Bloodless heart surgery is a safe alternative for patients who have serious heart conditions but cannot or choose not to receive any blood or blood products (red cells, white cells, plasma or platelets). During bloodless heart surgery, physicians use meticulous surgical techniques and innovative procedures that minimize surgical blood loss and avoid the need for a transfusion during surgery.

Bloodless heart transplants are incredibly complicated and require an experienced and willing surgical team. Jenkins suffered from congestive heart failure and had additional health concerns that made his procedure even more complex. Despite visiting some of the top hospitals on the West Coast, he was unable to find a surgeon willing to perform his heart transplant bloodlessly.

He expanded his search with the help of the national Hospital Liaison Committee for Jehovah’s Witnesses and found the nation’s most experienced bloodless heart transplant surgeon: Valluvan Jeevanandam, MD, Co-Director of the University of Chicago Medicine’s Heart and Vascular Center. Jeevanandam and the UChicago Medicine Advanced Heart Failure team worked with Jenkins and his family, and were confident they could deliver him a successful outcome while respecting his faith.

“What makes us able to help these patients that other people won’t operate on is a superlative team that we’ve created,” Jeevanandam said.

“That starts with our cardiologists, and they understand what Jehovah’s Witnesses need. Then you have the surgical team. We have a specific group of surgeons, physician assistants, nurses and perfusionists that take care of these patients; everybody’s in sync.”

Jenkins matched with a donor heart in a little over one week, and his May 2021 transplant was a success. The real estate investor is living in Naperville, Illinois, while he continues to recover and regain his strength, and credits the UChicago Medicine team with saving his life.

“My life is fabulous, actually,” Jenkins said. “To be able to do all the activities I was doing without being hampered with being tired or fatigued—I can’t describe the feeling.”