

What does our Church believe about organ donation?

Rapid advances in modern medicine have opened up vast new vistas in an effort to prolong human life and eradicate disease. One of the most dramatic of these breakthroughs is the transplantation of vital organs from one person to another. A healthy human being can donate a kidney, part of his or her liver, bone marrow, and blood without serious long term health risks. Surgeons can transplant many additional organs, such as the heart and lungs, intestines, pancreas, and the corneas, if the donor is already deceased.

The Church recognizes the highly personal nature of the decision to donate an organ. Such decisions should be made in an attitude of prayerful faith and in consultation with one's physician and one's spiritual father. No one should feel compelled or coerced to donate, and no person should donate if there is no reasonable chance that such a sacrifice will restore the patient receiving the transplant to a modicum of health.

The Greek Orthodox Church regards the donation of a duplicated organ, such as a kidney, by a living person to save the life of another person, as a loving act of mercy and compassion. The donor is to be commended for his sacrifice, which is a gracious and loving gift offered to save the life of another.

The Church is opposed to any commercialization of this process, to any trafficking in human organs.

Greece

In a decision made in October, 1999 the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece declared that organ donation for transplants "is a God-loved act of love and sacrifice" provided that this donation is a result of the conscious and free decision of the donor which serves no commercial purpose. Registration for all who wished to become organ donors began later that month in all the parishes of the Church of Greece. In 2005, the (then) head of the Greek Orthodox Church, Archbishop Christodoulos (1939-2008) of Athens and All Greece announced on state television that he and the bishops who constitute the Holy Synod had all signed organ donor forms.

The United States

The Pastoral Guidelines found in the official *Yearbook* of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America state that the practice of organ donation "is encouraged."

In 2003, the (then) dean of the St. George Cathedral in Hartford, CT – Father John Heropoulos – donated one of his kidneys to a 16 year old boy living in West Nyack, NY as the result of a search for a matching donor initiated by Archbishop Demetrios of America and the national office of Philoptochos, the Greek Orthodox women's philanthropic outreach ministry. In a 7/23/03 *Newsday* article Heropoulos was quoted as saying that he needed no thanks, that he never hesitated in making his decision, nor did he regret it during the difficult recovery period, which he called "the most intense pain I ever felt in my life." Heropoulos said, "Anytime that it hurt at all, I said, 'Eight weeks of pain in exchange for a lifetime of good health for a young man.' It's a no-brainer."