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Editor's note: Contact information for clergy, transplant recipients and families of donors with faith-based perspectives on organ/tissue donation can be provided.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**FAITH COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT ILLINOIS ISSUE CALLS FOR REMEMBRANCE
DURING NATIONAL DONOR SABBATH**

ELMHURST, ILL. (Nov. 3, 2003) – Leaders with the Archdiocese of Chicago and the Illinois Great Rivers Conference of the United Methodist Church are among the Illinois faith communities calling on congregants to make faith-based decisions to become organ and tissue donors during National Donor Sabbath, Nov. 14-16.

“With more than 83,000 Americans waiting for lifesaving organ transplants and thousands more waiting for life-enhancing tissue or cornea transplants, we must all participate in this celebration of life and hope,” Cardinal Francis George announced in a letter to all Chicago Archdiocese parishes this week. In his letter, the cardinal reminds the archdiocese’s 2.5 million Catholics of the Church’s teachings and statements of support for organ donation and transplantation.

The Communications Office of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference also plans to issue a statement in support of donation in the conference’s October newspaper and in communications to the conference’s 160,000 members.

Elsewhere in the state, hundreds of places of worship plan bulletin inserts, speakers and information tables about organ and tissue donation. Among major observances scheduled:

- Donation advocates, clergy and family members of donors from throughout central Illinois will gather for a remembrance and candlelight ceremony 2 pm Nov. 9 at OSF Saint Francis Hospital Chapel, 530 NE Glen Oak Ave., Peoria. The ceremony, featuring speakers and music by Cookie Bannon and the OSF Saint Francis Choir, will conclude with a dedication of a wreath and banner that will be displayed in the hospital’s main lobby through the holiday season.
- In northern Illinois, families and the public will gather for a “Donor Family Ceremony of Hope, Faith & Remembrance” at 4 pm Nov. 15 at the Fitzgerald Funeral Home, Mulford Chapel, 1860 S. Mulford, Rockford. In addition to speakers and prayer, the Gift of Hope Donor Quilt—a quilt made of memorial patches contributed by families of organ and tissue donors—will be on display, as well as a memorial wall and photo presentation.

(MORE)

Each year, National Donor Sabbath is observed two weekends before Thanksgiving. The weekend is a time for leaders of all religions to reach out to their congregates with the message that giving life to others through organ and tissue donation is a noble and selfless act that coincides with—and supports—their religious beliefs.

National Donor Sabbath is also a time for congregations to remember families who suffered the loss of a loved one, and yet gave the greatest gift of all, the gift of life. Thoughts and prayers also focus on the thousands of men, women and children who continue to wait desperately for needed organs and tissues to save or improve their lives.

Nearly all faith traditions in the United States—from Buddhism to Judaism to the Wesleyan Church—support donation and transplantation as one of the highest expressions of human compassion and generosity.

Yet, according to organ and tissue donation officials, many families mistakenly believe donation is against their religious beliefs and choose not to donate for that reason.

Organs and tissues from a single donor can help more than 25 individuals. Everyone, no matter how young or old, can be a lifesaver by choosing to be a donor. To become a donor, sign a Uniform Donor Card (such as the card on the back of a driver's license) and, most importantly, inform family members of the decision. In Illinois, a family's consent is required before donation can occur.

For more information, contact the Illinois Coalition on Donation at 888/307-DON8. For information on National Donor Sabbath, visit www.giftofhope.org. Spanish speakers can call 877/577-3747 or visit the Web site's Spanish-language section.

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