

The Conversation

#3 in an
Ongoing
Series

JUSTICE
FOR ALL

Note: "The Conversation" is a series of articles from Justice For All, an organization that trains thousands to make abortion unthinkable for millions, one person at a time. Each article in the series allows you to learn from a JFA mentor or volunteer the skills of good dialogue on abortion by looking in on one of their conversations. In this article, JFA's Founder, David Lee, relays to us a conversation he had with a group of Arizona Catholic high school students. The conversation is an especially good example of the third step of the "Trot Out the Toddler" tool featured in JFA's training seminars. The conversation shows the value of asking questions with an open heart and listening (waiting) so that the person can think through her view and discover the truth for herself. Finally, it illustrates how students, even religiously trained students like these, need more than a good presentation to respond appropriately to abortion. They need to work with the information in dialogue with someone who can help them ask the right questions and settle on satisfying answers. – Stephen Wagner, Executive Director

"Why Is It Wrong?"

David Lee & Stephen Wagner

It was a startling question.

Trent Horn, a Justice For All intern, had given a presentation to an assembly of religiously educated and conservative high school students. The presentation included beautiful pictures of the unborn in the womb and horrifying abortion images. A *Silent No More* speaker named Brenda complemented the presentation by sharing how abortion had affected her personally.

JFA's Executive Director, David Lee, was on hand and told this story of what happened shortly after the presentation during the school's break.

After the assembly, Brenda and I approached a table full of eight or nine girls to ask, "What do you think of what you just heard?"

There was genuine affirmation and "thank you very much" offered all around the table

Then, one of the girls blurted out, "But *why* is it wrong?"

"Excuse me?" I asked. "Do you mean, 'Why is *abortion* wrong?'"

"Yeah, I mean, you know...I believe it's wrong...but *why* is it wrong?" The girls around the table all joined in, "Yeah, *why* is it wrong?!"

"Wow," I said. "Great question. Have you ever heard anyone say, 'I personally believe abortion is wrong, but...women should have a choice?'"

"Yeah, *everyone* says that!" they all answered back.

"I hear you," I said sympathetically. "But what if the mother of a one-year old wants the same choice? I mean she wants to get rid of her born child? She wants to abort her one-year old kid? Should she have the same legal right to kill her one-year old if she feels the kid's going to be too great a burden on her?"

"No!" the girls shot back, almost in unison.

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I directed my next question squarely at the girl whose question had started the conversation.

“Why not?” I asked her.

She quickly shot back, “Because that would be wrong!”

“But why would that be wrong?” I probed.

With only slight hesitation she answered, “Because it’s a living human!” Then in less than two seconds she exclaimed, almost under her breath, “Oh my God...they’re both living humans! *That’s* why it’s wrong!”

Then, almost as if on queue, the end-of-break bell rang, the girls chorused their goodbyes and thank you’s and departed for their next class.

Note that as helpful as the Justice For All presentation was, it was only the beginning. The audience members needed to engage in dialogue with a skilled JFA Mentor to begin to connect the dots. The process of dialogue wasn’t complicated either. It featured asking a clarification question (“Do you mean, ‘Why is *abortion* wrong?’”) followed by a series of questions that helped the young women discover for themselves the answer to their question.

This is an especially moving example of the third step in the “Trot Out the Toddler” tool that JFA Mentors teach in the *Abortion: From Debate to Dialogue* seminar. When trotting out the toddler, we teach our volunteers to start by agreeing with some aspect of the person’s argument for abortion (**AGREE**). For example, we all can agree that generally choice is a good thing. Then we teach them to create a scenario that features the pro-choice argument, but replaces the unborn with a toddler. In other words, apply her argument to a toddler (**APPLY**). In this case, David applied the argument to a one-year-old.

The third step is perhaps most critical. When she said “It would be wrong [to kill the one-year-old],” David didn’t say, “So what is different with the unborn?” Instead, he asked, “Why is it wrong?” repeating her initial question about abortion, but now in this new context. This third step (**ASK WHY**) is allowed this young woman to discover for herself the truth about abortion.

It’s a good thing David asked the question and waited for the student’s response. The light bulb went off, not just for her, but for her whole group of friends. This was the fourth step in the “Trot Out the Toddler” tool (**AH!**), but David didn’t need to say anything. The young woman narrated what everyone was thinking: *If the unborn is a human being like the one-year-old, then it’s wrong to kill the unborn.* The question, “What is the unborn?” is central.

JFA credits Scott Klusendorf, President of the Life Training Institute (LTI) and JFA Board Member, for sharing the memorable “Trot Out the Toddler” tool with us. For more about Scott and LTI, see www.prolifetraining.com.

For more of David Lee’s thoughts on this interaction, see his original blog post reflection: <http://dleejfa.blogspot.com/2011/03/why-is-it-wrong.html>.

Stephen Wagner is the Executive Director of Justice For All. He blogs at www.jfaweb.org/Steve-Wagner.

Trent Horn served as a JFA Intern for two years (2009-2010). He now works with Catholic Answers. For more about Trent, see www.trenthorn.com.

David Lee is the Founder of Justice For All and served as Executive Director from 1993-2014.