

SLU, ROE AND WADE



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If you are anything like me, classes, tests and friends became background noise during the last week of November and the first week of December of 2021 as I waited with bated breath to see if Saint Louis University (SLU) would prevent “political commentator” Matt Walsh from speaking on campus. In addition to being blatantly racist, Islamophobic, transphobic and sexist, Matt Walsh’s views on abortion were an added stressor to the end of a semester that was chock-full of tension regarding reproductive access. Walsh, in a tweet from December of 2021, stated “I want Roe to be overturned...its overturning would cause misery and suffering among the very worst people on Earth.” At the beginning of November, SLU Students for Life’s display of flags representing a “fetus cemetery” began a campus-wide conversation regarding reproductive justice and abortion access. The rest of the nation is turning its attention to these issues as well. As the country approaches a crossroads, so does SLU’s campus. The question is, where will SLU stand when the dust settles? For and with its students, or with a poorly disguised ideology designed to control bodies and choices?

In November, it was all too easy to see the vast divide between student opinions regarding access to abortion. The country remains divided on this issue as well. The right to an abortion stands in limbo as the Supreme Court prepares to make a ruling this summer

that could reverse all of their prior decisions on abortions. Since 1973’s Roe v. Wade decision, abortion has technically been legal in all 50 states. However, Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, which directly challenges Roe v. Wade, could change that. The state of Mississippi looks to enforce an abortion ban after 15 weeks, as well as overrule Roe and the constitutional right to an abortion.

Missouri, like Mississippi, has only one operating clinic that provides abortions. This clinic sits exactly one mile from SLU’s campus. It is frequented by pro-choice and “pro-life” protestors alike. It is impossible not to feel the delicacy of this situation while having conversations about reproductive justice and access on campus.

The U.S. government’s political debate over access to abortion should not be informed by religion due to the establishment clause in the Bill of Rights, however, individuals are able to rely on religion to inform their political beliefs. SLU sits at an interesting spot in this situation. SLU is a private Catholic university and a good portion of its students are Catholic too, however, the argument that Catholicism and abortion access are fundamentally separate is flawed. The history of abortion and the Catholic church is complicated and at times contradictory. In a poll done by the Pew Research Center, 55% of Catholics in the U.S. today believe that abortion in most cases should be legal. Meanwhile, the Pope maintains that abortion is “murder,” that it is a “scientific” fact that life begins “at conception.”

However, it is unclear what he means. Scientifically, every cell in a woman’s body is alive. The question is, when do cells become a separate human being? A separate life? This is not an answer the Pope can turn to science for.

SLU, on the other hand, mostly avoids the conversation entirely. Even as conflicting groups protested on campus last semester, SLU’s administration maintained its relative silence. SLU does, however, charter a chapter of Students for Life which, according to their website, “upholds the position that human life exists from conception to natural death; that all human beings have the right to life regardless of age, health, function, condition of dependency, or crimes committed, including the unborn from the moment of conception.” SLU did not agree to charter B!llikens for Reproductive Justice (BRJ) in January of 2020. The group formed anyway, in response to a lack of reproductive justice and lack of access to safe reproductive supplies on campus. On their website, BRJ states “cura personalis means every person, and every student at SLU, deserves access to reproductive health care and the education to make the decisions they want about their body. Therefore, as B!llikens for others, we are called to actively implement our mission of reproductive justice at SLU.”

Cura Personalis, as defined on SLU’s website, is Latin for “care for the individual person and describes respect for the dignity of each person as a child of God.” On campus, cura personalis is widely defined as “care for the whole person” or care for a person’s mind, body and spirit. SLU has an obligation to the health and wellness of its students as it has an obligation for the education it provides.

According to the Pew Research Center, nearly 7 of 10 abortion patients are between the ages of 18 and 29 and about 20% of women will have an abortion before the age of 25. This is an issue that directly affects college students and directly affects SLU. This is a health care issue for college students. College students need abortion

access because college students need access to all forms of health care.

SLU can not hide behind its Catholic values just to appease its conservative alumni and donors. College students are overwhelmingly pro-choice. We stand on the side of justice and that includes reproductive justice. One religion’s shaky stance on an issue can not define the lives of millions of people across a nation nor should it define the health care a SLU student has access to.

Come this summer, no one can maintain silence. SLU has an obligation to its students to speak out against any ruling that may prevent abortion access across the United States, especially as a Catholic university that maintains a cura personalis value, and especially since campus is located a mile away from the only abortion-providing facility in the state of Missouri. The consequences of not would be detrimental to SLU’s students, the city of Saint Louis and the state of Missouri.

SLU eventually spoke out against Matt Walsh’s bigotry and prevented him from speaking on campus. SLU proved that it can recognize that injustice is not part of the Catholic faith nor part of SLU’s values. It is simply time for SLU and its pro-life students and alumni to recognize that the real lives on the line are the lives of students with uteruses. Those whose access to health care is on the line. Those whose lives were affected by SLU Students for Life’s actions last semester and those whose safety is hanging in the balance. There is only one right stance for SLU to take. SLU needs to stand with Roe and stand with the health of its students.

