

Burning Issues

Season 1, Episode 1: Reproductive Advocacy on a Catholic Campus

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Description: In this episode of Burning Issues, we dive into the possibility of reproductive rights advocacy on a Catholic, Jesuit campus. We speak with a co-founder of the Students for Reproductive Rights, a club that received a lot of pushback throughout their efforts to be created. We also speak with the Students for Life, a pro-life club who may not be as diametrically opposed to reproductive rights as we may think. We also speak with a Religious Studies professor who focuses on sex ethics, who provides some framework as to why the Catholic church teaches what it does. Throughout this episode, we come back to two main questions: How does reproductive advocacy fit into the GU Mission Statement? And Is there a space for reproductive advocacy on a Catholic campus such as Gonzaga?

MUSIC: Autowaschanlage Instrumenta by Lobo Loco (instrumental music) fades into introduction

NARRATION: WELCOME TO BURNING ISSUES BROUGHT TO YOU BY THREE EDITORS OF THE GONZAGA BULLETIN, BROOKLYN POPP, RILEY UTLEY AND MORGAN SCHEERER. THIS WEEK WE ARE DIVING INTO THE HOT DEBATE OF WHERE REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS HAVE A VOICE IN CATHOLIC INSTITUTIONS. THANKS FOR LISTENING.

NATS: Natural sounds of campus

NARRATION: ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES ACROSS THE COUNTRY ETHICAL DISCUSSIONS SUCH AS THAT OF REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS CAN BE CONTENTIOUS BUT AT GONZAGA THESE DISCUSSIONS AREN'T EVEN TAKING PLACE. TO REMEDY THAT, LAST NOVEMBER A GROUP OF STUDENTS GOT TOGETHER TO FORM THE STUDENTS FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS CLUB. AFTER A LONG APPLICATION PROCESS THE STUDENTS WERE DENIED OFFICIAL CLUB STATUS BY THE GONZAGA ADMINISTRATION DUE TO THEIR PROPOSED PARTNERSHIP WITH PLANNED PARENTHOOD GENERATION ACTION PROGRAM.

NARRATION: THE STUDENTS FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS CLUB IS LED BY SENIOR WOMEN, ANNA ALGATE AND ELAINE RICKARDS. WE SAT DOWN WITH ELAINE, THE CLUB'S VICE PRESIDENT AND CO-FOUNDER WHO MAJORS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SOCIOLOGY, TO GET A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF WHAT HAPPENED THROUGHOUT THE APPLICATION PROCESS AND AFTER.

Elaine: It was kind of what we expected to happen based on the first meeting with Katelyn Orcino, the student in GSBA, said 'I am behind you on this, I want to approve this and I'm going to recommend this but just know that Dean Lamsma will decline it because of the affiliation with Planned Parenthood.' That was kind of something we anticipated and interestingly after that happened and Riley's article came out in The Bulletin we got a lot of feedback from the community. Just people DM-ing us on Facebook and Instagram and following us and reaching out that way. And, *clears throat* I think the most interesting thing we noted was that from alumni, students and community members the feedback was all very positive. It was a lot of people saying 'we're behind you on this' and 'Gonzaga needs to take a stand on this with sex education and reproductive rights.' The only negative feedback we got was from parents. And it was just kind of - That was an interesting thing to take note of because it felt as though our student body knows what's going on on campus and their parents have a very different idea of what is going on campus and have a different idea of our identity and what a Jesuit university looks like.

Brooklyn: That is really interesting that parents' responses are so important to our university. Did you guys get a gage of why?

Elaine: Yeah, we had a meeting with Thayne about two weeks ago and asked him. We were like 'We know this something students are supporting this; why is this something the administration is so scared of?' And the biggest thing was that Gonzaga's operating budget, 83% of it comes from student tuition. So that's like, student tuition runs our school and that's everything from janitorial staff, COG staff, lights, water, anything like that. The people who are paying that tuition is parents. And so, essentially, because our university is private, it runs like a company and the people that matter in that company are the people giving them money. That's why Thayne doesn't have a lot of power in this situation because the people who have the power are board members who are making big donations and our board members. So, as soon as you start to piss those people off or make them mad they stop paying and our university can't survive without money. So that's kind of, why I think our university is so scared of parents.

NARRATION: MATT LAMSMA IS THE DEAN OF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND HAS THE ULTIMATE SAY OF IF A CLUB GETS APPROVED OR NOT.

