



Religious Resources for Faith Leaders

This section contains sample sermons, biblical passages, hymns and inspirational poems. The purpose is to assist faith leaders in preparation for sermons, donor events and memorial ceremonies.

Sermon Ideas

We understand clergy have their own unique way of sermon preparation and delivery. With that understanding and appreciation, the following suggestions are given as ideas. The following Scripture references are available as starting points and ideas.

John 11:25: "I am the resurrection and the life."

I Corinthians 15:35-58: The spiritual body

These verses could be used to teach about the resurrection, emphasizing that in the resurrection the physical body is transformed into a spiritual body. Therefore, the gift of organs and tissues does not affect the ability of one to be resurrected.

Luke 6:31-38: Give to others and God will give to you

This verse could be explored as to the command to give to others and various ways that we can give, including the giving of our bodies.

Romans 8:28-29: Seeking the good

This verse could be used to show how, in the midst of tragic circumstances of sudden death, God is seeking with us to find good. Donation may be one sign of good in an otherwise senseless death.

John 3:16-17: God gave His Son

God gave His son to us so that we might live in eternal life. Can we not give of our organs and tissues when we no longer have need of them so that others may live in this temporary world?

Luke 14:12-14: Giving without reward

In this verse we are told to give to those who are in need without thought of reward from them. The need for organ and tissue donation is great.

Genesis 2:26-31: Responsible power

In the moment of our creation we were given power over all things. Responsible use of this power would include using our own bodies to give life.

Sermon Outline (Protestant)

John 3:16

- I. The theme throughout the Bible is God giving of His life.
- II. The principle theme of the New Testament is Jesus giving of His life so we can live.
 - A. Jesus gave His life.
 1. No greater love demonstrated than this.
 2. No greater reward than giving so others can live.
 - B. Jesus gave His body that we may be whole.
 - C. Jesus gave His blood so we need not struggle for our own cleansing.

Luke 10:25-37

- III. It is understood that we love ourselves enough to know we are worthy to give of ourselves.
 - A. The command is to love one another as ourselves.
 - B. We would certainly want others to give of their material possessions, talents, and time to improve our life.
 - C. We should do unto others as we would have them do unto us.
- IV. Many are uncomfortable about what others think if we were to give to those in need.
 - A. But the Samaritan who had every cultural reason in the world not to help, did help.
 - B. Could we not/should we not be available to give to those in need of lifesaving procedures and gifts such as organs, tissues, and blood?
 - C. We do feel uncomfortable about giving, but reality points out we shouldn't be.
 1. Many people throughout history have cremated their bodies, as they saw no more need for the body.
 2. We need to remember, as the Moravians did, that death is the great equalizer.
 - a. We may be rich or poor materially, but at death we are all equal because we don't take it with us.
 - b. We should give that which will only be left behind to decay.
 - D. We should always be reminded that we go to God with only a rich or poor soul.

In Acts 3:1-10, Peter comes across a man crippled since birth sitting at the gate called Beautiful. Peter wasn't bothered by the man's plea for alms. Instead, Peter associated with this man (supposedly unclean because of impairment). Peter didn't have gold or silver, but instead he gave the man something more precious—a new life through new legs. This nearly cost Peter his life (Acts 5), but Peter courageously gave the man the power to be whole so he could walk through the gate called Beautiful.

The gift of giving life is an eternal heritage left behind by the donor. Jesus, Peter, and many others are known for their life-giving gifts. Today places such as Lynchburg General Hospital, Lynchburg, Va., have planted a tree in remembrance of their organ donors..

We all have the opportunity to help our suffering neighbors live improved lives.. We may not even know our "neighbor's" name, but it is apparent that the giving of ourselves to help someone else certainly pleases Christ and God. It doesn't matter if we are rich or poor materially, we can all give our organs, tissues, and blood so that others can go through the gate called Beautiful.

Adapted from "Giving for Life: Organ and Tissue Donation" memorial service by Wayne Lanham
Director, Pastoral Care - Lynchburg General Hospital, Lynchburg, VA

SAMPLE SERMONS

Sample Sermon - Baptist

"Organ donation: A biblical perspective"

An act of redemption

This world has not turned out as God intended. God, the creator, suffers at the condition of His handiwork. The world as we see it today hardly resembles the perfect creation that God spoke into existence. Crime, hunger, death, and disease were not present at creation, but due to man's fall in the garden, adversity has found a home in every human soul.

God the creator invites all those who would be His to suffer with Him. We are compelled to bear our burdens with the purifying hope that suffering will not have the last word. Even the most timid Christian must stand on the promise that ultimate and unconditional triumph awaits those that love the Lord. Our faith must fasten on the fact that no matter how severe the suffering, God will redeem the situation and utilize it for our good.

Since suffering is inevitable for both God and man, God has created a redeeming value for suffering. The goodness of God will allow something positive to come out of a negative situation. God's greatest demonstration of this redemptive process is realized in His son. The death of Jesus Christ resulted in the redemption of the world. His finished work at Calvary restored the broken fellowship between God and His most precious creation, man. God had rescued creation and mankind from hopelessness with His redeeming love. Christ suffered the loss of His life, but it became the seed of the world's hope and joy.

Sooner or later suffering and sorrow comes to every home. No conditions of wealth, culture, or even religion can prevent it. But the losses and griefs of life have been intended to leave behind an abundance of character and blessings that will make eternity richer. In a Christian home, sorrow should always leave a benediction. It should be received as God's messenger, and when it is, it will always leave a blessing.

