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Story 7

Lab 2

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Amid all the yelling about abortion across the country, the anti-abortion group Justice For All prides itself on peaceful dialogue.

A nonprofit organization, the group is from Kansas and is well-known for the massive display board marking its arrival. It travels to college campuses upon invitation, complete with pictures of aborted fetuses and various facts and statistics about the procedure. Its members, however, are nowhere as intimidating as the material they bring with them.

Cowboys for Life, an anti-abortion student organization on campus, got in contact with Justice For Life and invited it to come to OSU to talk to students and engage them in educational discussion.

Mentor Jeremy Wheeler has also been encouraged by the response he received while in Stillwater.

“This is Oklahoma,” he said. “Everybody is friendly here. It’s not like Kansas, where I’m from. The reception has been pretty good, and I have not encountered anyone who was overly hostile.”

Justice For All is made up of 19 full-time members from as close as Wichita, Kan., to as far as Pensacola, Fla., who pride themselves on being respectful, understanding and open-minded. They have gone to Fresno State University, Arizona State University and the University of Texas at San Antonio among others this year.

Although the group’s ultimate goal is to convert people into being against abortion, mentor Claire Rice said the group is not only out to accomplish that.

**“**If we can reason and come to an understanding with a person we are talking to, we still consider it a successful dialogue,” she said. “Our goal is to find a middle ground and respectfully talk about it.”

Rice said she believes abortion is an issue people need to learn to talk about better. Either they don’t want to talk about it or they don’t know how to without getting emotional. Justice For All provides mentors to help people talk about it in a more productive way.

Even though there are religious references on its website, Rice said the group is not a Christian-affiliated one.

“Not everyone who is anti-abortion is a Christian,” she said. “There is an atheists for life club and feminists for life club. It’s more of a morality issue than a religious one, so we don’t consider our group a Christian one.”

If there is someone who wishes to join the group, Justice For All does trainer seminars for volunteers to teach them about the displays and guide them through the sort of questions they may come across. They use role-playing and small-group discussions to engage the volunteers and simulate real encounters. Once training is complete, the volunteers are able to walk around and engage people in discussion.

A volunteer who participated in the event at Oklahoma State University Oct. 26 and 27, Wade Woodard said his experience has been an easy one so far.

“It’s been extremely tame out here,” he said. “Most students seem to share the same beliefs as us. If you come across just sharing your beliefs, they seem to be more receptive than if you came out antagonistic.”

Although the people of Justice For All were pleased with the students’ reaction, the same cannot be said the other way around. Kaitlyn Carter, a junior geology major, does not agree with the way the group is going about its exhibit.

“I don’t like how it is just right there,” she said. “It is cool and all to have an event and to try to educate people, I get that. But why not rent out a building and have only people who want to go see it? I don’t like having to see that major eyesore while I’m walking around campus at lunch-time.”

Abortion is an ugly topic, Rice said. Not everyone is going to want to hear or see what Justice For All has, but some people have need to so they can understand the issue better.

“If abortion really is killing babies, which I believe it is, then it is a large scale injustice that needs to come to an end,” she said. “Our mission is to expose that injustice through pictures and dialogue. Pictures do that.”

What the display lacks in beauty, the mentors try to make up for it with their attitudes. Wheeler said they all make a conscious effort to listen to the students and try to understand their point of view, instead of reading off a script or thinking of how to discredit others’ perspectives.

Marcelo Clark, a junior fire prevention and safety technology junior, said even though nobody can agree on what is right or wrong, everybody should agree about at least one thing.

“People really aren’t going to change their minds,” he said. “College students are at the age where they should already know all about what abortion is and already have an opinion on it. It seems kind of pointless to do all of this, since they aren’t revealing any new information.”

Wheeler said he believes it not necessarily the information they use to try to convert students, but rather how the mentors speak to them. The displays are more shock value and attention-grabbers for some. Some people need to see those pictures, but others are told that a fetus is another stage of human development, just like an infant or a teenager.

Alicia Tilson, a sophomore political science major, is a defender of the group’s presence on campus despite its controversial stance.

“You can’t start censoring who is allowed to come here,” she said. “Just because it is a divisive topic in this country right now doesn’t mean people shouldn’t be allowed to voice their opinions. They are out there peacefully. There is no harm in what they are doing, save for a little queeziness.”

At the end of the day, there are no hurt feelings or any ill will wished upon anyone, Rice said. As long as people are educated and there is a mutual understanding reached, Rice is willing to settle with that for now.

“You win with some people; you lose with others,” she said. “But that’s not what matters. It’s all about talking to people and making sure they are making informed decisions so they don’t do something they end up regretting one day.”

Source Sheet

Jeremy Wheeler- Mentor

Wade Woodard- Volunteer

Claire Rice- Mentor

Kaitlyn Carter- Junior geology major

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