NARRATION: THE BULLETIN'S STORY THAT ELAINE IS REFERRING TO IS HEADLINED "GONZAGA DECLINES CLUB DUE TO AFFILIATION WITH PLANNED PARENTHOOD" WRITTEN BY ONE OF OUR HOSTS ON THIS EPISODE RILEY UTLEY IN THE ARTICLE RILEY QUOTES LAMSMA WHO SAYS "THE CONFLICT IS BETWEEN PLANNED PARENTHOOD AND THE UNIVERSITIES JESUIT AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY. IF ANY CLUB WANTS TO BRING IN AN OUTSIDE ORGANIZATION THAT ORGANIZATION HAS TO ALIGN WITH INSTITUTIONAL VALUES." SO WE ASKED ELAINE WHAT SHE THOUGHT OF PLANNED PARENTHOOD AND HOW IT ALIGNED WITH JESUIT VALUES.

Elaine: I think he's wrong on all those accounts. He has pretty antiquated ideas about what it means to be Catholic and what it means to be Jesuit and I think he is just ignoring the lived experiences that students on our campus are having. Planned Parenthood is all about accessibility for sexual health and reproductive rights and their mission is to be able to provide that access to anyone who needs it regardless of education, income, race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, anything like that. One of the biggest parts of Gonzaga's Mission Statement is to stand in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable and that's what Planned Parenthood does. They also work to educate people who come into the office. It's not just about getting some birth control and run away kind of thing. They work on providing that education and the resources to become more educated which is another part of Gonzaga's Mission Statement which is to create resourceful students. I think that's what Jesuit education is about: providing the whole picture to students so the can make up their own minds about these things. When we cut out Planned Parenthood out of access on our campus or when we prevent students from using them as a resource we're limiting the scope of how much information they can gather for themselves. As far as Planned Parenthood's mission goes I think it definitely aligns with Jesuit ideals and I think that it's a big part of why I think it's so important to have Planned Parenthood as a resource on this campus.

NARRATION: WE ASKED ELAINE WHAT THE NEXT STEPS WOULD BE AND WHETHER OR NOT THEY WANTED TO REAPPLY TO BE A CLUB AFTER THEIR FIRST REJECTION.

Elaine: The first time that we got rejected by Dean Lamsma he said that not only could we not have any formal affiliation with Planned Parenthood we couldn't have any informal affiliation either. That means we couldn't use any of the resources they had which includes brochures, condoms and other free resources they provide. It also means we couldn't invite Planned Parenthood to come to campus, we couldn't even have them in our meetings and that was a deal breaker for me and Anna because it was censorship and we weren't OK with that. The first time he proposed that to us Anna and I just flat out said no to that. We decided it wasn't even worth our time to take that little step to create something on campus that would just essentially prevent us from information. We're not physicians, we're not medical professionals so to be

providing any sort of education and resources from our point of view would be not only immoral, because we're not experts in the field but not helpful to students. That was the first round of that. Then another student, Marlin Jones, started a social media storm calling out Thayne on a lot of things he does about reproductive rights on campus and access and limits to access that exist here and Thayne actually responded to him on Twitter and said I'm not going to engage with you on Twitter but if you want to talk about this I'd love to here what you have to say. So, we met with Thayne and yesterday we met with Dr. Gomez who is the interim vice provost of student affairs and that was a really frustrating meeting because he sat there for an hour and mansplained to us what activism looks like. But barring that he said that he would love to approve our club and he is going to put safeguards in place so that even though we can't have an official affiliation with Planned Parenthood we can do whatever we want in our meetings. Anna and I felt like this was the first time we'd felt compromise from the administration and it was the first time that we felt we could go forward with this and start something. So, we decided to go ahead and let him approve us and the main reason we decided to do this now was to start reaching out to freshmen, sophomores and juniors who can carry this torch into the next couple of years and just start doing what we can little by little to encourage them to make bigger changes later on. I think the other reason we felt that this was a really important club to start especially on a Jesuit campus is that a lot of people have this misconception that you can't be Catholic and support Planned Parenthood. Planned Parenthood has, for so long, been created as this organization that is in diametric opposition to anyone that is pro-life, and that's just not true and not the case. I have a lot of friends who are very strong in their Catholic faith and still support Planned Parenthood and support women's rights to be autonomous and right to choose. And I think by ignoring Planned Parenthood or erasing it on this campus, we are invalidating a lot of those students' not only lived experiences with their sexual health but their faith, and I think that as a Jesuit university, one of the most important things we can do is affirm everyone's faith regardless of what that is or what that looks like or where that comes from. And Mission and Ministry is such a big organization on campus, and it should be their job as well as the rest of our community's job to make everyone feel like their faith is valid and important

NARRATION: BEFORE WE CONCLUDED OUR INTERVIEW WITH ELAINE SHE WAS SURE TO CLARIFY THE INTENTIONS OF THEIR CLUB.

