

'Unbelievable blessing': Officer donates kidney to Mississippi football coach

*By Brian Blackwell
Baptist Message*

Patrick Johnson has put himself in harm's way to protect and serve the public for 23 years as a law enforcement officer. But recently, the Ouachita Parish Sheriff's Office Captain in Monroe, Louisiana, risked his own health and safety to extend the life of a stranger by donating a kidney.

Johnson, a member of Cedar Crest Baptist Church, West Monroe, gifted the organ on Dec. 11, 2023. For his courageous act, Johnson was awarded the 2024 Heart of Law Enforcement Service Before Self Award during a ceremony in Baton Rouge. The award is given each year to Louisiana law enforcement officers who have been nominated by their agencies or the public for acts of kindness they performed outside the scope of their normal duties for the previous year.

"Looking back on it, I can say Jesus was there to help me the whole way," Johnson told the Baptist Message. "And I see how he made me strong through the process. You don't have to look very far to see somebody in serious need that you can help. And I've seen what Jesus did for me and I just wanted to be part of this process.

"It never was 'my' kidney," he added. "I was just keeping it warm for Jesus until someone needed it."

Perfect match

While attending the FBI re-trainer class in the spring of 2023, Johnson learned of a kidney donation program and became

interested in becoming a donor, he explained.

After much prayer, he realized he was led to participate. He researched and selected the donor program at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson. Then, after undergoing extensive testing to determine if he was a candidate for donation, he was accepted in November 2023 to participate in the program.

The transplant was performed in December, and it functioned perfectly for recipient Herbert Davis. Johnson was back on the job within two weeks, while Davis was standing beside a player for signing day that he coached during the 2023 season.

Davis, head football coach with Madison-Ridgeland Academy in Madison, Mississippi, had battled kidney disease for the 10 years leading up to the transplant, he shared with the Baptist Message.

For those last five years, Davis underwent dialysis multiple times a week and had more than 25 surgeries. When he received word in November that the kidney transplant would take place, he was beyond excited.

'New Life'

They were part of a historic seven-way kidney swap over a four-day period between strangers. It was the largest ever in Mississippi.

"There are no words for this gift that I received," Davis said. "It's an unbelievable blessing from him and the Lord. To be able to coach football and do dialysis is quite the challenge, but I'm thankful the Lord has helped me through those trials. I am grateful for this new life."

While Johnson said he is not one who seeks the spotlight, he is passionate about organ donation. He said anyone who may be on the fence about donating should be comforted by the amount

of care that the hospital invests in the receiver, as well as the donor.

“Some people have kidney issues or know someone who does,” he said. “There are a lot of people running around with healthy kidneys who probably haven’t stopped to think that they could be saving a life. If we can just get the awareness out there and maybe get a few more people on board, we could save more lives. I would do it again in a heartbeat if I had to turn back time.”