



CHURCH of IRELAND GENERAL SYNOD
CHURCH in SOCIETY COMMITTEE
Medical Ethics, Science and Technology Sub-Committee

**A RESPONSE TO NEW ORGAN DONATION PROPOSALS PUT FORWARD
BY PRIME MINISTER GORDON BROWN**

The Church of Ireland welcomes the recent statement of the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, on the issue of “Organ Donation”, and bringing it back into the public domain. Members of the Medical Ethics committee, who are practising doctors, are only too well aware of the number of deaths due to the shortage of donated organs.

Organ donation is to be seen as an entirely consistent Christian act, both of caring for those less well off, and responding to Our Lord’s example of, and instruction to, heal and show compassion. There does not appear to be a theological argument against the change in practice from an opt-in to an opt-out one. However we are sensitive to those whose religions hold different views, such as the body being as complete as possible for burial, the discomfort that there is over the transplantation of cadaver organs, and the reaction of many, including, Christians to the removal of body parts.

We believe that the reasons for the significant shortfall of donated organs, for instance only 15% of those requiring a liver transplantation receive one, should be addressed, as to whether it is a failure to ask relatives at a time of great emotional distress, or due to lack of transplant co-ordinators to carry out this asking; whether it is due to difficulty for members of the public to opt-in, apart from when renewing their driving licences, or simply a lack of voluntary donors, but whatever, it does require agreement to the action by others, not just a signed donor card by the potential donor.

Before any changes are considered we would wish to see more public discussion and education on all the issues concerned. This would allow the public to have given thought to the issues involved, so as to make a decision at such a time, and for many not to be left some time after the event regretting either that they had declined the invitation to agree to donation, or had not been asked. The experience, for instance, in Spain is encouraging to take this approach. The Prime Minister has, however, suggested that permission of the family, or representative, would still be necessary with a change to an opt-out scheme, which would suggest that there would be no improvement without education. This change, if it took place, would of itself mean a very major change in the relationship of the State and the individual.

The Church of Ireland believes, that organ donation is a Christian act; that it is a way of bringing something good out of a tragedy (frequently the potential donor is young and the result of an accident), and in the longer term it gives the bereaved family comfort. However at this time we believe that other actions should be considered to increase the rate of organ donation before a change in the law, and we would encourage all the members of the Church to become fully involved and committed, if and when they should ever find themselves in this situation, and to remember all those awaiting the gift of a new organ.