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ILLINOIS COALITION URGES DONOR SABBATH OBSERVANCES

ELMHURST – All major religions in the United States support organ and tissue donation as one of the highest acts of compassion and humanitarianism. Yet, “it’s against my religion” is one of the most common reasons family give when they don’t agree to donate, according to officials with the agencies that coordinate organ and tissue donation in Illinois.

To bridge that gap in understanding, the Illinois Coalition on Donation urges communities to plan prayer services and programs in observance of National Donor Sabbath, Nov. 15-17. The three-day event is an interfaith observance of the gift of life through organ and tissue donation, observed by faith communities and donation/transplantation agencies throughout the country.

National Donor Sabbath observances supported through the Illinois Coalition include:

- In Champaign, a candlelight service beginning 6 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 10, at West Side Park, University and Elm streets.
- In the Chicago metropolitan area, an open house 1-5 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 10, hosted at Loyola University Medical Center, 2160 S. First Ave., Maywood. A memorial wall will feature photos submitted by families of organ and tissue donors remembering their loved ones.
- In Springfield, a memorial observance beginning 4 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 17 at Prairie Heart Institute at St. John’s Hospital.

To RSVP for any of the above events, contact Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network at 888/307-DON8.

- In the southern Illinois and St. Louis region, an ecumenical ceremony and reception beginning 2 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 17, at St. Francis Xavier (College) Church, 3628 Lindell Blvd., in St. Louis. Families are encouraged to bring photos of their loved ones for display at the reception. To RSVP for this event, call Mid-America Transplant Services at 314/991-2490, ext. 3400.

“The point is to honor and remember those who have chosen to give through donation, pray for those who continue to wait for a lifesaving organ transplant – and encourage people to examine their faith’s perspective on donation,” says Camille Deluhery, Education Coordinator for the Illinois Eye-Bank and chair of the Illinois Coalition on Donation’s National Donor Sabbath programs.

(MORE)

“We know that families who have discussed their wishes almost always honor their loved one’s request to give life through donation – and that preparedness is of great help to a family in their grief over a loved one’s death.” In Illinois, as in most states, families must give consent before an individual’s wishes to donate can be carried out.

Individuals, religious leaders and communities are asked to observe National Donor Sabbath by:

- Arranging for displays of green ribbons at places of worship, symbolizing support for organ and tissue donation.
- Speaking or arranging for speakers on the religious aspects of donation at worship services, youth classes or adult ministry groups.

- Arranging information tables in the community.
- Writing open letters or encouraging articles about donation in religious bulletins or newsletters.

The Illinois Coalition on Donation provides free materials and support for all of these activities. Call 888/307-3668 or visit www.giftofhope.org.

More than 4,700 Illinoisans are among the 80,000 people across the country waiting for lifesaving transplants possible only through organ donation. Every day, the need grows more critical as 100 people are added to the national transplant waiting list and 17 more die while waiting.

Thousands more patients require tissue transplants of bone, skin, heart valves, ligaments, tendons and major blood vessels. An estimated one in 20 Americans will need some type of medical tissue transplant during a lifetime, yet just 8 percent of the need for transplantable tissue is currently being met.

The Illinois Coalition is one of more than 45 regional coalitions and 50 national businesses or associations making up the national Coalition on Donation, a not-for-profit alliance stressing the importance of organ and tissue donation through national media and awareness campaigns.

In Illinois, state coalition members include the Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Awareness Program; Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network; Mid-America Transplant Services, the National Kidney Foundation of Illinois; Illinois Eye-Bank, MEBTC; Heartland Lions Eye Bank; American Liver Foundation-Illinois Chapter; American Red Cross-Tissue Services; the Minority Organ/Tissue Transplant Education Program, Chicago Office; Organ Transplant Support, Inc.; the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation; and the Illinois Department of Public Health, Division of Transplantation.

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