

Masked Conversations

Impact Report

JUSTICE
FOR ALL

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BECAUSE ONE PERSON CAN...

When our team conducts campus outreach, we start conversations with people of all different types. What's pretty common among all of this diversity, though, is the tendency for people to hide behind various kinds of masks. On Halloween every year, these masks are visible. On all other days, the masks are invisible but nonetheless present.

In this Impact Report, JFA trainer Rebekah Dyer tells the story of one conversation that had both the visible type of mask and the invisible type of mask. In the conversation, she modeled an excellent approach each of us can use as Christian ambassadors to build trust in order to help people come out from behind their masks and partner with us in finding truth.

 - Steve Wagner, Executive Director

...CHANGE THE WORLD

On Halloween last year, I was at the University of North Texas, and I noticed a man in a scary, tan-colored mask with no mouth and black eyes. He was looking at our embryology pictures.

I asked him what he thought about abortion. He shrugged and motioned to his mask. An interesting interaction ensued as I asked him questions, and he tried to answer with hand motions. Here's the gist of the conversation that followed:

"Wait," I asked, "can you not talk in the mask?" He nodded. "Is it that tight?" He nodded again. "How long have you been wearing it?" He made a motion with his hands. "You've been wearing it for twenty-one hours?" I asked, surprised. With an exasperated sigh he motioned again. "Two and a half hours?" I guessed again. He nodded vigorously. "Wow!" I said. "Well, if you want to chat, I'll be around."

I stepped away to make some notes about another conversation I had had that day. A few minutes later the student took off his mask, and we began to have a normal conversation. "Landon" told me he was in the middle on this issue. As I asked him questions, he shared that he thought abortion should be broadly legal so that women who have life-threatening complications during pregnancy have access to abortion. He shared that he had a friend who had been raped and had gotten pregnant at thirteen years old. This friend had also had seven abortions. Landon also told me people should be educated about abortion so that they know that it kills another human being.

As we spoke, I was hearing some conflicting things from Landon, so I asked the following question to help clarify some of the confusion:

Rebekah: What if we could have a law that made elective abortion broadly illegal, but had an exception for cases where the life of the mother is in danger?



Landon: Oh, that's brilliant!

Rebekah: That's what the current law is in Texas.

Landon was surprised and told me he agreed with the current law. As our conversation began to wind down he confessed something to me:

Landon: I need to apologize to you. I lied to you earlier. I can talk just fine in this mask. I was worried that you were going to yell at me when I walked up. I wanted to check out the signs, but I didn't want to talk to anyone.

Rebekah: Thank you for telling me. I forgive you. I can understand why it might feel intimidating to come up to this display if you have that fear.

During our conversation, he shared with me that he was a Christian. Whenever someone tells me he is a Christian, I always ask him what he means by that. Landon answered by referencing the Nicene Creed.

This conversation highlights a few important things. First, if we jump to challenging people the moment we hear something with which we disagree, we can easily talk past them and address a view they don't hold. In every conversation, it is crucial that we ask good questions and listen in order to understand the other person's views. Landon went from sounding like he was in the middle on this issue, to sounding very pro-choice, to finally clarifying that he was actually opposed to the vast majority of abortions. If I hadn't slowed down and asked Landon questions, I could have missed what he was trying to communicate.

Second, many people are unaware of the abortion laws in their own state. There is also a lot of apathy and ignorance surrounding what abortion is and what it does to another human being. When we have conversations about these things we have the opportunity to inform people and help move their hearts toward loving forgotten human beings, especially the unborn.

Third, many people are understandably uncomfortable talking about abortion. They are afraid of being verbally attacked, yelled at, and ridiculed. I understand that fear because I've had those experiences, and it affected the way I felt going into some future conversations. I've learned that acting against my fear and discomfort is necessary and something I'm called to do as a Christian. God meets us in those places of fear, and He empowers us to engage in the midst of difficult situations. By treating people with kindness and gentleness, we can invite others to engage in the conversation in spite of their fears.

In my experience, most conversations about abortion are not hostile. When people see that I want to have a civil conversation about an important issue, they are open to engaging in a respectful way. I think we can give people a gift on multiple levels. We can give them a good experience in a conversation about a difficult topic by asking questions, listening, and truly understanding them. Then we can help them get closer to the truth by challenging them to stop tolerating the killing of innocent children in the womb.

- Rebekah Dyer, for the JFA Team

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www.jfaweb.org/impact-quick-look

