doctors act on behalf of the patient even if that person is a potential donor, as well as to promote discussions about death arrangements with family members. Our goal is to ensure that the donation process remains ethical.

There is growing evidence that family discussion leads to higher rates of consent. The 1993 Gallup survey showed a strong pattern across all ethnic groups that if people knew their relative favored donation, they would nearly always comply. More recently, in research among donor and non-donor families, those who indicated they had prior knowledge of their relative's desire to donate overwhelmingly approved the donation decision.

The issue of ethics in organ procurement will remain for many years, always demanding accountability. Generally, the time of such decision-making is stressful, and families are not always making rational choices, and most need guidance; therefore the ethical dilemmas will always be a priority.

Discussion

- 1) What ways can the church ensure that ethical standards remain intact as it relates to organ donation and transplantation?
- 2) What measures can you recommend to your church leadership, which will keep your congregation at the forefront of new developments in the field of transplantation?

Jesus turned unto his disciples and said: “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that you see. For I tell you, many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which you see and have not seen them; and to hear those things which you hear, and have not heard them.”

Luke 10:23,24

Scholars often point to the intellectual movement of the 18th century when they refer to “enlightenment.” The thrust of the movement was the belief that “human reason” could be used to combat ignorance, superstition, and tyranny, to build a better world. Throughout the centuries, many great minds have contributed to the movement.

Today, we enjoy the benefits of scientific discoveries, which aid in combating forces that severely limited our forefathers. Due to great advances in medicine and technology, the opportunities to improve the quality of human life for the more than 80,000 American men, women, and children awaiting organ and tissue transplants are available to us today. As Jesus reminded his disciples in Luke 10:23,24, there were many from previous generations who had desired to see and hear [know] what the disciples were privileged to see and hear. Likewise, today we have the blessed privilege to not only know the facts and see the benefits, but actually participate in the process of improving human welfare. As a result, we should be thankful knowing that the “Lord gives wisdom; out of his mouth comes knowledge and understanding.” [Proverbs 2:6]

The prophet Hosea was convinced that a lack of knowledge is destructive to a society: he declared, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...” [Hosea 4:6a]. The passage suggests that ignorance is a sure death for any person, community or nation. But, according to Jesus, there is a liberating power in knowing the facts concerning matters affecting our well-being. Knowing that ignorance is ultimately destructive, Jesus informed the Jewish community of his day, in John 8:32, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Thus, not only should we seek to obtain the truth about our salvation; it also is equally important that we seek to stay abreast of all matters affecting the welfare of our society.

Studies reveal that the primary reason African Americans fail to donate organs is lack of knowledge. Efforts, such as this study series, have been implemented within local African American congregations to combat this problem.

Discussion

- 1) What impact do you believe societal ignorance has on future generations?
- 2) How does Christ’s statement in Luke 10:23,24 apply to present-day opportunities to know the medical benefits of organ and tissue donation?
- 3) Discuss ways in which the church can facilitate raising the level of awareness concerning health issues.
- 4) Discuss events in which the “lack of knowledge” contributed to deficiencies within the African American community.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son...

John 3:16

Donor families receive great consolation when donating the organs and tissues of their loved ones by knowing that something good came out of their tragic loss. The Scriptures speak of profound blessings for those who demonstrate kindness toward others through giving.

We believe that God loves people that give because they reflect His character as demonstrated in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..." Like God, our giving is out of a sense of compassion to those in need. According to Proverbs 3:27, God desires that we "withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it." Donating organs and tissue is good and beneficial for the many thousands that are awaiting transplants. In obedience to God's desires, we should not withhold this blessing from them when the opportunity presents itself. It is believed that we resemble God the most when we give to meet needs.

It is frequently noted in the Scriptures that Jesus ministered to the people of his day out of a sense of compassion. His ministry was predicated upon his giving of himself to humanity. The Lord's fulfillment came from doing the will of his heavenly Father, as demonstrated when Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-38.

Interestingly, Jesus never procrastinated in his ministry. He ministered to others with a keen sense of urgency: "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day, the night cometh, when no man can work." [John 9:4] Although his ministry involved ultimately giving his life sacrificially, Jesus continued to persevere. As he explained his sacrificial death to his disciples and is quoted in Matthew 16:26, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" In essence, life is not as much about receiving as it is giving. Giving positions us for receiving.

