

Giving Blood: The Most Basic Stewardship Statement

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With the cost of gasoline at an all time high and the concept of going “green” high on the list of those concerned with the environment, many people are being coming sensitive to identifying renewable resources. The blood that flows through your body is one such renewable resource that, if shared regularly, is the most basic stewardship statement anyone can make.

Yes, giving blood is an act of stewardship. Especially when you accept the definition of stewardship as “the management of everything God has given you.” Perhaps you’ve heard the word stewardship used as a synonym for the fund-raising effort of the church every fall to get you to give some of your money. And, I’m sure that at one time or another you heard someone use the expression that “filling out their pledge card felt like giving blood.” If that expression is true, then filling out a pledge card should be relatively painless because the actual act of giving blood involves only a momentary sensation of “OH” when the needle, yes the needle, is skillfully inserted into a well prepared vein.

When you commit to giving blood on a regular basis you truly do make the most basic stewardship statement anyone can make because:

- ◆ The action takes discipline to remember that you can give a pint of blood every 56 days
- ◆ In most cases, the action reflects a willingness to make an unrestricted gift as your blood is used to help a stranger
- ◆ The action involves more than mental assent because you must consciously present your body and not just your checkbook
- ◆ The action, when understood in the context of prayer, is a direct statement of thanksgiving to God for the life God has bestowed upon you

When I gave blood last week, I was surprised when the attendant tallied my now full West Virginia donor card and told me that over the past five years I have given over three gallons of blood. Giving blood is something I know I can do and which I try to do about six times a year. As the steward of the body that God has given me, I am grateful that I able to give blood for the reasons noted in this brief article. If, for some reason, you think I sound highly altruistic in linking giving blood with stewardship, please let me give you one more very human reason why giving blood on a regular basis is part of my discipline. Every time I give a pint of blood I equate that with losing a pound. Maintaining my weight within a certain range is important to me and there are foods I do not usually eat except in the 24 to 48 hours after losing that pound. So, giving blood is also an excuse to have something that is both “off the diet” and very delicious as my body rebuilds. Saying thank you to God does have its rewards!

The following "Frequently Asked Questions" about giving blood are also posted at www.givelife2.org/donor/faq.asp#12:

Is donating blood safe?

Donating blood is a safe process. Needles and bags used to collect blood are used only once and then discarded, making spread of infection to the donor not possible.

Can I give if I have been turned down before?

Most reasons, for which donors are turned away from donating blood are temporary, not permanent. For example, one common reason for a deferral is low iron level in the blood, but iron levels fluctuate daily and are affected by what you eat. Call 1-800-GIVE LIFE to check the eligibility requirements to see if you may be eligible to donate. A "mini-physical" is given to all potential donors to ensure they are healthy enough to donate.

How often can one give blood?

Regulations in the United States allow people to donate whole blood once every 56 days. The waiting period between donations can be different for other blood components. For example, donating only platelets in a process called apheresis requires only a 3 day wait before a person can give again. Donating two units of red blood cells through a similar process doubles the waiting period to 112 days.

How do I know if I am eligible to donate blood?

You must be in good health, be at least 17 years old, and weigh at least 110 pounds. You will also need to pass physical and health history reviews prior to donating. There is no upper age limit on your ability to donate. Conditions that require a temporary deferral are pregnancy, travel to certain parts of the world, inoculations, some health conditions and certain medications. Call 1-800 GIVE LIFE to get answers to specific eligibility questions you may have. Eligibility requirements may also vary for some states and blood centers. Final eligibility is determined by medical professionals at the time of donation.

Are the health history questions and my test results confidential?

Yes. The health history will be conducted by a trained professional in an individual booth arranged to preserve confidentiality. Your answers will be kept confidential, except where required by law. If your blood tests positive to any of the administered standard tests, you will receive confidential notification. The Red Cross maintains strict confidentiality of all blood donor records.

What can I do if I am not eligible to donate?

While you may be unable to donate blood, there are other ways you can help. You can help

organize a blood drive, recruit other suitable donors, or volunteer at fixed sites or mobile blood drives to help make donors' experience a positive one. Monetary donations are another way to help ensure that safe blood can be provided to those who are in need. Learn more about

How can I ensure a pleasant donation experience?

You'll want a good night's sleep the night before, and a good breakfast or lunch before your donation. Drink fluids like juice, milk, or soda ahead of time. Take your normal medications as prescribed. Ensure you have adequate iron level by making iron-rich foods part of your daily diet. These include red meat, poultry, fish, green leafy vegetables, iron-fortified cereals, nuts, raisins and prunes. During your donation, relax. After your donation, have some juice and cookies in the canteen. Then you can go about your daily activities, but avoid heavy lifting or strenuous exercise for the remainder of the day.

Should I give blood now or wait until I am called?

Under normal circumstances eligible donors are encouraged to donate as often as possible. Please call 1-800-GIVE LIFE or schedule an appointment online. During emergency circumstances please listen to media reports in your area and donate as requested.

How long does it take to donate blood?

The whole process takes about an hour. It starts with registration, a health history and a mini-physical. Then comes the actual donation, which usually takes less than 10-12 minutes. Afterward, you will be asked to spend a few minutes in the "canteen" where you can have a light refreshment before returning to your normal activities.

How much blood is taken — won't it make me weak?

A blood donation equals approximately one pint of blood. The average adult body has 10-12 pints. The vast majority of people will not feel any different because of the donation. A very small percentage may experience temporary dizziness, but some rest and fluids will help you feel better quickly. Your body will replace the lost fluid within 24 hours.

What will happen to my blood after I donate?

Each blood donation is assigned a unique computer barcode number, which will identify it throughout its path from the donor to a hospital patient. Immediately after the blood donation, the blood is placed in transport containers designed to keep it at a safe temperature until it reaches a Red Cross component laboratory. Samples of the blood donation are simultaneously sent to one of nine Red Cross National Testing Laboratories to be tested for transmissible diseases. In the component lab, the blood is separated into its components: red blood cells, platelets and plasma. The products are then placed in quarantined, temperature-controlled refrigeration units until the test results are received (usually 12-16 hours later) and the blood can be released for distribution

or destroyed. From local distribution centers, the blood is transported to hospitals based on patient need. Hospital personnel then transfuse the blood or blood products to a patient in need.

Can I direct my blood donation to an individual?

Patients scheduled for surgery may be eligible to donate blood for themselves in the weeks before non-emergency surgery in a process known as autologous donation. If an autologous donation is not used, it is discarded. Family members and friends can also make directed donations. Directed donations are fully tested, so if they are not used by the intended patient, they can be released for use by other patients.

Can I direct my blood donation to the military?

The American Red Cross has created a strong operations network that helps us direct your blood donation to the areas of the country — or the world — where they are most needed. While you can't direct your donation to be specifically routed to military personnel, you can be sure that it will be sent to the areas of most critical need.