

Episode 371 –How Christian Schools Have Failed to Teach a Biblical View of Abortion (and What to Do About It)

00:00 Understanding the Abortion Debate in Christian Education

Linda Kardamis (00:00)

In Christian schools, we tend to assume everyone is on the same page about issues like abortion, but shockingly, in a recent election, 30 % of Christian school graduates voted for abortion. So today we're talking about why this happened, where we as Christian school educators may be dropping the ball on this critical issue, and what we can do about it. Well, welcome back to the Teach 4 the Heart podcast, where we tackle teaching challenges from a biblical perspective. This episode is brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation.

I'm here today with Troy McIntosh, who is the Director of the Center for Christian Virtues Ohio Christian Education Network. Troy came to OSIN after serving 27 years in Christian education as a teacher, principal, and head of school. He also has vast experience working with many influential groups like ACSI, the Ohio High School Athletic Association, and even the House of Representatives. So we're really happy to have Troy with us here to kind of guide us through this.

and to share some of the findings. So Troy, thank you so much for being with us here today.

Troy McIntosh (01:00)

Yeah, glad to be here. Thank you for the invitation.

Linda Kardamis (01:04)

So ~ we're going to be talking today about a kind of hot button issue of abortion and specifically what teachers roles, particularly in Christian education and what the relationship should be to this. So those of you listening, before we get into this conversation, I want you to know we're going to be focusing in this conversation mostly on Christian schools responsibilities. But if you're a public school educator, I hope you won't skip this. I think there's going to be some key takeaways for you as well. And right off the bat, I also want to acknowledge that

Maybe not all of you listening will agree with our stance on this important issue, but I hope that you'll keep listening because this is truly a life and death issue. It's one that we as Christians should care about. And I think you might hear some things in this conversation that you might not have thought before. So I hope everyone that's listening will continue in and dive into this with us. let me tell you also where we're gonna go with this conversation. So.

~ There's just a little bit of background info. There was a ballot measure about abortion here in Ohio about a year ago. but it led to Troy's organization commissioning a study. And that study had some very surprising results about how Christian school graduates view abortion. So what we're gonna do is first of all, dive into that background so you understand where did this come from.

Then we're going to discuss the study and its results. And then number three, we'll kind of talk about what Christian schools can do. So Troy, can you start by giving us a brief background of what was the abortion ballot measure in Ohio? What was the results and why did it lead you to conduct this study?

02:32 The Ohio Abortion Ballot Measure and Its Implications

Troy McIntosh (02:32)

Yeah, so ~ many of you know that ~ several years ago when the Supreme Court issued its Dobbs ruling, it overturned the long-standing Roe v. Wade ~ decision that had ~ prevented states from regulating abortion or banning abortion in any way. When the Dobbs decision was handed down, Ohio had a heartbeat bill

that had been in place prior to that several years that our organization had worked hard, Center for Christian Virtue had worked hard to pass back in ~ 2019, I believe. ~ So when the Dobbs decision overturned Roe, the heartbeat bill went into effect. And the heartbeat bill essentially established a ban on abortions in Ohio after six weeks once ~ a baby's heartbeat was detectable, essentially. And so...

That went into effect. Unfortunately, a bit of a rogue judge in Cincinnati put a stay on it immediately. And then that gave kind of some pro-abortion advocates time to put a ballot initiative on the ballot in November of 2023 that would amend the state constitution.

~ to disallow essentially any regulations or bans on abortion. It was an extremely restrictive ~ amendment. It's by far the most restrictive pro-abortion constitutional provision in the country. It essentially, it eliminates almost any ability for Ohio to regulate the abortion industry. And that includes even putting like,

common sense standards on abortion clinics and so forth. So it create this, we've now enshrined in Ohio, a person's right to abortion pretty much at any point during the pregnancy and for any reason. And so what we know is we're now going to see upwards of 30,000 abortions a year. In Ohio, 30,000 lives lost.

~ due to that. ~ And so we're working to overturn that. That's going to be a long, hard road. What we saw though was that it was not particularly close vote. It was a ~ double digit loss, almost about 15, 16 points ~ that ~ the initiative passed by. And so we know that in Ohio, we have a lot of work to do.

to persuade people that abortion and ~ kind of a life ethic is important, not just for Christians, but for any person who cares about issues of justice, issues of life, issues of care for children. These are

important issues and we have some work to do in Ohio. So our eventual goal is to overturn that amendment.

Linda Kardamis (05:47)

Yes. And yeah, this was very almost I know you guys were focusing in on Ohio more as a case study in this case. Just want to make that clear to everybody because this was kind of almost a little bit unexpected. The state had been leaning more conservative, had been approving pro-life measures in the past. It was kind of a ~ little bit surprising turn. And so you guys commissioned a study. Can you share a little bit about why you commissioned this study and then what some of the key takeaways were, particularly related to Christian schools and their graduates?

