



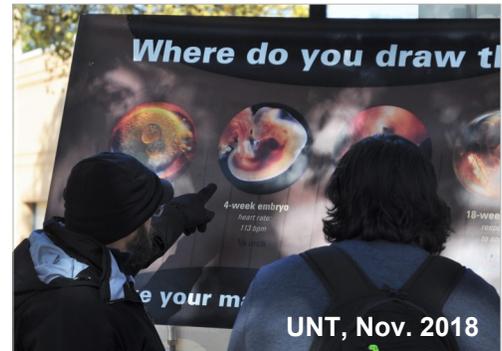
## Empathy Opens the Door

“I was in the broken foster care system and have seen the challenges of adoption—I wouldn’t wish that on anyone, so I am pro-choice,” replied “Eva” cautiously. I had asked for her opinion on abortion as she approached our exhibit at the University of North Texas (UNT). She continued to walk, appearing to have little interest in a discussion.

At that point, I was tired from a long day of conversations. My knee-jerk reaction to her anecdotal reasoning was to give a quick, factual response, but that approach wouldn’t have served Eva. She appeared to be skeptical and shy, worried that I might lash out with a firm response. I wanted my words to be meaningful and gracious to Eva. I wanted her to truly *hear* that I cared.

So instead of following my initial impulse I said, “I hear you, and I want you to know that I don’t think the foster care and adoption systems are perfect, or that these processes are easy or smooth. I’m sorry if anyone, especially a pro-life advocate, has ever implied that they are. I know that many cases do play out well, but I also know that even in the best cases, placing someone for adoption, adopting a baby, or being placed in foster care are very complex processes logistically and emotionally. We pro-life advocates need to research more and learn to listen and empathize better.”

*“I hear you, and I want you to know that I don’t think the foster care and adoption systems are perfect, or that these processes are easy or smooth. I’m sorry if anyone, especially a pro-life advocate, has ever implied that they are.”*



“Eva” was more willing to focus on the unborn because I showed empathy for her suffering first. Here JFA volunteer Mark creates a similar moment for another UNT student.

Eva was visibly relieved that I had acknowledged the challenges she brought up, and she was encouraged that I asked questions that allowed her to open up about her life growing up in the foster care system. She seemed very thankful to be heard.

Eventually, I felt we had reached a moment when it would be fruitful to return to the topic of abortion. Our dialogue went something like this:

**Jon:** Would you agree that many of the challenges faced by children in foster care actually increase as they get older? I’ve heard that it’s often especially difficult to place an older child for adoption.

**Eva:** I definitely agree with that.

**Jon:** Knowing that, then, **how should we treat infants, toddlers, and young kids who are currently in a difficult foster care or adoption situation?** Even though they face increasingly challenging circumstances, would ending the lives of these children ever be an acceptable solution to their problems?

**Eva:** Of course not. Regardless of the challenges, violence is not the answer.

**Jon:** I agree. Eva, it seems to me that this relates directly to the topic of abortion. If the unborn are fully human like older children in the foster care system, then wouldn’t that mean that the unborn should be protected in the same way? Shouldn’t children be protected despite the challenges they face, or the challenges that seem to lie ahead of them, at any stage in their development?

**Eva:** That makes sense. I would agree that *if* the unborn is a human being, just like children outside the womb in the foster care system, then they should be protected in the same way.

Eva then willingly processed through the information on our human development display, listening as I explained why we know that the preborn are whole, living, human beings. Furthermore, she heard me out as I shared that the preborn should not be treated differently because they look different than we do, or because they are inside of or dependent on their mothers. None of these reasons justify killing them. Eva then brought up pain sensation, asserting that perhaps it marks the start of value and worth for the unborn.

Eventually, after discussing that specific topic and several others, Eva agreed that abortion is wrong, at least after seven weeks. Even though she did not agree with me about the equality of the unborn before seven weeks of age, she seemed to shift on her view of many cases of abortion. Additionally, she now seemed more uncomfortable with *all* of them.

The most encouraging thing about my conversation with Eva didn't come until the very end. As we concluded our dialogue, Eva wasn't just content or thankful for being heard—*she was beaming*. I offered Eva a bottle of water since we had been talking for a while, and it was warming up. She said, "Yes, I'd love a water, but I was actually going to offer to buy *you* a drink and a snack in the union as a sign of gratitude for our conversation." **Eva chose to bless me, even though I had just disagreed with her very firmly.**



In my conversation with Eva, I had the opportunity to share JFA's brochure (see the link to the right) and my reasons for opposing abortion. The same happened with another UNT student pictured above.

I handed Eva JFA's new "Invitation to Dialogue" Brochure (access it at [www.jfaweb.org/brochure](http://www.jfaweb.org/brochure)), and wrote down other websites she could go to for further study.\* She was very open to these resources and promised to do further research. I gave Eva a hug, and she thanked our team for caring and engaging her campus in healthy discussion.

