

What Do I Teach?

Part II: What Is the Unborn?

JOANNA WAGNER'S MONTHLY UPDATE

APRIL 2013



Dear Friend,

In February I was standing by the *Should Abortion Remain Legal?* poll table at Arizona State University when I saw “Janine” and “Amy” walking toward me. They were obviously friends, and both seemed eager to sign the poll, but they were headed for opposite sides – Janine for the “Yes” and Amy for the “No.”

They looked at each other, and then at me, and then back at each other. “This should be interesting,” I thought. Janine didn’t even have time to sign the “Yes” side before Amy exclaimed,

Amy: Really!?! You’re for abortion? But it’s a baby!

Janine: I don’t *like* abortion, but I think it’s a woman’s choice. No one knows when life begins anyway.

Amy: Of course it’s a baby! You’re seriously okay with that?

At this point, I could tell I was witnessing the beginning of a fiery argument. Janine and Amy were standing right next to me, so I joined the conversation.

Joanna: [lightheartedly] Let’s hold up for just a second ladies. It sounds like you both have important things to say. Perhaps it would help you to get on the same page if we all take a look at what we’re talking about for a second.

I had a copy of the JFA Exhibit brochure with me and opened it to the first page which shows pictures of human development. Both Janine and Amy were very interested, admitting that neither knew much about fetal development. I asked them:

Joanna: When do you think we become human, biologically? We can talk about human rights and value in a moment. For now, let’s just talk about biology.

Amy quickly pointed to the embryo at four weeks.

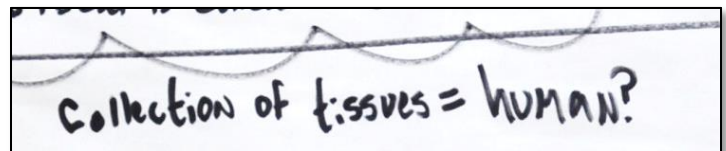
Amy: That’s when we become human, when we have a heartbeat.

Joanna: And what do you think, Janine?

Janine: Well, I guess I don’t really know... I didn’t know that we had a heartbeat that early, but it seems like abortion is okay until a baby is way more developed.



Above, I help mediate a conversation between Janine and Amy at our *Should Abortion Remain Legal?* poll table. Below, a quote from one of our free speech boards reveals the importance of discussing whether the unborn is an organism.



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The conversation continued. It was unique in that it gave me an opportunity to mediate a dialogue between two friends – a dialogue that could’ve easily been a fight under different circumstances. But this conversation was actually quite common in another way. As different as their positions were on abortion, Janine and Amy were both confused about biology. In nearly every conversation I have about abortion, it is important to clarify when a *living human organism* comes into being. To do this, I follow the same train of thought that we teach to volunteers in our *Abortion: From Debate to Dialogue* seminar:



This conversation gave high school students I mentored (left) the opportunity to learn by watching me dialogue with a Georgia Tech student who held an opposing view.

From fertilization, the unborn exhibits the three characteristics of living things: It is growing through cellular reproduction, reacting to stimuli, and metabolizing food for energy. So, it’s at least a *living* thing.

But what kind of living thing is it? It has human parents, and it has a distinctly human DNA “fingerprint.” So, it is at least *living human* tissue.

But is the unborn merely tissue? Just after fertilization, it’s not much bigger than sperm or egg. But sperm and egg are functional *parts* of male and female organisms. When they come together, each ceases to exist, and a new unique human entity comes into existence. Unlike sperm or egg, the unborn is a *whole* organism with its own functional parts. After fertilization, nothing is added except for adequate nutrition and a proper environment. So, if you and I are organisms, then we must have been organisms at fertilization. Therefore, the unborn is a *living human organism*.

After we discussed these points, both Janine and Amy shifted in their view of the unborn – they agreed that the unborn is a living human organism from fertilization. We were then able to move on to discuss whether all living human organisms have an equal right to life. But this next step was only worthwhile because we first agreed on biology. Janine and Amy left for class equipped with a common understanding of the biological humanity of the unborn. They had begun the conversation by arguing, but now these friends had a solid foundation for discussing their remaining disagreements about abortion.

Thank you very much for your prayers and financial support which enable me to help people like Amy and Janine. Please pray for health, safety, and endurance as I prepare for training events in Tucson, Arizona and Fort Collins, Colorado this month!

Joanna

Only Have Ten Seconds?

As I inched my way up the crowded aisle of a *Metra* train in Chicago last spring, I felt a vibration in my purse. I was receiving a text message. I finally found a place to sit and reached in my purse to see who was contacting me.

It was a good friend from California. Her text simply said, “Could you tell me why you’re pro-life in just a few words?” There I was, trying to figure out how I could express my convictions on this serious topic in the form of a text message. I couldn’t call her – the train was too loud for that.

I found out later that she was researching abortion for a class on current moral issues, but at the time, I didn’t know why she was asking. “Perhaps it’s urgent,” I thought.

Thankfully, I had practiced for such an occasion. I wrote back to her:

**If the unborn is *growing*, isn’t it *alive*?
And if it has *human parents*, isn’t it *human*?
And *living humans*, or human beings like you and me, are *valuable*, aren’t they?**

My brother Steve penned this series of short questions, *The 10-Second Pro-Life Apologist*, in response to a similar ten-seconds-to-respond episode while waiting at a stoplight in 2002. It’s a helpful starting point in nearly every conversation I have about biology. I hope it helps you, too!