Some treasures must be mined. They have to be discovered, realized. Blessings are often shrouded behind the veil of overwhelming grief. There are some tough places in this world, but nothing compares to the intensive care waiting room, where high levels of emotion and active grief can barricade any offer of redemption. Unfortunately, the only time donation advocates can approach a family about organ and tissue donation is in the midst of their grief and sorrow. Many people can only see grief as an enemy to whom they will refuse to be reconciled. They feel that they can never be comforted. For many families who consent to organ donation, it is a way of redeeming the loss of a loved one. In a situation where you feel victimized, the decision to donate gives the family a feeling of being in control. It gives life to others. Organ donation has helped families deal with their grief by bringing something positive out of a seemingly negative situation.

Not everyone dies in a way that allows vital organ donation. In fact, only a small percentage of people who die can be organ donors. If the decision ever becomes ours to consent for organ donation, we should consider why God has allowed such an opportunity.

The sweetest songs that have ever been sung have come out of fire. Sorrows should not be wasted. We should yield our rebellion, accept our suffering, and discover if it has some mission to perform, some gift to give, some golden fruit to enjoy, some redeeming value.

A sweet fragrance in the house

In Mark, Chapter 14, we have the marvelous account of a woman breaking an expensive alabaster vase filled with spikenard, a priceless perfumed oil, and anointing Jesus with all of it. Her extravagance was criticized by Judas Iscariot and others in the house. But our Lord praised the sacrificial giving of this woman and declared her deed a memorial. Suppose she had left the expensive oil in the unbroken vase? Would there have been any mention of it? Would her deed of careful keeping and self-preservation been told all over the world? She broke the vase, poured its contents forth, lost it, sacrificed it, and now perfumed incense has drifted into every home where this message has been heard. We may keep our life if we will, carefully preserving it from waste, but we shall have no reward. However, if we empty it out in loving service, we shall make it a lasting blessing to the world, and it shall be well spoken of forever.

By donating organs, we unselfishly pour out the fragrant gift of life upon those awaiting a second chance at life through transplantation. The sweet fragrance of sacrificial giving will flow into the homes of transplant recipients whose lives were saved and/or improved through the gift of life.

The donation of organs should not only be regarded as a medical or a secular good deed but also as a religious, sacramental extension of Christ's own life-giving sacrifice. Organ sharing is consistent with the beliefs of all major religions and is viewed as an act of charity, fraternal love, and self-sacrifice.

The cross of Christ is not only substitutionary, but it is also representative. His life of humility and unselfishness should become a prototype for those who bear His name as Christians. We should follow His example by giving the gift of life so that others may live life more abundantly.

The liberating truth

Unfamiliarity with the truth concerning the donor process will hinder the decision to choose life in the face of death. Misconceptions, myths, and mistrust of the medical community will eclipse our perspectives and leave us fearful and ignorant of the facts. God tells us that His people perish because of the lack of knowledge. People are indeed perishing, particularly African Americans. African Americans are less likely to consent to organ donation than whites, but much more likely to develop kidney failure. Another truth is that African Americans have an unidentified biological susceptibility to hypertension and diabetes, the major causes of kidney failure. If more African Americans would donate, it would provide better matches and increased chances of survival for other African Americans.

The misconception, "I need all my organs intact in order to get into heaven," is not scriptural. The Apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 15:50 that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." In eternity we will not have or need our earthly bodies. Old things will pass away and all things will be made new.

There is also some mistrust in the medical community. The myths that one could be declared dead prematurely just to gain organs or that you won't receive top medical care if you have signed donor card are flights from reality. The fact is that no one becomes a donor until all lifesaving measures have been exhausted. An open casket funeral is possible with any type of donation. There is no cost to the family for organ and tissue donation. If we would seek the truth about organ donation, the truth will liberate us not only to accept but to give the gift of life. "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

Through Christ's spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jew or Gentile. In sharing one body, we cannot isolate ourselves from the hurts of humanity. We are called upon to "bear ye one another's burdens." While we can't save the world, we can sign donor cards on the back of our driver's license. To become a vital organ donor is to give life to as many as seven recipients. A tissue donor can help as many as 50 people.

Should you decide to give the gift of life, discuss it with your family; let them know your wishes. Death, especially our own, is not something that we love to talk about, but in the last 2000 years no one has been able to escape it.

Death need not be the final comment of our lives. Instead of one stone marker at the head of our grave, there could be living memorials, real people with real families whose lives have been put back together through the gift of life. This is Christianity at its best: sharing one's own life for the purpose of helping someone else.

God, the creator of this world, has placed us as stewards of His creation. Being stewards, we cannot ignore the imperative to heal found in Matthew 10:8, "Heal the sick ... freely ye have received, freely give."

Give the gift of life; it's the chance of a lifetime.

By the Rev. Irvin Lance Peebles

Sample Sermon - JEWISH

"Don't hang up the phone, it's your covenant calling"

It was a little over a month ago. I remember the phone call quite well. I was settling into a comfortable position at my desk, reflecting on the holidays, thinking about what message I would offer this Rosh Hashanah. What fault would I force others to confront? What issue would I use to make the congregation squirm in their seats? And then the phone rang... On the other line was a member of our congregation who works with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as director of the Division of Organ Transplantation. Why was she calling me?