The Apostle Paul, in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, admonished them to serve as a support system to others by giving. With this admonition, he reminded them of his own example and the words of our Lord: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." [Acts 20:35] Likewise, we must realize that we too are to serve as a support system for those in need with a readiness to give. Perhaps the greatest blessing a giver can receive is the satisfaction of knowing: "I have helped someone." However, Jesus assures us in Luke 6:38 that when we give, others shall give unto us in the same attitude and measure in which we have given.

Organ and tissue donation is an area in which many will readily accept a life-saving organ, but fewer are as willing to give one to benefit someone else. More than 80,000 American men, women, and children need our support by giving the gift of life: organ and tissue donation.

Discussion

- 1) Reflecting on II Corinthians 9:8,9, describe God's blessings upon the life of a donor/donor family that makes the courageous decision to donate organs.
- 2) Describe the Christians' attitude toward giving as described in Romans 12:8b.
- 3) How can the teachings of Luke 6:38 inspire your decision about donation?
- 4) Discuss Jesus' attitude toward his ultimate act of giving as recorded in John 10:15-17.

Wisdom is before him that hath understanding.

Proverbs 17:24a

Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it.
Do not believe anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many.
Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books.
Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders.
Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations.
But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.

Unknown

This unknown author suggests that it is unwise to draw a conclusion about any subject matter without your own research and investigation. While organ and tissue donation is considered taboo by some, others understand that it can be a faith-based decision to give. Your decision about organ donation should be carefully weighed against many factors. By so doing, you will discover that it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all.

In the Book of Proverbs, we find many great teachings concerning the virtue of wisdom. In the introduction, the author makes his purpose known: “To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom.” [Proverbs 1:2,3] Immediately, the reader is made aware of the goals of the book and he or she can prepare to be conditioned to employ wisdom when making life-changing decisions.

Likewise, the purpose of this course material is to encourage you to use wisdom when considering the gift of organ and tissue donation. Myths and misconceptions abound about donation. Information about the realities of donation and prayerful reflection will help you and your family decide what is best for you. Below, you will find selected passages from Proverbs to be discussed in relation to considering organ donation.

Discussion

- 1) After reading Proverbs 1:20-23, describe the importance of abandoning myths and misconceptions to make wise and prayerful decisions involving issues that are crucial to a healthier life.
- 2) Based upon Proverbs 3:13-28, discuss the personal benefits of using wisdom when making challenging decisions.
- 3) Discuss how technology continues to enhance our access to pertinent information.
How do the claims of Chapter 8 compare to this age of information?

Beloved,
I wish above
all things that
thou mayest
prosper
and be in
health, even
as thy soul
prospereth.

3 John 2

Spiritual scholars and scientists long have debated the link between a strong spiritual life and its impact on health. In a recent article in *The Houston Chronicle* entitled “Religion and Health: New Research is Reviving an Old Debate,” two noted psychologists debated the merits of research suggesting that spirituality enhances health.

There is evidence of links between religion and good health, with some studies concluding that spiritual faith helps people recover faster, stay healthy longer. Such studies have compelled more than 70 medical schools to offer instruction in how to address patients’ religious beliefs, and more doctors are now crossing the traditional religion-medicine divide.

For example, a 1995 study examined whether religious activity lengthened the lives of 232 elderly patients who had undergone heart surgery. The subjects were asked to describe such things as their religious beliefs, how frequently they attended services, and how much strength and comfort they received from religion. When added together, these characteristics were not found to be associated with longer or shorter survival times, but independently, some characteristics had significance. Respondents who said they derived strength or comfort from religion lived longer after surgery than those who said they did not. Finally, one study concluded that the risk of mortality was about 14 times greater for those patients who participated little or say they found little strength and comfort from religion.

Undoubtedly, scientists can challenge the statistical accuracy of such outcomes, and there are many researchers who believe that the outcomes cannot be entirely dismissed. At the least, it has been suggested that links between religion and health in some cases were at least strong enough to warrant further study.

Discussion

- 1) Based upon the following Scriptures, how could our religious beliefs impact our health?
 - King Hezekiah’s recovery – II Kings 20:1-11
 - Wise counsel resulting in a healthy life – Proverbs 4:20-22; 12:18
 - A centurion’s servant healed – Matthew 8:5-13
- 2) Many religions endorse organ and tissue donation. How can the following biblical accounts enhance understanding of organ and tissue donation?
 - Woman created with man’s rib – Genesis 221,22
 - The miracle of life from a dead man’s bones – II Kings 13:20,21
 - A new body at resurrection – I Corinthians 15:35-44