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RELIGIOUS LEADERS SHOW INTERFAITH SUPPORT FOR LIFESAVING CAUSE

*Local Congregations Observe National Donor Sabbath to Raise Awareness of
Organ Donation, State's New Donor Consent Registry*

CHICAGO (Oct. 5, 2007) - Houses of worship of all faiths across Illinois will take time next month to recognize the lifesaving benefits of organ donation and encourage registration in Illinois' new donor registry. The call to action will occur on Nov. 9-11 during National Donor Sabbath—an annual observance intended to raise awareness, through religious communities, of the urgent need for organ and tissue donation.

Observation of National Donor Sabbath is an interfaith opportunity for religious communities in Chicago to touch the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Currently, more than 4,700 of the nearly 100,000 Americans waiting for a transplant are from Illinois. Unfortunately, these numbers continue to grow at a rate of 18 people per day nationwide.

Yet the solution to this problem is simple: encourage people to commit to being an organ and tissue donor - the goal of National Donor Sabbath.

"We're incredibly grateful for the level of commitment and outreach efforts that are put forth by faith-based communities in helping register organ donors in Illinois," said Jarold Anderson, President and CEO, Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network. "Clergy leaders around the state are providing us with a crucial voice and helping spread the word about the importance of giving life through organ donation."

Polls have shown that less than 10 percent of people in the United States know their religion has doctrines regarding organ and tissue donation. Though these beliefs differ between denominations, the underlying theme – that organ and tissue donation is one of the highest forms of giving – directly correlates with the principle upon which most religions are based.

Participating houses of worship will address the issue during their services, share Donate Life decision cards with their congregations, and encourage members to register as donors.

This year's National Donor Sabbath is the second since a change in the Illinois donor registry took effect on Jan. 1, 2006. Previously, organ & tissue donor registration did not guarantee that an individual's wishes would be fulfilled. A family member or other legal authority was required to give additional consent for a person to donate. As a result, nearly 20 percent of consenting donors had their decision overturned.

Today, the new donor registry makes one's decision legally binding. Additional witnesses or family consent are no longer required, although family members will be notified and are able to receive information and services through Gift of Hope regarding the donation.

Donors who registered before Jan. 1, 2006, need to re-register with the Secretary of State's office to ensure their wishes are carried out. Illinoisans can register to become an organ donor by clicking on www.giftofhope.org or www.LifeGoesOn.com; by visiting any Illinois state driver's license facility; or by calling the Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program at 1-800-210-2106.

For more information about National Donor Sabbath, visit www.giftofhope.org/nds. To arrange an interview with a clergy member, donor family member or transplant recipient, or simply learn more about organ and tissue donation, contact Vikki Tulcus, Volunteer & Public Education Coordinator, at 630/758-2740, or visit the Gift of Hope Web site at www.giftofhope.org.

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About Gift of Hope

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network is proud to serve as the federally designated not-for-profit organ procurement organization (OPO) dedicated to coordinating organ and tissue donation in the northern three-quarters of Illinois and northwest Indiana.

Since its inception in 1986, Gift of Hope has coordinated donations that have saved the lives of more than 14,000 organ transplant recipients, and improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of tissue transplant recipients.

As one of 58 OPOs that make up the nation's organ donation system, Gift of Hope works with 183 hospitals in its donation service area. Its administration and staff serve as healthcare administrators and professionals, trained clinicians and community educators in helping evaluate potential donors, coordinate the donation process, provide family support services, assist hospitals with donation policies and procedures and educate the more than 11.7 million people in our service area about donation and how to register as a donor. Visit www.giftofhope.org or call 888/307-DON8 (3668) for more information.