06:15 Key Findings from the Study on Christian School Graduates

Troy McIntosh (06:15)

Yeah,

yeah. So like you mentioned, was particularly what was surprising was how heavily the amendment was supported, particularly in what really is a deep red state that has pretty conservative bona fides. mean, every state official, every statewide official in Ohio is ~ a Republican, ostensibly conservative, ostensibly pro-life. And so for

the amendment to pass so easily caused us to say, we need to find out why. Why were so many people willing to say, we want our state constitution to protect the ability of a parent to take the life of their child. And so we commissioned ~ a major study ~ afterwards to try to find out some key answers that will help guide us in the future.

toward how can we address this and eventually get this overturned. And there were some really, really ~ key findings that were eye opening. One was ~ the vast majority of Ohioans agree with the statement that life begins at conception. So we have won the debate on when life starts. The vast majority of them

will agree with the statement, ~ life begins at conception. However, 30 % of those people who profess that life begins at conception still voted to enshrine abortion rights into our constitution. And so you end up a little bit with the Bill Maher position, right? And Bill Maher takes the position, I agree life begins at conception.

I'm just okay with abortion. And so there's this cognitive dissonance among so many people ~ that are willing to say, yeah, I'm okay with abortion because I value personal autonomy above protecting the life of an innocent child. And so that's significant, significant issue and hurdle that we have to overcome.

And I think it kind of changes because we for so long believed if we could just convince people that this is a baby we're talking about, of course they're going to oppose abortion. And what we found is

that's not always the case. And so we really have to consider what are the reasons and really try to make the argument that life is a higher good and a higher value than personal autonomy.

another thing is it relates more to Christian schools because ~ background our organization is called Center for Christian Virtue. So we're Ohio's Family Policy Council, the largest Christian policy organization in Ohio. I'm the director of the Ohio Christian Education Network, which is the Christian School Division within CCD. So we have 208 member schools across Ohio, ~ Christian and some Catholic schools as well. And

What we wanted to look at was ~ what impact did a student's Christian education have on their decision when it came to issue one? And what we found was a little surprising. 55 % of Catholic school graduates and 31 % of evangelical school graduates in Ohio voted for the abortion amendment.

Now I'm a former Christian school head. spent 27 years at a large Christian school here in the Columbus area. And I'll be the first to admit that I made assumptions that I probably shouldn't have made during that time. I assumed that the broad-based Christian worldview that we were providing our students would have compelled them to adopt a pro-life position.

12:23 Building a Pro-Life Ethic in Christian Schools

I think now in retrospect and now looking at the data, I don't think we can make that assumption. ~ I think I did was operate on the assumption that we don't need to directly address this issue because of course our kids are developing a biblical worldview. Of course that's going to come. And the data show that's not the case. So what we realized is if we want to turn the tide, particularly within our Christian community,

We need to have intentional, direct efforts at building a pro-life ethic into our young people, or else they're going to be so susceptible to the ideas and influences and big ideas of the world that that's going to overwhelm anything that we potentially gave them. If the Christian community had just, here's an example.

of the, we pulled the, we segmented out just those voters who attended church at least once a week. So these aren't casual Christians we're talking about here. These are committed, faithful, church-going, self-professed Christians. 30 % of them voted for the amendment, voted for the abortion amendment. If we had just won that constituency,

the issue would have been defeated. So we can sit back and we can blame the world for all these ideas and this elevation of personal autonomy above all else. If Christians had just applied a pro-life biblical worldview on this issue, we would have won, but we didn't. And so I think as Christians, we have to take stock of that and say, what do we need to do?

to begin developing in our community a pro-life ethic

Linda Kardamis (13:26)

Yes, and thank you so much for sharing this. For those of you listening, Troy and I and a few others who have dinner, he shared this story and I said, oh my goodness, we have to talk about this because I would have had made this exact same assumptions. I remember when I was teaching at a Christian school, I don't know if that was one of the things on my list that I'm like, we need to talk about this, right? There's so many other things that seemed more like you could tell people disagreed and you thought it'd be make a discussion, but this one I would have put in the obvious box, but clearly at this point it's not. And that's really interesting.

how you're sharing about it's almost become that personal autonomy being more important than just the protection of life. So could we maybe dive a little bit deeper into that? Do you have any advice? Well, there's two different people that could be listening to this. One could be a person that kind of falls into that category. They are thinking, yeah, I know it's a life, but all these other things. So to those people, or particularly though, to...

Christian school teachers or public school teachers who are like, okay, I wanna address this. How do I make an argument? How do I help people start to see that this is important, especially when our culture is pushing so hard on the autonomy, do what's right for you messaging?

