

# Organ donation is a gift of life

By Father Michael Leiker

God, the source of all life has enlightened man to uncover many of the mysteries of life. One such piece of knowledge is modern medicine. Over the course of years and practice, doctors have learned to cure and prevent diseases as well as increase longevity. God's great gift of life doesn't stop with him creating us. He enables us to be a part of creation, with his command to, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28)." In other words, create new life through the sacrament of marriage and have dominion over other creation. Jesus also gave a command to be a co-creator, "love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another (1 Jn 13:34)." One may ask, "How does this command associate with being a co-creator?" One answer is organ donation.

There are two ways in which one can be an organ donor. The option we are probably more familiar with is by signing our driver's license or making it known to family and friends or by having it in written form in one's advanced directives. The second option is by becoming a living donor, where a kidney or part of a liver is donated.

Typically, a living donor has

someone they know or have heard about that is in need of the organ and makes contact with the facility where the person in need is a patient. After making that contact, the donor answers initial questions or may have questions answered about how the process works and what is involved.

Many Catholics know or have heard that the body should not be mutilated or separated after death or be put into unnecessary danger while alive and question what the Church teaches about organ donation.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (2296) states: "Organ transplants conform with the moral law and can be meritorious if the physical and psychological dangers and risks incurred by the donor are proportionate to the good sought for the recipient." St. John Paul II heartily affirmed that a beautiful act expressing the culture of life "is the donation of organs, performed in an ethically acceptable manner, with a view to offering a chance of health and even of life itself to the sick who sometimes have no other hope" *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life, No. 86). St. John Paul II, during an address to the International Congress on Transplants (3) stated the decision to

offer without reward a part of one's own body for the health and well-being of another person is "a genuine act of love." He continues: "It is not just a matter of giving away something that belongs to us but of giving something of ourselves, for by virtue of its substantial union with a spiritual soul, the human body cannot be considered as a mere complex of tissues, organs and functions ... rather it is a constitutive part of the person who manifests and expresses himself through it."

**AS OF DEC. 9, THERE ARE** 113,269 people that need a life-saving organ transplant. Nearly 74,000 of those in need are active waiting candidates; those currently suitable for a transplant. So far this year, 36,196 transplants have been performed (United Network for Organ Sharing).

According to *organdonor.gov*, 95 percent of adults in the United States support organ donation, but only 58 percent are actually signed up as donors.

Each year, the number of people on the waiting list continues to be much larger than both the number of donors and transplants, which grow slowly (*organdonor.gov/statistics-stories/statistics.html*).

## Statistics at a glance

**113,000+** Number of men, women and children on the national transplant waiting list as of July 2019.

**36,528** transplants were performed in 2018.\*\*

**20** people die each day waiting for a transplant.

**Every 10 minutes** another person is added to the waiting list.

**Only 3 in 1,000** people die in a way that allows for organ donation.

**One person** can donate up to 8 lifesaving organs (heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, kidneys and intestines)

**In 2018**, there was a total of **17,553 donors**; 10,722 were deceased donors and 6,831 were living donors.

\*\*data as of July 22, 2019; Source: *organdonor.gov*

## Colby parishioner reflects on donating a kidney

By Tony Horinek

**IS GOD CALLING YOU?** Have you ever wondered what it would be like to really know, without a doubt that God called you to do something? I had this opportunity 14 years ago when I met a man suffering from polycystic kidneys. He was on his way to a wedding, but had to be home the next day so he would not miss his dialysis. I thought to myself, "How difficult it would be to be tied down and dependent on a machine to keep you alive."

A couple months later, I was passing through Greeley, Colo., and decided to stop in and check on Brennan. We had a wonderful time visiting and playing cards. I learned how difficult life really was without functioning kidneys. He described how he had asked many friends and sent a letter out to all his high school classmates asking if anyone would consider donating a kidney. While he had many friends, acquaintances and classmates, no one had volunteered for this job.

A few years earlier, my wife Anita and I had become involved in the Cursillo movement. It changed my relationship with Christ from the "go to church on Sunday Catholic," to one seeking to know Christ better daily by an active prayer life and a study of the Scriptures. I had a real hunger to dig deeper into my faith and live it out. It also came to us that while we believed in tithing and were able to donate money to various causes, it was not enough. We had been searching for something we could offer up that would truly cause us some discomfort in

our materialistically blessed life.

As you may have guessed, by the time I was ready to leave Brennan's house the next morning, I looked at Anita and said, "I think I am supposed to give my kidney away." She confirmed that if that's what I was being guided to, she would support me all the way.

When I announced this to Brennan, he told me not to get my hopes up, as there were a lot of hoops to jump through and many things would have to come together for this to work. He gave me a phone number to call. They explained all the tests that would have to be ran in the coming months to make sure that we were a match and my health was sufficient to donate without causing harm to myself.

**ALL OF THESE APPOINTMENTS** were in Denver and occurred during wheat planting and fall harvest, a very busy time on the farm. After every appointment, if you got a passing grade, they would want to set up another date for the next test. I would tell them that it would depend on whether or not I was in the field if I would be able to keep the appointment. Somehow on every appointment date, I was rained out, snowed out, or the grain became too wet to harvest. I firmly believe God wanted me to get to these appointments.

Our doctors and surgical teams work were kept completely separate, as to not cause any influence on my decision. I had never had anesthesia or been in the hospital for anything like this, so I was a little apprehensive at first. They described all of the dangers and

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## Father Leiker shares his experience, need for an organ transplant

By Father Michael Leiker



**Father Michael Leiker**

Salina Diocese

**AS MANY OF YOU ARE** aware, I looked rather sickly at the ordination in September. I get many questions about how I am feeling and about the jaundice coloring of my skin and eyes. I have been open to answer questions when asked, but would give an abbreviated diagnosis or that doctors are working with me. Bishop Vincke and I thought this is the appropriate time to shed some light about my condition.

