

"To train pro-life advocates to think clearly, reason honestly, and argue persuasively."



That's the mission of the [Equal Rights Institute](#) , a new pro-life organization founded by brothers Josh and Tim Brahm. I attended their recent all day training in Sacramento and followed it up with two days at [University of California, Davis](#)

where we dialogued with students. The training taught me to use three essential skills: ask questions, listen to understand, and find common ground when possible.

(See Steve Wagner's book [Common Ground without Compromise](#) .) The on-campus experience gave me practice in holding non-confrontational conversations about a subject I am passionate about. (picture at left:

We set up a "poll table" consisting of a poster asking a question like "Should abortion remain legal through all nine months of pregnancy?" Students were invited to sign their name on a clipboard that said "yes" or "no" or "maybe." When they did, we had the opportunity to initiate a conversation.

) I was nervous at first but found it to be fun and heart-breaking at the same time. How deeply tragic to meet young women who believe the lie that they are oppressed by their uterus.

It was wonderful to hang out with other courageous "pro-lifers" and engage for hours in a topic I care deeply about. If I ever thought that "pro-choicers" were the enemy, I never will again. I see them as lost and blind and my heart goes out to them. It was like witnessing Eve in the garden of Eden because many of the students believed they had a better way than God's way. During the handful of conversations I had, no minds were changed about legal abortion but several

people commented that this was the most calm discussion about abortion they'd ever had. I appreciated hearing what real people had to say since I admit I only hang out with people who think like me. Who brings up the topic of abortion anyway? How amazing to be able to not only open the conversation but to also have some tools to lead a discussion, find common ground and also point out where we disagree. Even if we don't change minds about abortion we are changing what people think about pro-lifers, in the same way that [40 Days for Life](#) is able to put a peaceful, civil face on the movement. The training taught us to respond to people, not to arguments. Josh teaches these six tips for having good dialogues:

1. Silence your inner monologue.
2. Rephrase what they said.
3. Find genuine common ground when possible.
4. Acknowledge the horror of rape.
5. Be intentional with your body language.
6. Be willing to jump to another topic.

I found that the students included a host of social problems when talking about abortion: racism, sexism, oppression of women, poverty, patriarchy, contraception, marginalized, access to health care, capitalism, etc.

The "protestors" holding handmade signs mostly did not want to engage in conversation with us. Nor let us take their pictures.

This experience changed me. I am equipped to have a gracious and hopefully productive conversation with someone who disagrees with me. I could have a conversation about the God of the Bible, evolution, climate change and a host of current issues. I no longer have to feel like I am under assault, must have a debate, or have to win an argument. In all of these conversations, we must remember to steer others back to the main issue: God and Biblical morality.

Related:

[Responding to the question of rape with wisdom and compassion](#) , blog by Josh Brahm

[Tough Questions Series: The Hard Cases: Rape and Incest](#) , PPL brochure