Elaine: The biggest thing we want people to know about this club is we're not trying to take stance on abortion. I think there's a lot of misconceptions that Planned Parenthood is only an abortion provider and doesn't do other things and i think a lot of people were against this club because they thought that was the issue we were trying to come at this from. And I think we just want to make it really clear that we're focusing on sexual health and sex education and reproductive rights separate from abortion because our school is so scared of what could happen if we start talking about abortion that we're not quite there as a university.

MUSIC: Autowaschanlage Instrumenta by Lobo Loco (Instrumental music) fades into next segment

NARRATION: TO GET A CLEAR AND BALANCED LENS ON THIS COMPLEX CONTROVERSY, WE DECIDED TO ALSO SPEAK WITH THE GONZAGA STUDENTS FOR LIFE CLUB. THIS CLUB IS DEDICATED TO ADVOCATING A CONSISTENT ETHIC CONCERNING LIFE ISSUES, WHICH INCLUDE ABORTION, THE DEATH PENALTY, EUTHANASIA AND ASSISTED SUICIDE. THEY OFFER RESOURCES TO BOTH MEN AND WOMEN IN CRISIS THROUGH THEIR PREGNANT ON CAMPUS INITIATIVE. WHILE THEIR MISSION EXTENDS BEYOND ABORTION, WE ARE CURIOUS TO HEAR THE TENSION BETWEEN STUDENTS FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND PRO LIFE VALUES, ESPECIALLY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND A JESUIT UNIVERSITY. WITH US TODAY WE HAVE MEGAN LOWERY THE PRESIDENT OF THE CLUB AND THERSA MCCARTHY, A PREGNANT ON CAMPUS COORDINATOR.

Megan: Speaking on behalf of that mission statement, we work to uphold the dignity of all humans from conception to natural death, like you said. We do this mostly through our pregnant on campus initiative, which I can have Theresa talk a little more on because that is her role on the board. But basically it's to help our pregnant and parenting students here on campus and provide them the resources and help they need to continue their education and their pregnancy to term.

Theresa: The other part of the club is providing information about different life issues, so at our weekly meetings we have information about abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty and just kind of looking at current events and how they interact with those issues.

Megan: We work to bring awareness to campus on those different life issues through speakers, tabling we do a lot of and just any type of outreach like that throughout campus.

NARRATION: ALTHOUGH A CLUB NAME LIKE STUDENTS FOR LIFE MAY HAVE VERY STRONG RELIGIOUS UNDERTONES THE CLUB ITSELF IS NOT RELIGIOUSLY AFFILIATED AND FOCUSES ON LIFE ISSUES OUTSIDE THE CONTEXT OF RELIGION. HOWEVER, MANY OF THE STUDENTS IN THE CLUB IDENTIFY WITH SPECIFIC RELIGIONS. ALONG WITH THE MISCONCEPTION OF BEING IDENTIFIED AS A RELIGIOUS CLUB STUDENTS FOR LIFE ALSO FACE MANY OTHER MISCONCEPTIONS AROUND CAMPUS.

Megan: We definitely get a few assumptions directed when we do tabling or different ways we interact with the students on campus. For the majority, people don't know about our Pregnant on Campus initiative. That's one of our main goals is reaching that out so everyone is aware of these resources. So often we get the comment or assumption that we don't care about the woman or the man involved in a pregnancy, or helping her continue her education and how that might look but in actuality it's the very opposite because we are there for the woman through and after her entire pregnancy and for the man as well and so it's important we try to make that as known on campus as we can, that we are there for every person involved in this decision and in this time in their life.

Theresa: Yeah, and I also think the term “pro-life” a lot of people readily associate with just being against abortion, which is a large chunk of what our club focuses on, but we also, like we were saying, try to cover different life topics.

NARRATION: MUCH LIKE WITH THE STUDENTS FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS, THE STUDENTS FOR LIFE CLUB USE THE SAME SENTENCE IN THE GONZAGA MISSION STATEMENT TO JUSTIFY THEIR WORK.

Megan: Our mission statement is in direct alignment and words with the Gonzaga mission statement, and so upholding that dignity of every person, including the baby and the mother and the father, and as well outside parent pressure or friend pressure from the outside — just different things like that. It's all a contributing force. So to uphold Gonzaga's mission is what we follow in that alignment with. And like Theresa said, with our other life issues, it's a social justice focus and emphasis in our club as well. And looking even in situations of poverty and racism and different forces that also come into play when talking about abortion or the death penalty or whatever it may be, is truly what our Jesuit education is about.

