

University of Iowa Deeded Body Memorial Service Reflection

Good afternoon. I'm David Kozishek, one of several hospital chaplains at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. It is my privilege to be with you on this sacred occasion as we honor the life and death of your loved ones who gave of themselves for the benefit of our students' learning.

After hearing the testimonies of these students, I am humbled by their words and their experiences in human anatomy lab as they learned what it is like to explore and discover the intricacies of the human body. Some would say that the complexity and wonder of such a collection of nerves, bone, organs, and tissue leads them to believe in a higher power – who else could create such a complex masterpiece? Other would argue that their experience inspires them to appreciate mystery – seeing beyond the physicality of the human body to something deeper, something that so far has been hidden from our grasp. How, for example, does our very consciousness arise from such a complex biological system? How is it that this collection of cells gives rise to our ability to love and laugh; learn and explore; grieve and create? Someday our science and our philosophy may be able to grasp that mystery, but today that knowledge still eludes us.

Students often acknowledge that they are forever changed by their experience in the anatomy lab. When they first stood in front of the body of a donor, respectfully covered by a clean white sheet, many thoughts and emotions most likely washed over them – probably for many, fear and anxiety held sway. As they progressed through their examinations and studies of the body before them, those thoughts and emotions most likely transitioned into curiosity, wonder, awe, respect, and a thirst for the knowledge that this teacher before them had to offer through the donation of their body. While the loves, losses, joys, sorrows, character, and personality of the donor remains hidden to the students; they are known to you, gathered here today to honor their lives amongst us, and to offer our immense gratitude for the final profound gift they chose to give to the future – offering themselves in death to further the education of our future health care professionals. Their gift of themselves should be humbling to all of us – especially to those of us who work in health care.

While we honor our donors' generous gift of knowledge, you of course also continue to grieve their loss from your lives. May today's service give you some comfort in the midst of your grief, and hope for the future.

There are many of us gathered here today, and we undoubtedly represent many different religious beliefs and ways of being in the world; so to honor those who have died, let us pause for moment of silence to offer up the prayers of our hearts, the meditation of our minds, or to simply hold our loved ones' images in our hearts....*(pause before committal)*.

Committal

At this time, we respectfully commit the physical remains of your loved ones to the earth. We remember that we are dust, and to dust we will return. May the souls of the departed now rest in peace, as their journey on earth has ended. In this life, they blessed you, here gathered, their loving friends and family. In death, they have blessed these students in their education and the practice of health care. We hallow them for the gifts of love and knowledge that they have so generously bestowed upon us all.

May the memory of your loved one's selfless gift forever inspire each one of us to act out of love for one another.

We now commend their spirits to God, to that Eternal Love that knows neither beginning nor end but participates in the great mystery of creation. May that love continue to dwell in each one of us today and forever more. Amen.