Troy McIntosh (14:38)

Yeah,

yeah. So I think, you know, as teachers, we like to think if we just give our kids the best argument or the best information that they'll listen and they'll grab hold of that and become part of them. And certainly there's an aspect where we have to provide a logical reasoned argument for protecting unborn life.

But I think even more importantly, why we have largely, why we have not been winning at the rate we would like to think is we have, we've neglected the stories that go along with it. And so part of what we're encouraging schools to do is to connect their students with people who are working ~ in this field so they can begin to see the stories that go along with it. They can come across.

Linda Kardamis (15:18)

Hmm.

Troy McIntosh (15:34)

~ You know, they can make connections with pregnancy centers in their area where they're going to be able to meet moms that had to wrestle with the decision of whether to keep their baby or not. They're going to be able to serve those families, see the real struggles that a lot of them are going through and be able to develop this story as part of their life. I think that's so important. ~ Things like getting involved with things like a March for Life where

they'll be able to come and hear from people who have made the commitment to life with their own kids. ~ Like for instance, in Ohio, we host in October every year, we host a statewide March for Life in Columbus. And each year as part of that March, we will have ~ people come in to share their stories about they were in a crisis pregnancy, they weren't sure what to do. ~

through the help of a pregnancy center or through the help of a pastor or some church resource, made the decision to keep their life and they'll have their kids standing next to them. Maybe five years old, eight years old, 15 years old. And it's a connection to say that child, this person they're now seeing and is testifying this would not be here were it not for the fact that their mom made the decision to protect their life. So I think there's certainly an aspect of let's continue to

to make the argument ~ for ~ life being more important than personal autonomy. And there's any number of biblical ways that you can approach that. But I think more it's exposing our kids to those stories that they see the impact that choosing life can make.

Linda Kardamis (17:21)

That makes so much sense and I would not have thought of that. that, yeah, connecting with those March for Life, I think those pregnancy centers too are so valuable because you're right, you see both the stories of people's personal experience and the impact that choosing life had on their families. But then you also can see how the Christian community is involved. Because I feel like that's another argument that you hear, right? you only care about protecting the baby, like you don't care about helping the woman. You leave them on their own and that is absolutely not true.

Troy McIntosh (17:35)

Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (17:49)

sure there's pregnancy centers all over the country that are there and getting students involved in that in a way that's really helpful. I think that's really, really wise.

Troy McIntosh (17:56)

Yeah,

Since we started the March for Life several years ago, I've been impressed with how many people have told me that their commitment to a pro-life ethic started by coming as a child, either with their church or through their families to a March for Life. And that was so formational to them that it stuck with them their entire life. So I think it's things like that.

Linda Kardamis (18:11)

Mm.

Troy McIntosh (18:22)

that just kind of bend the twig, bend the heart toward these kinds of issues that are important to us.

Linda Kardamis (18:31)

Yeah, that's great. So any advice, so obviously I want you to tell us a little bit just about those that are in Ohio or close. Maybe you can tell us where we can go and we'll link to it to where you can get information about that March for Life. But what advice would you have for either a teacher or a principal that's like, okay, I wanna get started. Like where do I start if they're not necessarily familiar with the resources that are available or in their area?

18:54 Practical Steps for Educators to Promote Pro-Life Values

Troy McIntosh (18:54)

Yeah, so that's a great question. So one of the things that when we when we saw this the study and the study is called vital signs, you can get a copy of it yourself if you like. You can go to CCV.org. It's our website. Click on the resources tab and there'll be a link to the vital signs report there and you'll be able to read it for yourself. But one of the things. ~ That ~ we began to think about is what can we as Christian schools do ~ to begin to turn the tide?

on this issue. And we realized that, you know, coming out of my own experience that I regret not taking an intentional approach to doing this. And so we wanted to create something that encouraged schools to begin building intentionality and how they teach a pro-life ethic as part of their biblical worldview. And so we created what is called, we've called the Mike and Peggy Hartshorne award, the Mike and Peggy Dignity of Life award. And

This is, ~ you can find it at hartshorne.ocen.org. ~ H-A-R-T-S-H-O-R-N.ocen.org. And this is open to any Christian school. This past year was the first year, our inaugural year for the award. ~ We recognized five Christian schools here in Ohio that had taken intentional efforts over that year ~ to do just that.

But we really we are opening it up and expanding this to any Christian school in the country So if you're in California, if you're in New York, if you're in Florida, Georgia, Tennessee doesn't matter We are encouraging Christian schools who are taking Intentional steps to building a pro-life ethic to their students to apply for the award It's not a competitive award in the sense that there's only going to be select number of winners We will recognize any school that meets certain criteria

for that. And it's things like some of the criteria are things like ~ bringing in a pro-life ~ speaker from a pregnancy center for a chapel ~ thing. And it's like we have three levels, a bronze level, a silver level, a gold level. A bronze level recognition is just kind of dipping your toes in to see what this might look like. Bringing a speaker in, ~ it could be as simple as ~ making a connection with ~

a pregnancy center to do a baby bottle drive ~ or possibly partnering for a student service activity ~ there. For instance, in Ohio, we had ~ one of the things that our schools did was do a diaper drive ~ for a local pregnancy center. Then they would go and visit it, present it, meet the people who are working there and so forth. ~ Other criteria, things like attending either the state or the National March for Life.

