

Hunt Valley woman donates organ to fellow parishioner

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On July 4, Sharon Christie walked for 15 minutes on the treadmill at her gym. The next day, the Catholic Community of St. Francis Xavier, Hunt Valley, parishioner spent a half-hour on the machine, even doing some light jogging.

While this may not earn her a spot on the Olympics, it was “pretty good,” for the 46-year-old lawyer who had donated her kidney just eight days earlier.

A former nurse, Ms. Christie didn’t know fellow parishioner David Greenwood, even though he lives about a mile from her in their May’s Chapel, Timonium, community, but that didn’t stop her from giving him one of her kidneys.

It was while glancing through the parish bulletin that she first became aware of Mr. Greenwood, a 67-year-old retired Baltimore County public school teacher and administrator who was in desperate need of a kidney transplant.

The notice asked parishioners to consider being tested to see if they could be a match for Mr. Greenwood, a graduate of Loyola Blakefield, Towson, and Loyola College in Baltimore.

“When I read it,” said Ms. Christie, “there was a voice in the back of my head that said, ‘You need to get tested.’”

She took the bulletin home and three weeks later placed a call to Mr. Greenwood. Test results showed she was a match, and she celebrated by having dinner with Mr. Greenwood and his wife Sueanne.

“I just had a feeling from the beginning that it would work, that somehow I would be a match,” said Ms. Christie, as she scratched the head of one of her two West Highland White Terriers who share her home.

Before the surgery at the University of Maryland Medical Center June 26, both St. Francis parishioners were anointed at their parish.

It was the first major surgery for Ms. Christie, but the relatively new laparoscopic procedure took place without a hitch and required only a few pinhole-size incisions and one, three-inch incision.

While she can not lift more than 20 pounds for six weeks and had to take two weeks off from her job, Ms. Christie said that otherwise she feels fine.

Mr. Greenwood, who celebrated his 67th birthday the day after surgery, could not have asked for a better birthday present.

"It's a miracle," he said "to get somebody I didn't even know to give me their kidney. She is a great young woman."

For 20 years, Mr. Greenwood suffered from diabetes, a disease that caused him to lose both of his legs and forced him to receive three-hour dialysis treatments three times a week.

"It's a very difficult lifestyle for both the person on dialysis and their family because it's just a huge change in your life and it's just so limiting," Ms. Christie said.

Mr. Greenwood, who served as a teacher and principal in the Baltimore County public school system for 35 years, had been on the waiting list for a kidney for two and a half years before Ms. Christie came forward.

Mr. Greenwood has no siblings and his only son was not a match. Friends came forward to help him find a match and even hosted a "Gift of Life" seminar in Dundalk to draw potential donors.

When Mr. Greenwood found out Ms. Christie was a match, it seemed almost too good to be true.

"The Lord has answered my prayers," he said, choking up. "It's had a tremendous impact on my faith. You don't doubt the power of prayer anymore."

In honor of his newfound friend, who graduated from the University of Notre Dame Law School in Indiana, and is of Irish descent, Mr. Greenwood fondly named his new kidney, "Irish."

"I became Irish by implantation," he joked.

Although Ms. Christie's family initially responded to her intentions by saying, "You're doing what?" they supported her in her decision.

"The thing that struck me was that if it was me and my kidneys failed and nobody in my family could help me, wouldn't I hope that someone would come forward?" Ms. Christie said.

As she sat in a chair in her townhome in a T-shirt and shorts on a recent morning, Ms. Christie reflected, "When you look at what you have accomplished in your life or what have you done with your life, I think for me, that this will rank right up there at the top."

Although every surgery has its risks, Ms. Christie said she was not frightened, understanding that the chances of something happening to her other kidney are not very high.

"I gave up two weeks of my life so David's life could potentially be changed so positively," she said. "It's an easy trade-off."

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