The voice on the other end said to me, "I want to talk to you about a professional issue." Immediately I thought to myself, "Uh oh, what did I do now?" "No, no," she assured me. I wasn't in trouble. She was calling because she wanted me to give a sermon on organ donation. Had I thought at all about organ donation? And I must confess to you that only one thought went through my mind at that moment—hang up the phone. Suddenly, I didn't want to be talking about this subject at this time.

This member told me about the thousands of people across America that are waiting for transplants. About the many, many who will die because there are an insufficient number of donors to meet the need. She shared with me that Jews were among the two groups with the lowest number of organ donors, even though the strictest movements in Judaism permit donations in some cases.

She explained how there are many people who die tragically who would have wished to donate their organs to save a life but couldn't because they never shared that information with their families while alive. Well, I was feeling pretty overwhelmed now and more than a bit depressed, and then to prove her point she asked me if I knew what my wife's wishes would be if she were ever in an accident. And I quickly replied that it wasn't the type of question one liked to ask his wife over dinner at the end of a long day. And then I was overcome with an even stronger desire to hang up the phone, to leave the problem alone, to make the question go away.

Explain to me how I can sit in bed and read about thousands of people dying in Rwanda and be disturbed but not really have any trouble sleeping through the night, but I can't discuss the topic of organ transplantation in the middle of the day without wanting to jump out of my skin. Somehow this is different, isn't it? This is my life, my death, and who really wants to make decisions about that anyway? If we talk about it, then we make it real.

On Rosh Hashanah morning we read a strong and disturbing piece of liturgy, the prayer Unatenah Tokef, "Let us proclaim the sacred power of this day for it is awesome and full of dread.... You, O God, are judge and arbiter.... [O]n Rosh Hashanah it is written, on Yom Kippur it is sealed ... who shall live and who shall die; who shall see ripe age and who shall not; who will die by fire and who by water; who by hunger and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by plague."

What is this prayer that tells us that God seals our fate this day? What do we make of this list of ways to die? And yet we know that we are lucky to be here. We all know people who have died in the past year. We are aware of the random nature of our lives. And the prayer Unatenah Tokef says yes, our lives are random. We don't know who will live and who will die, so it is time to

get serious. We have been given another chance. We stand here today alive, lucky to be alive, so what are we going to do about it? Hope that we get lucky another year or face up to the sacred responsibility that awaits us. This prayer reminds us that today is a day of decision, today is a day when we face the unpleasant, but real, decisions that we avoid the rest of the year.

Now you're thinking, "Rabbi, it's Rosh Hashanah. Some of us are here with our children. What are you talking about? Organ transplants? Death? You're scaring my kids. Just tell us a nice story about the round challah and let us go eat a happy holiday meal.

There is a legend about King David, that when he was a young man he learned that he would die on a Shabbat. And what do you think his favorite ceremony was? Havdallah, the ceremony that marks the end of Shabbat. The legend tells us that David couldn't get to Havdallah quickly enough.

Isn't that a lot like us? We say to ourselves, "We made it to another year, we're alive and hopefully healthy, Mazel Tov, L'chayim, let's give thanks and go eat some brisket." But Rosh Hashanah is not thanksgiving, and we do not live only for ourselves. We live in covenant with the people around us—our spouses, our children or grandchildren, our parents and grandparents, or our brothers and sisters. We all have people we made covenants with, people who depend on us as we depend on them. Yes, Mazel Tov, congratulations to all of us; we've made it to another year, but now it's time to get serious. It's time to face up to some major decisions; it's time to honor our role in the covenants we have made with our many partners in life. These high holidays are called Yamim Noraim in Hebrew, Days of Awe. We need to use this time to successfully avoid the rest of the year.

And organ donation is a great example. Too often when asked about this issue, we hide behind the answer that we don't think Jewish law allows that. But rather than pursue and study if this is true, we hide behind a vague answer that we think is true. In reality, there are many different opinions on this issue. But for the majority of Jews in America, there is agreement that organ transplantation is permitted to some degree when the saving of a life is involved. Pikuach Nefesh—the saving of a human life—is one of the most urgent Mitzvot in Judaism, and based on the statistics, you can rest assured that anything taken from you will be used to save a life. While organ donation makes us uncomfortable and forces us to think about what we want done to our bodies when we die, the truth is that it may be the closest thing we have to immortality. A part of us living on in the body of another person who has been given a miraculous second chance. And who knows, maybe one of us or our loved ones or friends will one day find themselves on the other end, surviving only because someone else had that conversation with a loved one in advance and said to him or her, "These are my wishes if something ever happens to me."

What about living wills? How many of us know someone who said in their lifetime, "If I were ever in a coma, I would want to die," only to later end up on a respirator, placing a burden on their family they desperately wanted to avoid. All because they didn't really discuss the issue properly with their family. It is amazing how you and I can worry about car pools and seat belts and other day-to-day safety details while we drive around with the future of our families in our hands. Because if, God forbid, something happens to us and our families don't know what to do, we will burden them financially and emotionally in ways that could ruin them for the rest of their lives. We warn our children about drinking and driving, and we beg them to behave cautiously. Then we proceed to drive around every day with unresolved issues that are just as dangerous to the security of their futures.