Currently, I have been going to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., where they monitor my condition called primary sclerosing (sklub-ROHS-ing) cholangitis (koh-lan-JIE-tis) or more simply, PSC. PSC is a disease of the bile ducts, which carry the digestive liquid bile from your liver to your small intestine. In primary sclerosing cholangitis, inflammation causes scars within the bile ducts. These scars make the ducts hard and narrow and gradually cause serious liver damage such as fibrosis, cirrhosis and liver failure. Patients may eventually require a liver transplant (Mayo Clinic and *pscpartners.org*).

**IT'S NOT CLEAR WHAT CAUSES** primary sclerosing cholangitis. An immune system reaction to an infection or toxin may trigger the disease in people who are genetically predisposed to it. A large proportion of people with primary sclerosing cholangitis also have inflammatory bowel disease, an umbrella term that includes ulcerative colitis (I was diagnosed with in 2004) and Crohn's disease. My doctors believe mine was caused by my autoimmune system.

On my last visit to the Mayo Clinic, my doctor (who is Catholic)

told me that I am not in dire need of a transplant at this time, and that even though my symptoms are present, I am too healthy to be a priority on a transplant list. However, he did say that if a liver from a living donor was directed for me and a good match, we would go ahead with a transplant which would improve my quality of life. We also discussed that since I am still healthy, so to speak, recovery would be a much easier.

**A QUESTION THAT IS** frequently asked is, "I only have one liver how can I be a living donor?" The answer is: the liver is a unique organ in that it is the only organ that regenerates! During a living-donor liver transplant, a surgeon places the part (30 to 70 percent) of your liver that is removed into the recipient after all of his or her liver is removed. It usually takes several weeks to several months for the liver to return to its normal size in both the recipient and the donor.

There are strict requirements for who can be a living liver donor. First, the donor must be between the ages of 21 and 60 at the time of the transplant. Second, the potential donor must be a blood match for the recipient; my blood type is O+, so I could accept any form of O blood type. Finally, making the decision to donate an organ is a personal one that deserves careful

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AROUND THE DIOCESE

**Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration**



*Courtesy photo*

More than 250 students from Kansas State University in Manhattan attended a special Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration at the St. Isidore Catholic Student Center on Dec. 12. The evening included a presentation on Our Lady of Guadalupe, traditional Mexican dancing, Mexican food and drinks and a candlelight Mass in Spanish. K-State FOCUS missionary Stephanie Teffeteller helped organize this event, with the assistance of the women of the Kappa Delta Xi sorority.

**Herington Knights donate**



*Courtesy photo*

Tom Biehler, District Deputy Knight of Columbus and member of Council No. 1066 in Herington presents a check to Jeanette Wirtz, treasurer of the Southeast Dickinson County Transition Council. The funds were raised during the Tootsie Roll Drive from October.

*Donor screening is thorough process*

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thought and consideration of both the serious risks and benefits. Talk through your decision with your friends, family and other trusted advisers. You should not feel pressured to donate, and you may change your mind at any point (source: Mayo Clinic). The donor evaluation process usually includes an initial screening by phone or online and blood typing tests to make sure your blood is compatible with the recipient. There will also be a physical and psychological evaluation to make sure that undergoing living donor surgery will pose minimal risk to you, and the last step is consent and final review.

With all this being said, I am humbly asking that you consider becoming an organ donor, not just for me, but also for the near 113,000 in need of both deceased and living donors. If you do con-

sider becoming a living donor for my situation, a directed donor, you would contact the Mayo Clinic in Rochester and state that you would like to be a living donor for me.

The Mayo Clinic website <https://connect.mayoclinic.org/page/transplant/tab/resource-36/> is full of information of what to expect and how the process works. You may also call the Mayo Clinic Liver Transplant Center at 866-227-7501.

If you have any questions about the process prior to contacting the Mayo Clinic, you can email at the address below.

I close with the words of St. John Paul II, "the decision to offer without reward a part of one's own body for the health and well-being of another person is 'a genuine act of love.'"

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**Horinek thankful for opportunity to donate kidney**

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everything that could go wrong. But after passing each test and knowing what a difference it would make in another man's life, I began to have complete peace about this surgery.

I knew it was what I was being called to do, and I was prepared for any outcome, successful or not. Also, I am quite certain that Anita did not appreciate that I was singing "Soon and Very Soon I am going to meet the King" as I was taking my pre-surgery shower.

**EVERYTHING TURNED OUT** well, and I felt a peace like never before. "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's

**2296** "Organ transplants are in conformity with the moral law if the physical and psychological dangers and risks to the donor are proportionate to the good sought for the recipient. Organ donation after death is a noble and meritorious act and is to be encouraged as an expression of generous solidarity. It is not morally acceptable if the donor or his proxy has not given explicit consent. Moreover, it is not morally admissible to bring about the disabling mutilation or death of a human being, even in order to delay the death of other persons."

*Source: Catechism of the Catholic Church*

friends (John 15:13)." The hardest part of the whole deal was when we left the hospital after three days and realized how attached Brennan and I had become. These were the only tears shed. This was over 14 years ago, and I continue to be thankful for this opportuni-

ty that God granted me. I know it would not have happened if I had not deepened my relationship with Christ. It was only by daily prayer and the hunger to get closer to Christ that allowed me to be aware enough to hear the call.

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