Theresa: And also thinking about, the poor and vulnerable in relation to Gonzaga's mission that so many with child don't have the means or the resources to carry out the pregnancy and raise a child, so we just try to draw the two together while still helping the woman who finds herself in a crisis but also upholding the life of the baby.

Riley: When it comes to the conversation about the Students for Reproductive Rights club that just tried to start, are you guys aware of what's been going on in terms of that, and what kind of dialogue do you think could happen between the two clubs?

Theresa: Yeah it was interesting, I was reading the Letter to the Editor about it today, and they were talking a lot about like focusing on reproductive rights and like we were saying the conversation around sex, the conversation around birth control and I think that potentially a dialogue, like I would love to have a dialogue, especially about the affiliation with Planned Parenthood, but I think our clubs focus on different areas. Our club doesn't have a stance on contraception because we focus on life from conception to death, so I think it would be interesting to have a dialogue and to see how them focusing on sexual education and us focusing on educating about life issues, they definitely intersect. It was interesting to read it and see that they weren't the exact same things.

Megan: I do think that any dialogue is good dialogue for sure. I'd like to have that conversation if they want to talk to our club and, I don't know, Mission and Ministry or whoever may be on campus can get involved and we can all have that conversation. Because it definitely intersects.

Theresa: Yeah, and I think one issue too that they brought up, for me reading the article, was the services available to students on campus, especially pregnant and parenting students find, so it would be interesting to dialogue with them about how we could do that.

Megan: It's a tricky one, I mean this topic is always so difficult. But ultimately if they are a group that's willing to uphold the life and dignity of every human being from conception to natural death, we are in full support. So I think if they want to focus the conversation on before conception as well, and focus on contraceptives and things like that, then that's a different discussion that we can't as much take part in, but upholding the worth of the mom and the baby and the father, that's what we do so we are always open and willing to have that dialogue.

MUSIC: Autowaschanlage Instrumenta by Lobo Loco (Instrumental music) fades into next segment

NARRATION: AFTER MEETING WITH THE STUDENTS FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS, WE DECIDED TO GO TO A PROFESSOR ON CAMPUS WHO IS A PROFESSIONAL SPECIFICALLY IN HOW WOMEN'S RIGHTS FALL UNDER CATHOLIC VALUES AND COULD TELL US MORE ABOUT THE COMPLEXITY OF REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AS A RELIGIOUS ISSUE. DR. SHANNON DUNN, A PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES HERE AT GONZAGA, IS A RESEARCHER WHO INCLUDES ATTENTION TO GENDER, VIOLENCE, RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR SYSTEMS OF LAW. SHE RECEIVED HER UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND, WENT ON TO CLAREMONT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY FOR HER MASTERS AND EARNED A PH.D. FROM FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY. WE WENT TO DR. DUNN BECAUSE SHE TEACHES THE CLASS CHRISTIAN SEXUAL ETHICS HERE AT GU, WHICH DEEPLY COVERS SEX ETHICS IN CATHOLICISM AND CHRISTIANITY. TODAY WE ARE JOINING DR. DUNN IN HER OFFICE IN THE HUMANITIES BUILDING ON CAMPUS.

Brooklyn: Regarding the Students for Life and Students for reproductive rights clubs, do you see justification of Catholic values on both sides?

Dunn: Yeah, let's start with the students for life. So, their position is probably most clearly supported by official catholic teaching. We can see this on the prohibition of abortion as well as the prohibition of artificial birth control. And I think it is probably useful to mention that the culture wars play a large role in the manifestation of these positions. So the students for reproductive rights, trying to affiliate with PP probably was seen as a threat by Catholic-affiliated groups. I don't know if you pay attention to the news much, but Planned Parenthood is kind of on one side of the culture wars and the Catholic church but also some other more conservative, protestant churches are also aligned against PP and have been prominently in law suits, so on many levels - cultural legal - there is a sort of sense that these groups are sort of at war for the control of the country for the way the country's moral compass works. So it's not surprising that we see this manifested in this particular way here. With the students for reproductive rights, I don't know as

much about them, I don't know their mission statement. But there are catholic teachings that certainly talk about the importance of conscience and talk about the role of conscience as given to all human beings and given to make decisions. So, that might be one way in which students for reproductive rights might find themselves in alignment for Catholic teaching, but perhaps not directly. The other thing is that if students for reproductive rights have a wholistic approach, ya know, thinking about the body and thinking about gender justice, I imagine that some Catholic theologians, moral theologians and in particular some feminist theologians, support some of those aspects of that thinking or that kind of argument. But again, because the Church is so... has drawn such a strong line against abortion, its really hard for people to go against that, it's hard for institutions to go against that, it's hard for institutions to individuals to come out publicly and go against that, even if in their conscience they think its the right thing or that there might be cases in which abortion is justifiable.