There are so many issues to be discussed, so many important decisions to be made. How have we managed to avoid them for so long? We put away money to help out those we love when we are gone, we take out life insurance policies, but how many of us have bought a cemetery plot? How many of us have confronted that terrifying reality of our own mortality and saved our own family thousands of dollars in the future? A future in which we will not be around to help out.

I recently read about a 22-year-old woman who had made clear to her family her intention to be an organ donor. It seemed unusual for a 22-year-old to have such a deep awareness of her own mortality and the foresight to deal with it. Little did she realize just how soon her own life would end. She was killed in an accident, and her heart was given to a man who had been waiting 4 years for lifesaving surgery. He was running out of time, and her gift kept him alive. The man who received her heart was her father.

We have the power to help the world; we have the power to help our families, but we won't help anyone if we don't talk about the decisions, if we don't make them real. When you put down the prayer book and leave this building, talk about these issues; make them real. On your way out, there are pamphlets on organ donation. Take one, read it, discuss it with your family or friends. It will offer clear answers to any of the questions you may have. There is another book printed by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations called A Time to Prepare. It is about living wills and funeral arrangements. It has forms and information to help you understand anything you may be unsure about writing a living will. It will make you uncomfortable now, but it will help your family later. Call us at the temple, tell us you want one, and we will order it for you.

It's time to talk about these things. It's time to make them real. Let's face it. How many of us had moments in the last few years where we were worried about our own health? Where we had a real scare? And yet what have we done about it? If I had a car that broke down in the desert and I didn't have AAA or any other protection, wouldn't you expect me to purchase some as soon as possible afterwards? And yet, you and I keep living our lives on borrowed time, and we're not purchasing the proper insurance, we're not making another year. It is time to face our destiny while we are healthy. I know that this is painful, and I'm not trying to tell you what the right decisions are in each of the cases I have mentioned, but I know that we have to start asking the questions; we have to start making the decisions.

When I came home from that eventful phone call with Judy Braslow, I was very excited. I was fascinated by my reaction to our conversation and thought I had the makings of a great Rosh Hashanah sermon. I explained all this to my wife, Mimi. And when I was done, she looked at me cautiously and said, "So, are you going to make some big decision now?" I quickly answered, "No, no, I have to write this sermon first. I just wanted to let you know what I was going to speak about on Rosh Hashanah."

I know that these are not the easiest things to talk about, and I do not know what my final decision will be, but I do know that the time is coming when I must ask the questions. It is a covenant I made when I agreed to marry Mimi, and I intend to honor it. On this Rosh Hashanah, may we all find the strength to fulfill the covenants that we have made with our loved ones, may we find the courage to make the hard decisions that cry out for a response. Amen.

By Rabbi Brian Zimmerman

Sample SERMON - Baptist "Life before death"

There is as much mystery about life as there is about death. In this western world of ours, we never really treat either of these realities with the respect that each of them deserves. Our acquired habits, customs, and attitudes tend to make light of life and death; attempts are too frequently made to gloss over the only two certainties we have: life and death.

It is a painful exercise to watch generation after generation simultaneously disrespect life and death until each of them smacks us back into universal reality. It is no secret that societal painkillers blunt life, making people think all things are made possible with chemicals, legal and otherwise, in order to cope. Then, too, there is the ultimate painkiller—suicide. Neither of these choices corresponds to understanding, living, and respecting life. Both may appeal to some, but that is not an answer for many. It never has been, nor will it ever be.

Life's questions, its challenges, its pains, its hopes and triumphs reach beyond the immediate context of the individual, family, or community. We are constantly searching for answers, though at times they are just that—answers, not solutions. Answers are not solutions, only ways to them. And in order to move toward solutions, we need life. We need life even in the middle of terrible hardship and pain. Without life there can be no answers and clearly no solutions to life's problems and challenges.

Part of the social means of coping with life's hardships was the church's emphasis on "life after death." That the suffering "servants" need not worry about the here and now; pain is only for a season. It was said "the heavier the burden, the brighter the crown." Of course, we know that is nonsense in its purest form. But echoes of those words are still present. For the church it is important to live and practice the understanding of life taught by Jesus in the here and now.

In the text (John 10:10) Jesus uses a metaphor for death. A thief, thief in the night, as it were. Death is like a thief—cunning, watching for another victim, universally detested. Stealing something of value, something it will never have on its own. That is like death—approaching unaware, victims largely unprepared, unexpected in the "normal" course of things.

[Death] robs just like a thief; it robs the riches of life, health, and even youth because it robs life itself. No one knows this as sharply as those who are called upon to donate a loved one's organs after an unexpected death.

The "world" has caved in, life has been lost, the future denied, and anguish is all consuming. There is no easy way to approach people in this situation of human tragedy. In actual fact, one suspects that is a matter of case by case, family by family.

The "miracle" of transplants is one thing. Our having the vocabulary to address grieving survivors is another. We are yet to have the full language, the words to adequately convey the transplant message except on a pathway that still is not complete.

It is almost solely through confronting reality, confronting life and death with courage and sensitivity, that we can have a vocabulary that will match the progress in transplants. This science

will continue to develop; it will move on. We have to see to it that our words and our actions keep it human and move with it.

Giving permission is an act that contributes to the legacy of life. It emphasizes "life before death." It is an act of love that gives back to others what death took away; it gives back life. [Organ] donors have been known to save [the lives of] as many as seven other people who would have been without hope had not the transplants taken place.

