

Chapel Talk  
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### Learning the Gift of Life

My focus tonight is on the process of learning, regardless of whether that process takes place in our personal lives or in school. This environment is full of well-rounded teachers and people committed to personal growth. Our community is a special place because we are ALL encouraged to be important. These influences encourage me to be selfless as a teacher because Lord knows I'm not a funny comedian.

In October 2007 I watched an airing of an ESPN show called E:60. First, I have to admit that the program made me tear up. I am not quite ready to say that I cried though! Men don't cry right? The program titled, "Ray of Hope," focused on organ donation. Jason Ray, a twenty-one year old senior and organ donor at the University of North Carolina, passed away on March 26, 2007. He passed away three days after being stuck by a car during March Madness.

There were at least four people who received organs from the experience. They agreed to meet Jason's parents and you can probably imagine the emotions of that meeting. Each recipient and parent talked about the irony of organ donation. Everyone, including me, seemed to be fighting back tears as they shared warm hugs and great dialog. I should also mention that this story was interesting because the boundaries of race and culture were not an issue, because two of these four people were of a different racial background than Jason.

For years I selfishly thought I would never be an organ donor. I rationalized that organ donation had nothing relevant to do with me. The reality is that organ donation is about helping others. This E:60 story convinced me to correct my prior choice, so I logged online that night and registered as an organ donor.

Here is what I learned. One person can contribute to the lives of about 50 people. A healthy donor regardless of age can contribute organs, human tissue, stem cells and blood. Again, age is not a factor.

I was telling a friend about my topic when they blurted out that they received a cornea from someone. I didn't believe her and was floored to realize that she was telling the truth. When I registered online the process took less than five minutes and I was informed that my driver's license would be updated the next time I renewed it. I also received a nice letter of thanks from the DMV and the Gift of Life Donor Program.

I made the correct decision even if it was long overdue. I'll never know who'll receive my organs whenever my time comes and I'm okay with that notion. Besides, can you imagine the small talk that might take place, 'hey, how's that organ treating ya?' I know that I am in no way the first person to be an organ donor in our community, but I learned something about myself in the process of deciding to do so.

Over Christmas break I also learned about Baby Fintan Schiltz. This Chicago-born baby is now four months old and was born with a congenital heart defect. He was on the organ donor list to receive a heart when his family learned about a match on Christmas day of 2007.

After reading the article in the Chicago Sun Times I talked to my father about it one morning at breakfast. We talked about my decision to be an organ donor and Baby Fintan. I told him how I thought the story was great and also sad. We talked about Jason Ray and how Jason's decision led me to be an organ donor. My father didn't voice any concerns and listened humbly to me. It was a good conversation and I felt pretty good that my father and I were able to share that moment.

When I look back on the life of NFL Hall of Fame runningback Walter Payton I am reminded of his humble personality. Here he was an ailing 45-year-old man who needed a liver transplant. Payton refused to be moved ahead of any other people on the donor list

who needed a liver. He didn't want special treatment just because he was famous and thus taught others about doing the right thing even as he suffered from cancer.

Each of these moments were teaching moments for me. So can you see why I teach? I love helping students. I teach because I care, and I care because I recognize that my teachers cared about me. I talked about organ donation tonight because Jason Ray's story influenced me to think about my fears. If I refused to better myself, if I refused to be informed, if I refused to listen to reason, if I refused to educate myself, to make myself more aware, then I'd never be the best person that God provides me the ability to become. But I'm not perfect. I still haven't come to grips with donating blood because I hate needles.

Perhaps one of the most endearing conversations, and a key moment in education I've had with a St. Andrew's student, was listening to a student who told me that he hated St. Andrew's. I did not believe him, considering that I like it so much. Was I missing the obvious? I asked him if he would ever return to visit and he again assured me that he would never, ever step foot on this campus after graduation. So I asked him a question to test his limits, as a good teacher should. I asked him whether or not he would return if he was hired to teach and his salary was contracted at one million dollars? He perked up and happily responded, "if they made it two million, they would have a deal!" In that one instance when he said 'never', I somehow taught him or perhaps suggested to him that his hate had a limit and that it was possible to rethink a stance. Fear can also be conquered. Hate can also be conquered.

Ironically I feel like I am invincible; not perfect, just invincible. John Mayer wrote in his song No Such Thing that, "I want to run through the halls of my high school, I want to scream at the top of my lungs..." He wants to go back to the place that repressed his personality. He wants to rebel. He wants to be expressive. He wants to be free. We all want to behave that freely. We all share in some fantasy about our lives and we always search for answers. Perhaps I'll free myself of all my fears one day. Besides, learning to admit things about yourself is not so bad after all.