

GENERAL SYNOD

Blood and Organ Donation

A Background Paper from Diocese of West Yorkshire and the Dales

1. 'That this Synod call on all Church of England parishes to encourage their members to consider, as part of their Christian giving:
 - (a) becoming blood donors; and
 - (b) registering as organ donors and making their wishes known to their families.'

Christian Giving

*'We believe that everything we have, including our bodies and our possessions, comes from God; and following in the footsteps of Jesus, we are called to make a sacrificial offering of what already belongs to him for the benefit of others. That 'sacrificial offering' is usually associated with time, money and gifts. But it applies just as much to the blood that flows in our veins and the organs that are such an intrinsic part of our bodies. Whether it's the regular donation of blood or registration to become an organ donor, being willing to give ourselves in this way is a significant aspect of our 'stewardship' of what we have received. And in both cases, the benefit to others is not only life-enhancing; it can mean the difference between life and death.'*¹

2. This statement by the Right Rev James Newcome, Bishop of Carlisle, the Lead Bishop on Healthcare for the Church of England, puts our response to blood and organ donation firmly in the realm of Christian giving. The Church of England is one of many organisations supporting **fleshandblood**, a campaign to mobilise the church to increase the number of blood and organ donors in the UK, a call to recognise a need and respond with an act of generosity.²
3. It seems in keeping that Christians consider blood and organ donation as a genuine act of love and a way of following Jesus' example. This act of love then becomes part of Christian discipleship or faith journey that is motivated by compassion to help someone else and demonstrate a sense of social responsibility. Sacrifice and helping others are consistent themes in Christianity which teaches the principle of seeking to do for others what you hope others would do for you; enabling life to be lived as fully as possible is consistent with the teaching of the Son of God Jesus Christ. 'Freely you have received, freely give' (Mt 10:8) seems a fitting scripture to encapsulate this idea.³

¹ <http://fleshandblood.org/resources/>

² <http://fleshandblood.org/about/overview/>

³ 'Organ donation and religious perspectives', published by NHS blood and transplant

Blood Donation

4. A number of reasons have been given for why blood donations are required, such as:
 - Doctors and surgeons rely on blood donations to carry out life-saving and life-enhancing treatments every day.⁴
 - Red blood cells are used to treat some types of anaemia and replace blood lost as the result of an accident.
 - Platelets are used to treat problems with bone marrow, such as leukaemia and people with blood clotting disorders.
 - Plasma is used to treat conditions where abnormal clotting causes bleeding, such as liver disease, and where large volumes of blood have been lost.
 - Donated blood may also be used to improve the quality of life of people with a terminal illness.⁵
 - The top uses of donated blood are: Surgical 30%, Haematology 18%, Gastro intestinal bleeding 11%, Anaemia 30%, Maternity 6%, Other 5%

*From research in 2009. Blood usage will vary between hospitals because of their particular specialties.⁶

5. The current situation is:
 - 7000 units of blood are used every day in the NHS.⁷
 - Approximately 225,000 extra blood donors are needed per year to meet the current needs.⁸
 - Although many people are able to donate, only about 4% of the population donate regularly.
 - Blood can only be safely stored for a relatively short time so hospital blood stocks need to be continuously refreshed. Red blood cells can only be stored for 35 days and platelets can only be stored for seven days.⁹

From this we can see a need in terms of the use of blood and the need for donors.

Organ Donation

6. The level of need varies but the most recent figures show around 6,900 people who need a transplant in the UK.¹⁰ By contrast fewer than 5,000 people each year die in circumstances where they can donate their organs.¹¹ Of these only a proportion actually donate, for

⁴ <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Blood-donation/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

⁵ <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Blood-donation/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

⁶ <http://www.blood.co.uk/about-blood/how-blood-is-used/>

⁷ <http://fleshandblood.org/about/overview/>

⁸ <http://fleshandblood.org/about/overview/>

⁹ <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Blood-donation/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

¹⁰ https://nhsbtdeb.blob.core.windows.net/umbraco-assets/1124/annual_stats.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.organdonation.nhs.uk/news-and-campaigns/organ-donation-campaigns/>

example figures published in 2015 show 1282 deceased donors and 990 live donors.¹² Whilst several people may benefit from one donor, there is also a decreasing rate of donation of 3% in deceased donors and 5% in live donors, corresponding to a 5% decrease in lives saved or improved. In fact 429 patients died while on the active waiting list for their transplant and a further 807 were removed from the transplant list. The removals were mostly as a result of deteriorating health and ineligibility for transplant and many of these patients would have died shortly afterwards.¹³ Whilst many may have made pledges to donate, next of kin are normally approached to give agreement and consent rates remain stubbornly at 60%.¹⁴ Recent news coverage showed that organ donations from hundreds of registered donors have been blocked over the past five years.¹⁵ In response to the growing evidence of donors' wishes being overturned, there is a campaign to make loved ones aware of the decisions we make.¹⁶ Due to changes in the Human Tissue Act (2006) allowing 'non directed' donation (anonymous altruistic giving), there are also a significant number of live donations, especially with kidney donation where live donation has a much greater chance of success.¹⁷

In Summary

7. This motion has been put forward to raise awareness of the excellent work being done by **fleshandblood** to raise awareness of the issues around blood and organ donation and to forge a partnership between the NHS and Christians across all denominations. We would urge all to give it their support. To conclude:

“Thousands of people in the UK today are waiting for an organ transplant that could save or dramatically improve their lives. The simple act of joining the donors' register can help make the world of difference to those in need. I hope that everyone will consider whether they can give life to others after their own death.” Sentamu Ebor, Archbishop of York, 2010¹⁸

**Kay Brown, Leeds Diocesan Synod member (Allerton Deanery)
January 2016**

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¹² https://nhsbtdeb.blob.core.windows.net/umbraco-assets/1124/annual_stats.pdf

¹³ http://nhsbtmediaservices.blob.core.windows.net/organ-donation-assets/pdfs/activity_report_2014_15.pdf

¹⁴ http://www.nhsbt.nhs.uk/news-and-media/news-articles/news_2015_07_20.asp

¹⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/15/nhs-moves-to-stop-bereaved-families-blocking-donation-of-relatives-organs>

¹⁶ <http://fleshandblood.org/organs/tell-someone/>

¹⁷ <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/kidney-transplant/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

¹⁸ <https://www.organdonation.nhs.uk/about-donation/what-does-my-religion-say/christianity/>