Such a gift is really treating life and death with the seriousness each demands. It, in a sense, is a celebration of life itself, another act of creation. We need to give thanks in the language of God because with each new day we can take it as God's personal invitation to each of us on this planet earth that we have an opportunity to try and try again until we get it right. And what is it that we need so desperately to get right? That God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, that we as human beings have been ordained to have life and have it abundantly.

By the Rev. Archie Le Mone

SAMPLE SERMON - METHODIST

"The best of things in the worst of times"

Scriptural text: Romans 8:28

I read about a young man from Florida University who played in the 1995 college baseball playoffs. In a crucial game, this player homered, drove in four runs, and made a key defensive play in leading his squad to victory over a higher-ranked team. What made his personal triumph all the more remarkable is that it came less than 48 hours after a great personal tragedy. This young man's girlfriend had been killed when her Ford Bronco rolled over on Florida's turnpike, tore through a guardrail, and dropped 25 feet into a canal. The baseball player attended the funeral mass for his girlfriend on a Friday morning, then was the hero of the game that afternoon. He said, "This was the hardest day of my life. And probably the best game of my life."

On the cornerstone of an old church in England, these words are inscribed: "In the year 1653, when all things sacred in the kingdom were either profaned or demolished, this church was built by Sir Richard Shirley, whose singular praise it was to do the best of things in the worst of times."

As a pastor, I've been intrigued and inspired by individuals who respond to negative situations with positive action. They meet overwhelming adversity with amazing ingenuity. They look for ways to redeem even the most hopeless circumstances. On the "hardest days" they seem to have their "best games." Somehow they summon the courage "to do the best of things in the worst of times."

I recently served for three years as a hospital chaplain in a trauma hospital in Houston, Tex. I came to identify with one of the characters in the popular television series "M*A*S*H"—the young Army clerk, Corporal O'Reilly. Of course, no one in the medical unit addressed him by his formal name. He acquired the nickname "Radar" because even in a noisy, hectic military camp he had the uncanny ability to hear helicopters from a great distance flying in with wounded soldiers.

Well, I developed "radar" of my own while serving as a hospital chaplain. Our institution had an air ambulance service called "Life Flight." From any point in the hospital I could hear the roar of the helicopter as it approached the landing pad carrying its critically ill or wounded passenger.

My "radar" was sensitive not so much to the sound of the chopper as it was to the pain and suffering the chopper would bear. Patients transported by "Life Flight" were victims of every conceivable tragedy—natural disasters, industrial explosions and fires, gunshot wounds to the head (many of them self-inflicted), gruesome automobile accidents, dangerously premature births.

When I heard the dreaded sound of the helicopter, I knew I would be paged momentarily to the trauma unit, perhaps to offer a silent prayer for the patient in the midst of frantic emergency treatment, perhaps to keep vigil with the patient's family members as they absorbed the shock of the incident and vacillated between hope and despair.

Late one night I was asked by the trauma team to be with the mother and father of a teenage girl who was blindsided in her car by a drunk driver. She had suffered irreversible head injuries and was given little chance to survive, much less to resume a normal life. As the parents poured out their anguish to me, I wept with them—in part because I, too, had a teenage daughter and felt my own vicarious anguish. Soon the attending physician entered the waiting room and

began to speak to the parents in a halting, almost apologetic, way. He explained that they had done everything that could be done, but that their daughter's injuries were too severe to overcome. She had just been pronounced brain dead. Later the doctor added, however, that her vital organs were still functioning because she remained on a respirator. Due to this unusual combination of circumstances, it was possible for their daughter to be an organ and tissue donor. The doctor proceeded to lay out the facts about donation without applying any pressure. He then offered to address their questions and concerns and give them adequate time to reach a decision.

For the next 45 minutes, this couple, already stricken with grief, struggled to make a decision they were unprepared to make. They had never thought about organ donation, for themselves or their loved ones. Now they were asked to make a decision regarding their own beloved child in the wake of a senseless tragedy, and to make it in the crucible of crisis.

The parents were initially skeptical and suspicious. They began to raise tough, even angry questions: Was their daughter's death being hastened so that her body could be exploited for organs? No, the doctor replied emphatically. She was already dead by every clinical definition, and the decision to donate was entirely up to them. Would their daughter's body be mutilated? Would it be possible for her casket to be open at her funeral? The doctor assured them that there would be no visible signs of the surgery to remove her organs and that an open casket would indeed be possible. She would be treated with utmost dignity and respect. Even so, the mother and father recoiled at the idea that any other physical damage might be done to their daughter. "Her body has already been through so much trauma," the mother said. "I don't know if I can stand putting her through anything else." The father added, "I remember holding her as a newborn baby. I want her to go out of this world the same way she came in, with her body as intact as possible."

The girl's parents were religious people, and, not surprisingly, they also raised religious questions. Does the Bible shed any light on their dilemma? Is it possible to discern God's will in this situation? Does their own church tradition encourage or discourage organ donation? The mother and father happened to be United Methodists like myself. I mentioned to them that our recent church pronouncements have strongly advocated organ and tissue donation as a "life-giving act." Because the technology for transplants is a recent development, the Bible is, of course, silent about this specific issue. Christ gave us the comprehensive commandment to love one another as he has loved us, but he left it to individuals to apply the law of love in particular situations. I suggested to the couple that a decision either way could be interpreted as a loving decision.