As I reflected back to the beginning of my interaction with Eva, one important principle stood out: *I didn't need to immediately make my next point when she first shared hers*. I needed to empathize with her and acknowledge her ideas, even if they were unpersuasive, **because she matters**. Ironically, this was likely what prompted her interest in hearing what I had to say, after all. Eva ended up showing genuine interest in the reasons I opposed abortion and in

discussing our differences. She even expressed interest in staying in contact and discussing the issue further.

**Empathy for another person and genuine interest in another perspective drew together two unlikely friends.** This was one of my favorite conversations last year. It showed once again the value of JFA's Three Essential Skills: asking questions with an open heart, listening to understand, and finding common ground when possible.

Defending human value together,

Jonathan Wagner

\* To view the websites I shared with Eva, see the footnote at [www.jfaweb.org/mar-2019](http://www.jfaweb.org/mar-2019).

113 N. Martinson  
Wichita, KS 67203

316-683-6426 (work)  
805-464-1146 (cell)

[jwagner@jfaweb.org](mailto:jwagner@jfaweb.org)  
[www.jfaweb.org](http://www.jfaweb.org)

*It will take an eternity for the unborn to defend themselves.*



# Loving Every Human Being with JFA

## Resource Bulletin – March 2019



**PRAY FOR CONVERSATIONS**

*Pray for Recent and Upcoming Events (Partial List):* “In March, JFA staff members were busy leading events in six states (TX, KS, GA, NE, CO, and NM)! As we continue on into April, please pray for good weather during our outreach events to facilitate good conversations. Pray for the health of our trainers that they might keep active in the field. Pray for each person we train and each person with whom we converse at outreach, that God will kindle new affection in their hearts for women in distress and for the smallest humans on earth.” – Steve Wagner, Executive Director

- Mar. 3 (Houston, TX): Interactive Seminar – Univ. of Houston
- Mar. 11 (Norfolk, NE): Interactive Seminar – Norfolk Catholic High School
- Mar. 8-13 (Atlanta Area, GA): Seminars and Outreach near/at Kennesaw State Univ.
- Mar. 17-19 (Durango, CO): Seminar & Outreach Events near/at Fort Lewis College
- Mar. 23-26 (Albuquerque, NM): Seminars & Outreach Events near/at UNM
- Mar. 31-Apr. 2 (Lawrence, KS): Seminar & Outreach Events near/at Univ. of Kansas
- Apr. 4-7 (CO): Interactive Seminars in Denver, Fort Collins, Littleton, & Greeley
- Apr. 8-9 (Greeley, CO): Outreach at University of Northern Colorado
- March/April/May: Seminars & Outreach Events in MD, AZ, & CA (See calendar.)

See More Recent and Upcoming Events, and Register to Attend: [www.jfaweb.org/calendar](http://www.jfaweb.org/calendar)

**PREPARE FOR CONVERSATIONS**

*Featured Resource for Equipping Yourself:* In “Empathy Opens the Door” (enclosed, or see [www.jfaweb.org/mar-2019](http://www.jfaweb.org/mar-2019)) JFA trainer Jon Wagner shares his conversation with “Eva,” a student whose pro-choice view stemmed from her experience in foster care. Notice how Jon invited Eva into the dialogue, starting with common ground rather than an argument. See also how “Trotting Out the Toddler” (read more examples at [www.jfaweb.org/tott](http://www.jfaweb.org/tott)) revealed that, if the unborn is a human being, abortion is *not* a compassionate solution to the difficulties surrounding unplanned pregnancy.

Read “Empathy Opens the Door”: [www.jfaweb.org/mar-2019](http://www.jfaweb.org/mar-2019)

**START CONVERSATIONS**

*Featured Conversation Starter:* Since the advent of JFA’s *Loving Every Human Being with JFA* monthly resource bulletin, we’ve posted over 20 unique conversation starters to the JFA Blog and our @7conversations Twitter page, including video of our dialogue artists in action, trending news stories, and more. The goal of every JFA conversation starter is to help an average pro-life advocate to create a conversation about abortion in a natural, less awkward way. If you haven’t yet done so, choose one and open up a dialogue with a friend or co-worker. We’d love to hear how it goes!

Explore All Conversation Starters (Twitter): [www.twitter.com/7conversations](https://www.twitter.com/7conversations)

Explore All Conversation Starters (JFA Blog): [www.jfaweb.org/start-the-conversation](http://www.jfaweb.org/start-the-conversation)

*What can I do to love every human involved in unwanted pregnancy?*

### About the *Loving Every Human Being with JFA* Resource Bulletin

Friends of JFA ask, “What can I do to love every human involved in unwanted pregnancy?” This resource bulletin offers some answers. Supporting JFA financially enables JFA’s trainers and volunteers to create conversations that kindle affection for unborn children and their parents, but beyond that, you can **PRAY** for conversations the JFA community is creating, **PREPARE** for conversations, and **START** conversations.

*Pray for conversations. Prepare for conversations. Start conversations.*