

For Others

By Abby Deatherage

A Life-Changing Transplant Unites Jesuit Brothers in Faith

There are few things worse than surgery before Christmas — unless it allows for an amazing gift.

On December 21, Edin Barrera, SJ, 34, was admitted to Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago.

Barrera, a Jesuit scholastic studying philosophy at Loyola University Chicago, suffered from a kidney disease for years. His condition was declining, and he hoped his brother could donate a new kidney. Instead, one of his Jesuit brothers stepped forward.

The same day Barrera was admitted to Northwestern, Ryen Dwyer, SJ, 34, changed into his own hospital gown. Dwyer, also studying philosophy at Loyola Chicago, is a fellow Jesuit and therefore a brother not only to Barrera but to thousands of men around the world who comprise the Catholic Church's largest religious order. Like any loving brother, Dwyer heard a call and responded.

Finding a new kidney is delicate: "I'm not the type to go and ask for something like that," Barrera laughs. When Barrera's brother was not a match, Fr. Jim Prehn, SJ, rector of the Ignatius House Jesuit Community at Loyola Chicago, announced that a Jesuit needed a kidney.

"If anyone wants to come forward," he said, "let me know."

Dwyer "felt a desire to respond right away" and believed God was guiding him to give his kidney. Throughout the process, Dwyer says, he prayed "that I would continue hearing God's voice."

God is very present to both Jesuits, in good times and in bad. When Barrera was diagnosed with his kidney

disease in 2003, he felt God was near.

"When I was diagnosed, of course it was difficult for me to hear. I was very young and wanted to live," says Barrera. "But God was there."

God remained present when Barrera, who was born in Guatemala but raised in Los Angeles, served as a hospital chaplain prior to joining the Jesuits in 2011. Helping those who were ill and struggling with diseases and caring for patients solidified his call to the priesthood.

Far from Los Angeles, Dwyer grew up in West Michigan and lived in Evanston, Ill., for many years before entering the Society of Jesus. He was attracted to the Jesuits and their unique spirituality, expressed in their desire to look for God's voice in every moment and decision.

From the moment he volunteered to be a donor through the many tests that followed, Dwyer says he always felt an unusual peace.

"I really feel on a deep level that it didn't come from me," he explains. This sense of peace continued, even on the day of the surgery.

"It just felt like the most natural thing in the world," he says.

Within four hours, both surgeries were complete. Father Prehn told Dwyer, "You saved Edin's life." Dwyer's simple reply: "God is good."

Though it can sometimes take days for a kidney to function correctly, Barrera's new kidney began working immediately. Dwyer left the hospital the next day; Barrera followed a day later, instantly feeling "stronger and healthier." Both were home for Christmas.

"It's a gift," says Barrera. "Ryen gave me a part of himself." What Dwyer probably did not anticipate was that the kidney would take on a new identity outside his body.

For fun, fellow scholastics decided to name Barrera's new kidney "Janette." Why Janette? No reason. But Barrera always loved the name Camila, so as a compromise, the new kidney was dubbed "Camila Janette."

The entire experience provided a deeper meaning to Dwyer and Barrera's faith.

"This whole thing had to do with the body, with flesh, and at Christmas, we have Christ, God being born into the flesh," says Dwyer. "I've been able to take the experience at a deeper level, especially with the Eucharist, thinking about our God, who became flesh for us and ultimately gave Himself up for us."

Both men also have become advocates for organ donation.

"I want people to be educated about the importance of organ donation," Barrera says. "Ryen gave me more life. If it wasn't for him, I'd be on dialysis. That's not the life I want."

"I don't want to say how easy it is, because I understand that it's not easy," Dwyer adds. "But there's no reason that anybody should die of a disease that can be treated through organ donation when people are available."

With surgery behind them, Dwyer, Barrera, and Camila Janette are back to their studies at Loyola Chicago, proving that two Jesuit scholastics, a donated kidney, and the Holy Spirit make for an uncommon but extraordinary gift. ✠



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Following a successful kidney transplant, Ryen Dwyer (left) and Edin Barrera look toward the future of their Jesuit formation.