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Registering As Organ Donor Called Act of Christian Love *Easter Provides Perfect Time for Church Families to Discuss Giving New Life*

Carmen Polhemus' son received the gift of life through organ donation. Then the unthinkable happened—her other son died, and Carmen chose to donate his organs so someone else could have a second chance at life. During this Easter season, which falls during National Donate Life Month, Carmen's story encompasses themes of death, new life and hope.

Carmen's younger son was born with a congenital heart defect. When Jonathan was 21 years old, doctors successfully implanted a donor's aortic valve into Jonathan's heart.

Eight years later, on a sunny Saturday, Jonathan's older brother Daniel lost control of his car on a winding road. Doctors told Carmen that Daniel had suffered a brain hemorrhage and could not survive, but he had almost no other injuries.

"I sat in the seat where Daniel sat and the hood was pushed in and the passenger door was pushed in and then the trunk was pushed in but right around the driver was just a bubble," said Carmen, who lives in Wimberley outside of Austin. "I think God took care of Daniel to be a donor."

When faced with the choice to donate her son's organs, Carmen said, "It was like a light had gone on. We thought we had no choices, but we had a choice to honor Daniel by having other people share his healthy body. It made sense out of the senseless." She considers organ donation a gift worth reflecting on as Christians celebrate God's gift of his only Son's life.

The Ultimate Gift of Charity

Church families across Texas have a unique opportunity to change the critical shortage in registered organ donors. Nearly 9,000 people in Texas are waiting for a life-saving organ. Every day in the United States, 17 people die waiting for an organ transplant.

The solution is for Texans to register as organ donors at the state's official Web site for organ donation, The Glenda Dawson Donate Life Texas Registry, at www.donatelifetexas.org.

Bishop Mike Pfeifer of the San Angelo Catholic Diocese thinks any misconceptions about religion and organ donation may come from the mistaken belief the body must be whole in order to rise to Heaven.

"The first place to start the conversation about organ donation is in the medical/health field, which clearly points out the benefits of receiving healthy organs that can be used to sustain and give life to other people," said Bishop Pfeifer when explaining why he encourages his parishioners to register to be organ donors. "Of course, the Catholic Church supports this by pointing out that this is a great act of

charity, by helping to maintain the life of another human being even when one dies. This is a true act of Christian love. This is the message we need to give to families.”

Bishop Pfeifer's feelings are reflected in most religions' position on organ donation. In fact, most of mainstream Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism encourage organ donation. All mainstream American Protestant denominations and the Vatican strongly support donation.

Myths and misconceptions about organ donation are cleared up on Texas' official Web site for organ donation registration, www.donatelifetexas.org. It takes less than five minutes to register online or at your local driver license office.

Historically, while signing a donor card and placing the "donor" sticker on your driver license served as an important symbol of your intent, it did not place you on any official list or registry. In 2006, Texas created its own official state donor registry. The registry is named in memory of State Rep. Glenda Dawson, a kidney transplant recipient, who championed the cause of organ donation.

Registering to become an organ, tissue and eye donor helps ensure your wishes will be carried out after you die. During this celebration of Christ's resurrection, it's your chance to give new life to someone else. Carmen said of the unbelievable sadness of losing a child, “Look what Jesus went through to save people. The number of people Daniel saved doesn't compare, and it still gives me great peace.”

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