NARRATION: IN HER OFFICE, DR DUNN HAS SHELVES FULL OF BOOKS THAT COVER RELIGION, POLITICS, SEX AND ETHICS, SUCH AS "GENDER, BODY AND KNOWLEDGE," "SEX AND THE SOUL," "THE IDEA OF HOLY," AND MANY MORE.

Dunn: So, the Church prohibits artificial contraception, but allows for natural family planning, and that's kind of an interesting area of focus and study. But, if you read carefully Human Vitae, the 1968 encyclical that specifically prohibits the use of contraceptives, there are ways in which birth control, artificial birth control, can be used for other needs, aside from prohibiting conception. So, if you use artificial contraception with the intent to prohibit conception, it's wrong, it's considered evil. But there are uses for other types of contraception if there are other prevailing reasons that don't have to do with preventing contraception.

NARRATION: WHEN LOOKING AT THIS DEBATE, THE LENS OF CATHOLICISM CREATES A NEW COMPLEX ANGLE AROUND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS. DR. DUNN HELPED US UNDERSTAND WHY THIS COMPLEXITY EXISTS.

Brooklyn: Earlier, about taking a holistic approach when considering abortion and contraceptives in the Catholic church. Maybe, I might be confused about Gonzaga's mission and how we have the Cura Personalis foundation about like, considering the whole person, and the whole situation. I guess, how maybe does that create tension?

Dunn: Yeah, that's a... that's a great question. Um, well, I think there is a tension between a couple things, right? So, a tension to the whole person and their well being, and then tension with having to be authentic to Church teachings. And, I don't know that Gonzaga as an institution is comfortable jedinicng the church teachings, or coming into conflict with them. It would not be good, in some ways, right, it would maybe in public eyes or in the church's eyes, challenge legitimacy of our institution, right? So, that would be a reason for being very cautious about it from the university's point of view. But I think if we go back to this concept of conscience, I think there are lots of administrators, lots of professors, lots of community members that understand that reproduction, sexual health, these are really important matters and its important to provide the sort of care and dignity needed. It's just hard to do it to address it at an institution level, in part due because of these culture wars that seem like they're never ending, unfortunately. So I think people really find themselves in a hard place in this matter.

NARRATION: THIS CONVERSATION GOES FAR BEYOND CATHOLICISM. DUNN EXPLAINS THAT ALL PEOPLE SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATION.

Dunn: Everyone needs to be brought to the table to have these discussions. Who needs to be protected? I mean, it's clear that the people who suffer the most from misinformation are people who are poor, and people who don't have access - educational access, economic access. So, I think attending to material inequality is really important. And again, framing it as a whole person issue. I think one of the not great things, sometimes, about the way we talk about reproductive rights is it seems like the people who are

maybe the most vocal are people who have the most privilege already. And so, it's easy to attack them and say, "Well you just want to have sex," right, and this is... but really, it does affect... it affects the whole person, right? And for those people on the social margins, who are disenfranchised in many ways, it's gonna hit them harder, right. If you are wealthy and you have access to birth control and access to decent sexual education, you have an ability to leave a marriage that's abusive - I mean, domestic violence hits on all levels, but you have more resources to get out of it, right. I think these are the kind of conversations we need to be having and I think those are the kinds of ways in which a Jesuit concern for the whole person intersects with, I think, some of the thinking on reproductive rights.

MUSIC: Autowaschanlage Instrumenta by Lobo Loco (instrumental music) fade into conclusion

NARRATION: THE DISCUSSION AROUND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ADVOCACY ON GONZAGA'S CAMPUS IS FAR FROM OVER. WITH THE STUDENTS FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS BEING ON THEIR WAY TO OFFICIAL CLUB STANDING, ONLY ONE THING IS CLEAR - THE DISCUSSION WILL BE HAPPENING. IT IS NOW UP TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE GONZAGA COMMUNITY TO DECIDE HOW, WHEN AND WHERE THAT DISCUSSION WILL TAKE PLACE.

MUSIC: Autowaschanlage Instrumenta by Lobo Loco fades out