



DC Peace Team

Cultivating a Culture of Nonviolent Peacemaking

Event Report: March for Life

Jan. 24, 2020

Our Unarmed Civilian Protection or Accompaniment units deploy to protect people, particularly those who are most vulnerable and those who request protection. We seek to defuse hostility and build empathy when possible. We do recognize the dignity of all people, even when we might disagree with their political positions or strategies. We do not try to stop conflict or expressions of anger at injustice. We understand that there is constructive conflict, yet we do try to defuse dehumanization when possible as well as physical forms of violence.

Quantitative Assessment

De-Escalation Incidents: requiring active intervention to defuse de-humanization, hostility, or physical threats of violence

8 incidents

8 successful de-escalations

Empathy Building Incidents: active intervention to generate deeper understanding of self and/or others who disagree with one's political position

40 persons engaged and responsive to empathy building

10-12 situations enabled of dialogue between persons of different political positions

Qualitative Assessment

Example 1: An older man escalated tension and raised his voice far higher than those around him seemed comfortable with, and more specifically, toward a pro-choice advocate he targeted with his yelling. He was yelling about the greatness of America and the killing of babies. This led to another person shoving their sign in his face and putting a camera close to it. The tensions were escalating, and the physical contact was beginning to happen. He was engaged by two members of the DC Peace Team. One of us first used distraction by saying to the yelling man, "those glasses look really good on you. Where did you get them?" After this broke the intensity for a moment. We asked him to tell us more about what is great about America. As he started to do this, his lady friend turned to us and said not to worry, he'll calm down. As we engaged with her

about what was important to her, this de-fused his sense of performing for her since her attention was now elsewhere. We enabled the man to express his emotions and allow feelings of safety to return for those around him.

Example 2: Two men from the March for Life and two women standing with "Keep Abortion Legal" signs were engaged. The two men held cameras very close to the women's faces and seemed unwilling to hear challenges to the points they were making. A DCPT member was motioned over by the women to assist in interrupting the situation, which was accomplished by stepping in between the two parties. While the two men were noticeably more aggressive in their tone and defense of their ideals, one was willing to talk openly about the importance of engaging across party and position lines for the sake of collective safety and health.

Example 3: Three individuals with pro-choice affiliated signs, and two individuals standing with the March for Life, directly confronting them with a camera were engaged. Dialogue did not seem present, as the questions from the March for Life marchers provided little room for answers, and those with the pro-choice signs did not wish to speak at all. Confronting the two individuals with the cameras proved productive, as they were willing to talk about why we from the Peace Team were there, and why we valued constructive dialogue when possible. They explained their own lament over the decline of open dialogue, and perceived unwillingness of all parties to empathize more regularly. They sensed a deeper desire to try and offer more constructive dialogue approaches.

Example 4: One pro-choice advocate was confronted by seven young high schoolers, where the individual was continually asked accusatory questions, and stated that she felt surrounded. The situation concluded when the boys stepped away after bodily intervention by a DCPT member and asking the students what school they go to and why the march was important to them.

Example 5: At the conclusion of the protest, advocates in one of the hottest pockets of activity, both pro-life and pro-choice individuals, were deep in conversation. They all shared similar reactions to the amplification of tension by members of both sides and were interested in connecting further. Some of these individuals also were curious about the work of DC Peace Team, and willingly took the pamphlets we had brought to learn more.

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