

I arrived a little before one at the Supreme Court where I immediately saw a sign that read, 'Abortions on Demand.' I knew I had found the counter-protesters. In what seemed like the same group I saw a man in a Roman collar praying with a group of assembled folks. After I got my bearings I realized there couldn't be two more distinct groups. I found my home for the next hour - right between them. For the most part the group members kept to their own constituents. However, there were three individuals from the pro-life clan that constantly shouted at the rally held by the pro-choice group. One man was from Buffalo who has participated in the rally for the past six years. After one of his shouting fits I told him I went to school in Buffalo and this was the first time I was at the event. He smiled. I asked what he thought would motivate the pro-choice group to change their ways and after a few minutes conversation I asked whether or not he thought shouting at them made them more or less passionate about their cause. We dialogued for a few more minutes and we agreed that one-one dialogue might be the best option. He opted to return to the prayer vigil.

A woman from Philadelphia replaced the Buffalo man and proceeded to start shouting at the counter protesters. I engaged her and we spoke about how hard it was to know that '55 million babies had been killed in the last 40 years.' She asked why I was there and I told her I was there as a member of the DC Peace Team. I shared that we try to maintain a peaceful presence where conflict otherwise might take place. She thanked me for being there. After we finished chatting she returned to the vigil and I began engaging a member of the counter protesters. She was trying to persuade me that not allowing abortion was forced motherhood. I shared with her that life begins at conception. It was a long conversation that appeared to go nowhere in terms of immediate change. Perhaps the most successful Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping took place shortly thereafter. After finishing the conversation I noticed that my friend from Philly had a contingency of a priest, four teenagers and a pro-choice man from California engaged. I heard the pro-choice man call the priest Mr. Pedopher and jumped straight in the middle of the man from California and the four people defending the priest. The woman was screaming at him with words that could be described as less than positive. I faced her and smiled. She pleaded with me to understand why she was berating him with negative comments. I asked her to speak softly and not yell at the man. She obliged but still wanted to profusely defend 'her friend.' I suggested she love him, pray for him and if need be, walk away. She took the advice and started to speak with kindness and compassion completely switching her approach. Ultimately the group walked away while the man continued shouting after them.

I turned around and started to talk to Mr. California. He shared how he likes to agitate people as that is what makes people change their minds. He shared a story of when he and his girlfriend were arguing about the death penalty. He left the conversation angry from the exchange and afterwards he started seeing her side. Because of that, he shared, he is now against the death penalty. He has also mentioned how he has studied the bible and enjoys using his knowledge to argue with people about their beliefs to the point of frustrating them. He believes people will switch their views only once they are frustrated. He was a very engaging fellow.

The parade of protesters shortly arrived and the counter protesters lined the sidewalk. Shouting and chanting ensued. It was a mess of verbal passion and sign jousting. I monitored the fifteen yard stretch of the sidewalk where marchers and counter protesters engaged. Some groups shouted others dialogued. The one engagement worth sharing was when I noticed a man, around 65 years old in age, shoving his finger in the face of a counter protestor. I put myself in between the two folks and said, 'hello.' I asked the man if he realized that people could feel intimidated about having a finger in their face or that it could be viewed as an aggressive move. The intensity from his face fell and he gave me a hug and thanked me for being there. He joined the march.

After about an hour 50% of the counter protesters were engaged in what was viewed as civilized dialogue with pro-life marchers. There were other folks engaging in peace making as well. Specifically a member of the pro-choice group was consistently positioning herself in front of people who were hostile towards the counter protesters. She used a mixture of posturing and humor to diffuse potentially difficult situations. I thanked her for being there.

Overall the experience was enjoyable. The environment, although filled with passion, could be described as civil and there was even a moment when everyone paused...as it started snowing.

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