The mother and father continued to struggle aloud about their options. Then they asked to have a few minutes to talk privately and come to a conclusion. The doctor and I left the room and conferred about our exchange with the couple. We both surmised that they would reject the option of organ donation. Their heads seemed to be saying, "Organ donation is a good and helpful thing to do." But their hearts seemed to be saying, "Enough already! Let our daughter rest in peace."

Soon the father signaled that they were ready to talk with us again. And to our amazement they announced that they were consenting to donate their daughter's organs and tissues! I wondered to myself what caused them to overcome their caution and fear and reach a positive verdict. It wasn't necessary to ask. The mother and father proceeded to tell us why they made this choice. They viewed their daughter's death as a cruel, needless act. Nothing could make sense of it. Nothing could make her death good, in and of itself. But something good could come

out of it. Their daughter's death could provide the gift of life for someone else. Moreover, they decided that donating their daughter's organs would be "life-giving" not only to a needy recipient, but to themselves as well. As parents they would find comfort and healing in the knowledge that their daughter's death had not been a total waste, that part of her physical self would benefit someone else on the brink of death.

As a hospital chaplain, I counseled numerous families facing the option of organ donation. Many declined to donate, and I never presumed to judge their decisions. Their reasons for declining were varied. However, those who consented to donate all voiced the same reason. In each instance they saw an opportunity "to do the best of things in the worst of times." They believed that their loved one's death would not have to be useless; that their own loss would somehow be transformed into someone else's gain; that their choice to donate would bring healing and life in the midst of death.

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul makes the audacious claim that "In everything God works for good" (8:28). No matter how negative or hopeless our circumstances, says Paul, God can produce a positive result. God can always salvage something good out of something bad. For most of us, the acid test of this credo comes with death, especially a premature, tragic death. Can anything good possibly come from a death as unjust and untimely as the death of a teenage girl at the hands of a drunk driver? According to Paul, the potential for good is always there as long as God is present in our loss and sorrow, and God is always present!

But how is this potential realized? How, in practical terms, does God work for good even in the bleakest circumstances of life and death? Part of the answer is that God accomplishes his work through us. We are called to become God's partners in the salvage business. As God empowers us "to do the best of things in the worst of times," God's redemptive purposes are realized.

Herein lies the deepest significance of a decision to donate organs and tissues. When we are faced with the worst of times—our own [imminent] death or the death of a loved one—we can choose to work with God in working for good. We can embody Christlike self-giving in the most tangible way possible. We can make our own deaths purposeful. Best of all, we can choose life for someone else. And we can make these choices now, while we are still able to think clearly and speak for ourselves, before we are incapacitated by crisis.

Frederick Buechner once compared the God of the Bible to the old alchemists—those ancient, primitive scientists who were always trying to take an inferior, impure material and transform it into gold. The testimony of faith is that God is able to pull it off! God can take even the worst—death itself—and somehow out of it bring the best. "In everything God works for good." The wonder of it is that you and I can have a hand in this great work.

By the Rev. John Thomason

Sample Sermon - CATHOLIC "Eulogy of an owl"

Scriptural texts

- A. Resurrection passages: Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:9-20; Luke 23:35-48; John 20:1-29
- B. Healing miracles of Jesus: John 5:19, 9:1-12; Luke 5:12-26, 6:6-11

Depending on the occasion for this sermon, your introduction and your lead into the opening story may vary. For example, for a funeral: "My eulogy today for (the deceased) will begin with a story, titled 'Eulogy of an Owl.'"

If used at Easter, one might start by saying "I wonder if anyone thought about what would have been appropriate to engrave on a tombstone for Jesus. I wonder if anyone has thought about a eulogy for Him. Maybe the best eulogy we can find for Jesus is the entire New Testament, which reveals His wisdom, His generosity and sensitivity, His strengths, and His accomplishments. This Easter morning I would like to begin by reading an interesting eulogy that relates to today's celebration. It is titled "Eulogy of an Owl" and is taken from [the book] Paul Harvey's The Rest of the Story".

His name was Walter Elias, a city boy by birth, the son of a building contractor.

Before Walter was five, his parents moved from Chicago to a farm near Marceline, Missouri. And it was there on the farm that Walter would have his first encounter with death.

Walter was only seven that particular lazy summer afternoon, not much different from other afternoons. Dad was tending to farm chores; Mother was in the house.

It was the perfect day for a young fellow to go exploring.

Now just beyond a grove of graceful willows lay an apple orchard. There Walter could make believe to his heart's content that he was lost, which he never was, or that he had captured a wild animal, which he never had. But today was different. Directly in front of him, about thirty feet away, perched in the low-drooping branch of an apple tree and apparently sound asleep--was an owl.

The boy froze. He remembered his father telling him that owls rested during the day so they could hunt by night. What a wonderful pet that funny little bird would make. If only Walter could approach it without awakening it and snatch it from the tree.

With each step, the lad winced to hear dry leaves and twigs crackle beneath his feet. The owl did not stir. Closer...closer...and at last young Walter was standing under the limb just within range of his quarry. Slowly he reached up with one hand and grabbed the bird by its legs. He had captured it! But the owl, waking suddenly, came alive like no other animal Walter had ever seen. In a flurry of beating wings, wild eyes and frightened cries, it struggled against the boy's grasp. Walter, stunned, held on.

Now it's difficult to imagine how what happened next, happened. Perhaps the response was sparked by gouging talons or by fear itself. But at some point the terrified boy, still clinging to the terrified bird, flung it to the ground and stomped it to death.