~

It could be things like hosting more of a teacher training program on how to build a pro-life ethic into your classrooms. ~ could, so staff training available. You can find, well, starting to like a Students for Life club on your campus. Ultimately, what we hope to do, kind of the gold level recognition, would be to have schools adopt a formal pro-life curricula.

as part of their instruction. So whether that's a nine week portion of their health class, whether it's a K-12 fully integrated at some point every year, ~ there are ~ pro-life messages and lessons being taught to students. There are some really good resources out there for that. particularly Catholic schools have done a much better job.

with this I think in evangelical schools, unfortunate for the evangelical schools. ~ There's a very good one ~ called Ruah Woods, R-U-A-H Woods out of Cincinnati that is a very good ~ K-12 pro-life integrated curriculum. So that's ultimately what we hope to move schools toward, ~ but we have kind of stepping stones along the way and we would love any Christian schools, any questions.

Feel free to contact us. If you go to that website, you'll be able to do that. And just we take applications. Applications are due by April 15th. We make awards in May, and then we do recognitions the following fall. that's one of the things we want to be able to do is just encourage schools to begin thinking about how they can be intentional about teaching this to their kids. That's great. And we'll think as we say.

Linda Kardamis (23:37)

That's great. And we'll link those resources

in the notes so you guys can check them out there as well if you didn't catch all those URLs. I'd imagine if someone's a teacher, even if they're just the teacher, they're not the administrator, that sounds like not only is this an award, it also gives you a lot of ideas, right, of where to start and things you can do. So I think checking that out, kind of looking through the criteria and being like, well, we could do that. We could do that. So even if you're not gonna...

Troy McIntosh (23:54)

Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (24:02)

You don't feel ready to go for the award, picking, looking at some of those ideas and taking them to your administrator and say, hey, could we do this? Or saying, hey, our next service project, we're gonna do this instead of something different.

Troy McIntosh (24:13)

There are all kinds of things that schools could be doing. ~ We do name one school of the year every year. a school out of Calgary, I'll recognize Calgary Christian School in Bellefonte, Ohio was this year's Hartshorne School of the Year. ~ And there's a cash award that goes along with that. But more

importantly, it's ~ just we want to be able to recognize schools and we want schools to be able to show prospective parents.

that they take a pro-life ethic seriously. And if their kid enrolls in their school, that's part of the instruction that they're going to receive.

Linda Kardamis (24:45)

Yes. Is there anything else you'd like to share though about the Center for Christian Virtue or OSEN? Anything else you want to share about there or just any final words of encouragement and advice to those listening?

Troy McIntosh (24:53)

Yeah.

Yeah, I mean, one of the other things that relates to this is ~ we have a phone free Christian school covenant. So we have also taken the idea of trying to create schools for students that are free from the distractions that go along with cell phones. And so we have a covenant.

that any Christian school in the country can say, yes, I want to sign on. We're going to be cell phone free. And we're kind of doing this. We're doing this in conjunction with ~ Dr. Jonathan Haidt, who helped us put this together. If you're familiar, he's the author of Anxious Generation. ~ But we see the value in creating kind of these spaces for kids where they're free to learn and think without the distraction of cell phones, all the mental health issues that we think are safe. ~

by doing that. that's another thing that we're doing. if a Christian school is interested in that, they can feel free to reach out and contact us. And we'd love to have them be a signatory to that.

Linda Kardamis (25:59)

Wonderful. Well, thank you, Troy, so much for being with us. I really appreciate you sharing this with us. any final piece of advice you want to give as we wrap up?

Troy McIntosh (26:07)

Yeah, just you know, I'm a former teacher myself and I know most of your listeners are teachers and you're so valued. What you do is it's impossible to express the influence that you have. So thank you on behalf of somebody who has kids and grandkids who have gone through schools with Christian teachers and Christian schools. Thanks for what you do.

Linda Kardamis (26:33)

Yeah, well thank you Troy for being with us and for all the work that you guys are doing over there. And thank you guys so much for listening. I appreciate you being with us. We're gonna have all the notes links below, so go ahead and check that out if you want to take any of those next steps. Well this episode has been brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation. All views and opinions are our own and don't necessarily reflect those of the Herzog Foundation. We look forward

to being with you again soon. In the meantime, teacher, remember God is at work in you and through you and he's using you to make a difference. Keep your eyes on him.

and teach 4 the heart.