

Of joy, and Father Jeff

Father Jeff Dausen bounded down a hallway on the ninth floor of the Sheikh Zayed Critical Care Tower at Johns Hopkins Hospital, in socks and a surgical gown but sounding chipper enough to take his bike to the B&A Trail.

The 55-year-old pastor of St. Andrew by the Bay in Annapolis was 30 hours removed from donating a kidney to a woman related to members of his parish, one of several coincidences that he describes as a “sign from God.”

As shared in frequent updates on his Facebook page, Father Dausen serves to promote the joy of the Gospel, Lenten sacrifice and organ donation awareness. (April, by the way, happens to be National Donate Life Month).

It began when Cindy Edwards, a graduate of Archbishop Keough High School in Baltimore and resident of Springfield, W.Va., developed kidney failure and asked friends and family, including her sister, Joann McKnab, to encourage organ donation.

As Father Dausen put it, Joann and her husband, Glenn, contribute greatly to the fabric of St. Andrew by the Bay Parish. He not only promoted Cindy’s need for a kidney donor in the bulletin, but volunteered to be screened himself.

One in four living organ donors are not related to the recipient, and months of testing showed that Father Dausen was indeed a match with Cindy.

“The only caveat for me was I told the hospital that it (the transplant) had to be after Ash Wednesday and I need to be back on the altar well in time for Easter,” Father Dausen said. “It happened quicker than would normally happen.”

March 7, the day after Ash Wednesday, Father Dausen was anointed by a good friend, Father Jim Proffitt, the pastor of St. John the Evangelist in Severna Park. March 10, the First Sunday of Lent, Edwards and her extended family attended 11:30 a.m. Mass at St. Andrew by the Bay.

As Father Dausen said, “I’m thinking, ‘I’m anointing this woman and in a few days

my kidney is going to be in her.' It's really freaky."

After Mass, the oldest of Cindy's three sons placed Father Dausen in a bear hug and said, "Thank you for saving my mother's life." The young man's name is Enoch, as Father Dausen explained, "my favorite character in a book ("Wise Blood") by Flannery O'Connor, my favorite author."

The transplant took place March 11, which would have been the 18th birthday of Ciara, a great-niece of Cindy's who died at 16 months from shaken baby syndrome. Her name is on a wall at Hopkins where organ donors are honored.

There is more providence, or, if you prefer, irony.

A decade ago, when he weighed close to 300 pounds, Father Dausen would have been an unlikely donor candidate. His physician began prescribing various medications when Father Dausen, who describes himself as having "an aversion to medicine," suggested losing "a lot of weight."

His physician told him to lose 70 pounds. Father Dausen lost 115. He gained some of them back, but improved diet and exercise keep him in good health.

Raised in Shrine of the Little Flower Parish in Northeast Baltimore, Father Dausen began his secondary education at Archbishop Curley High School, the first of several locations where he was taught by Franciscans. Long ago he heard the words of St. Francis of Assisi, "For it is in giving that we receive."

He raved about Bishop Mark E. Brennan filling in for him the weekend of March 16-17 at St. Andrew by the Bay, and shrugged off his own sacrifice.

"It's not like you need two kidneys to function," he said. "A lot of people with one have a perfectly uncompromised quality of life, and I have every expectation of the same.

"I mean, the impact it can make is incredible."

With that, he padded down the hall to say hello to Cindy.

"I got more than I gave," he said.

“You got to give life,” she said.