When it was over, a disbelieving Walter gazed down at the broken heap of bronze feathers and blood. And he cried. Walter ran from the orchard but later returned to bury the owl, the little pet he would never know. Each shovelful of earth from the shallow grave was moistened with tears of deep regret. And for months thereafter, the owl visited Walter's dreams.

Ashamed, he would tell no one of the incident until many years later. By then, the world forgave him. For that sad and lonely summer's day in the early spring of Walter Elias' life brought with it an awakening of the meaning of life. Walter never, ever again, killed a living creature. Although all the boyhood promises could not bring that one little owl back to life, through its death a whole world of animals came into being.

For it was then that a grieving seven-year-old boy, attempting to atone for a thoughtless misdeed, first sought to possess the animals of the forest while allowing them to run free—by drawing them.

Now the boy, too, is gone, but his drawings live on in the incomparable, undying art of Walter Elias ... Disney. Walt Disney. And now you know the rest of the story.

I'm sure that all of you recognize the name Paul Harvey, a radio commentator from Chicago who uncovers a lot of fascinating background information on famous people and uses captivating words and phrases to tell us "the rest of the story." I'm sure you all recognize the name Walt Disney. You probably all have a favorite movie of Walt Disney's and probably a favorite Walt Disney character. Mine happens to be Peter Pan. I dream a lot about flying. Flying with my arms outstretched, not in front of me, like Superman, but to the sides, like Peter Pan. I think I fantasize about being eternally youthful and always taking care of those who are in need. I have to be careful though, especially lately, because of that new book *The Peter Pan Syndrome*. But I do enjoy Walt Disney and his work. As Paul Harvey wrote, "All the boyhood promises could not bring that one little owl back to life, through its death a whole world of animals came into being." From a tragic event in the early days of Walt Disney came life, and Walt Disney left a legacy of fantasy, laughter and joy."

Closing Comment for a funeral

We are reminded of that, somewhat, today as we bury _____. I presume that _____, as all of us, watched Walt Disney's movies and had a favorite star. (His family mentioned that he enjoyed the character _____ from the movie _____.) The legacy of Walt Disney will live on for a long time. Likewise the legacy of _____ will live on in a number of different ways. The happy memory of things that he and his family did together. We can see the family that he raised, the home he provided, and the farm business that he nourished and cultivated. We will recall the many times he worked with us in our parish and the times we saw him as an active part of our city.

Those memories will bring us some joy and maybe some laughter as the pain of our loss begins to fade. And we can find further comfort in the fact that _____'s life, in a sense, did not end, but rather his life changed. We believe he has joined his Creator and Father and his Savior because he has been faithful to the request of Jesus to love Jesus and to love his fellow man and woman. Jesus promised us that salvation would come on Easter as a result of the sadness and

tragedy of Good Friday. New Life did come to us out of the death of the crucifixion. And if we continue to follow the covenant we have with God, we, too, can experience the joy of redemption.

Another very beautiful way in which the legacy of _____ will continue is through a decision that his family made when he died. I am pleased that they have permitted and encouraged me to mention to you, his friends and acquaintances, that _____ was an organ and tissue donor. As you know, the hospital does support the transplantation program, and through the family's generosity, _____'s cornea, kidneys, heart and bone tissue were used to save the lives of several other people. Through the tragedy of _____'s accident and death, more than six other human beings will have a longer life, and for some, a richer and fuller life. The recipients may never know who the donor was, but they can again experience laughter, joy, hope, and happiness through his miracle of transplantation. I compliment _____'s family for their choice and reaffirm that we are proud to have known him and will all miss him for what he did for us when he was alive, as well as what he has done for others after his death.

Eternal rest, grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the soul of all the faithfully departed rest in peace. Amen.

Closing comments for Easter

We are reminded of that this weekend. The death of Good Friday's crucifixion resulted in the life of ... Sunday's resurrection. From sin comes salvation, from the negative comes the positive, from the destructive comes the creative. To Christians throughout the world, Easter Sunday means life. Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead so that all people could be given a new life. Easter belongs to the season of new life, to the season of spring. Organ and tissue donation also means new life for thousands of men, women and children who are awaiting organ transplants. Therefore, it is fitting that this year, National Organ and Tissue Donor Week begins today, Easter Sunday.

Organ and tissue donation is an opportunity to make a positive, valuable contribution out of a tragic death. It is considerable comfort for families to realize that their loved one has given others a new life. Our local community, as you know, has a growing interest and involvement in donation programs. You might even know of someone near you who can see again because of new corneas or work again because of a bone transplant or function normally because of a new kidney. I encourage you today to think about your decision regarding organ and tissue donation. I would encourage you to discuss it with your families and sign your driver's license. In fact, 10 minutes after our service began this morning all of the church doors were automatically locked. You can't leave until you sign your driver's license, and I will witness it. Now, if any of you succeed in breaking free, the consequences will be severe. I mean, God spoke to me last night about this very item (pause). She said (pause for a laugh—I hope), "If they don't sign up during services, their beautifully decorated Easter eggs will turn out soft boiled, and their chocolate bunnies will have melted by the time they arrive at home."

There has been a great deal of publicity about the great needs of people all over the United States. I appeal to you to make a positive life-giving decision to donate the organs and tissues of you and your family so that others might live or live more fully. I encourage you today to consider your involvement in organ and tissue donation programs, so that like our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, [and] like Walt Disney, we might be able to bring life out of death.

Sermon by Father Michael J. Lynch, DMin

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES SUPPORTING DONATION

Organ and tissue donation is not specifically mentioned in the Bible. However, the timeless content of the scriptures speaks to donation in principle. The following Scriptures can guide our thinking and actions on organ donation:

Genesis 2:20-30	The first transplant: a rib taken from Adam to create Eve.
Ezekiel 37	The Valley of Dry Bones, "These bones shall live."
Matthew 5:7	Blessed are the merciful.
Matthew 7:7	Ask ... seek ... knock.
Matthew 7:12	"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them"
Matthew 10:8	"Heal the sick, ... freely ye have received, freely give."
Leviticus 1:7	"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."
Mark 9:47	We can enter heaven without having every part of our bodies present.
Luke 6:37-38	Give and it shall be given unto you.
John 3:16-17	God so loved the world that he gave ...
John 10:10	Give life that others may live more abundantly.
John 15:12-13	Greater love has no man ...
I John 4:11	"If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."
Revelation 21:4-5	In eternity we will not need our earthly bodies: "Former things will pass away, all things will be made new."

Suggested Hymns

The following list of hymns is a start in your efforts to locate appropriate hymns from your own religious tradition that bring the message of hope and giving that organ and tissue donation and transplantation provide.

- "I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath"
- "Amazing Grace"
- "Bless Me Now"
- "Come, Sinners, To the Gospel Feast"
- "Jesus, Lover of My Soul"
- "Have Thine Own Way, Lord"

INSPIRATIONAL WRITINGS

Bequest

So white.
Now I lay me down upon a sheet so white.

No more.
My brain can hear your voice no more.

But wait.
These eyes,
This heart,
This kidney,
These bones, skin, blood, nerve
Still can serve.
As Christ gave His body and His blood for me,
Now let me give this gift to thee.
Take these eyes and let them see.
Let this skin feel again and be.
Accept this organ to make her whole,
This blood to speed him on his way,
Then Blessed Lord, receive my soul.

Herbert Nelson

To Remember Me

The day will come when my body will lie upon a white sheet neatly tucked under four corners of a mattress located in a hospital busily occupied with the living and the dying. At a certain moment a doctor will determine that my brain has ceased to function and that, for all intents and purposes, my life has stopped.

When that happens, do not attempt to instill artificial life into my body by the use of a machine. And don't call this my deathbed. Let it be called the Bed of Life, and let my body be taken from it to help others lead fuller lives.

Give my sight to the man who has never seen a sunrise, a baby's face or love in the eyes of a woman.

Give my heart to a person whose own heart has caused nothing but endless days of pain.

Give my blood to the teenager who was pulled from the wreckage of his car, so that he might live to see his grandchildren play.

Give my kidneys to one who depends on a machine to exist from week to week.

Take my bones, every muscle, every fiber and nerve in my body and find a way to make a crippled child walk.

Explore every corner of my brain. Take my cells, if necessary, and let them grow so that, someday, a speechless body will shout at the crack of a bat and a deaf girl will hear the sound of rain against her window.

Burn what is left of me and scatter the ashes to the winds to help the flowers grow.

If you must bury something, let it be my faults, my weaknesses and all prejudice against my fellow man.

Give my sins to the devil.

Give my soul to God.

If, by chance, you wish to remember me, do it with a kind deed or word to someone who needs you.

If you do all I have asked, I will live forever.

Robert N. Test

LETTER FROM HEAVEN

To my dearest family, some things I'd like to say.
But first of all, to let you know, that I arrived okay.
I'm writing this from heaven. Here I dwell with God above.
Here, there's no more tears of sadness;
Here is just eternal love.

Please do not be unhappy just because I'm out of sight.
Remember that I am with you every morning, noon and night.
That day I had to leave you when my life on earth was through.
God picked me up and hugged me and He said, "I welcome you.

It's good to have you back again,
you were missed while you were gone.
As for your dearest family, They'll be here later on.
I need you here badly, you're part of my plan.
There's so much that we have to do, to help our mortal man."

God gave me a list of things, that he wished for me to do.
And foremost on the list, was to watch and care for you.
And when you lie in bed at night the day's chores put to flight.
God and I are closest to you....in the middle of the night.

When you think of my life on earth, and all those loving years.
Because you are only human, they are bound to bring you tears.
But do not be afraid to cry: It does relieve the pain.
Remember there would be no flowers, unless there was some rain.

I wish that I could tell you all that God has planned.
If I were to tell you, you wouldn't understand.
But one thing is for certain, though my life on earth is over.
I'm closer to you now, than I ever was before.

There are many rocky roads ahead of you and many hills to climb;
But together we can do it by taking one day at a time.
It was always my philosophy and I'd like it for you too;
That as you give unto the world, the world will give to you.

If you can help somebody who's in sorrow and pain;
Then you can say to God at night....."My day was not in vain."
And now I am contented....that my life was worthwhile.
Knowing as I passed along the way I made somebody smile.

So if you meet somebody who is sad and feeling low;
Just lend a hand to pick him up, as on your way you go.
When you're walking down the street
and you've got me on your mind;
I'm walking in your footsteps only half a step behind.

And when it's time for you to go....from that body to be free.
Remember you're not going....you're coming here to me.

Author Unknown