

THE CATHOLIC TV MONTHLY

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programming highlights
House+Home
The New and Eternal Word
Pope in Africa
Spotlight



bringing

Mass Confusion

to the masses

Premiering Thanksgiving

Mass Confusion page 4



cover story



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by Greg Willits

I was in Boston back in August 2010 for the Catholic New Media Conference at the archdiocese's Pastoral Center. Father Robert Reed from The CatholicTV® Network was the first keynote speaker that day and I looked forward to catching up with him. We'd gotten to know each other over the previous few years through our mutual interest in Catholic New Media, and CatholicTV had been airing the program my wife and I created, *That Catholic Show*, for quite some time.



While it would be good to see Father Reed, the truth is an idea had been fermenting in my brain, and I felt the CatholicTV Network provided the perfect audience for it because I felt I'd earned Father Reed's trust, I wanted him to have first dibs on this new project that would bring to Catholic media something never before attempted. Or, if it had been attempted, I didn't know about it. So, for the sake of argument, I'm claiming this as a first in all of Catholic media, unless someone proves me wrong.

The following exchange is exactly what happened that Saturday afternoon at the Pastoral Center. Trust me, there is no exaggeration in what you're about to read. It's 100 percent true.

Father Reed had just finished his address and I pulled him aside.

"Father," I said, "I have an idea for a Catholic sitcom pilot."

"A Catholic sitcom? That's the most amazing idea I've ever heard!" Father replied. His eyes sparkled with wonder and glee, like a child on Christmas morning. "Please, Greg. Please. I must know more."



We were in a crowded hallway, pressed from all sides by professionals from other TV networks, newspapers and pretty much every other outlet in the world of Catholic media. Knowing everyone that weekend was looking for the next great project, hungry for a chance to discover the next

most amazing thing in Catholic media, I needed to be careful. I lowered my voice to barely a whisper.

"It would be about two Catholic families, each with a bunch of kids."

"Brilliant!" Father yelled.

"Quiet, Father," I cautioned. "This could be the project that finally brings great success to CatholicTV."

"I think you might be right, Greg," Father Reed said. "Though CatholicTV is a national broadcast television network that has been in operation since 1955 and is available in 10.2

million homes nationwide, as well as on your iPhone or iPad, I think your idea, Greg, might just be the thing to finally put us on the map. How can I ever thank you?"

Really. Those were his exact words and this is exactly what happened. Exactly.

It was like



fishing, and Father Reed was the catfish. He took the bait – hook, line and sinker.

"Tell me more about this amazing idea of yours, Greg," he continued. "Tell me! I must know!"

"That's it," I explained, confident he'd want the exclusive rights for CatholicTV. "It would be my wife Jennifer and I with our kids, and our good friends Mac and Katherine Barron (hosts of the Catholic in a Small Town podcast) with their kids."

"Two Catholic families? With a bunch of kids? And it's a sitcom?"

"Yes, Father. Exactly. And hilarity ensues."

I thought perhaps Father Reed was going to cry. His bottom lip trembled. It was precious.

"I think it'll win an Emmy," Father said.

He sent me back to Atlanta to put together a script. For months, Jennifer, Katherine, Mac and I invested hundreds of hours digesting one television sitcom after another, analyzing the components that went into the most successful programs of our time. We then compiled our



findings into an intricate array of spreadsheets until we'd detected the perfect calculation for what makes a good sitcom. We then carefully applied this to the script we soon presented to Father Reed and CatholicTV.

Not surprisingly, they immediately greenlighted the project. At the end of June, the best of the best from CatholicTV flew to Atlanta and turned our home into the set for this, the very first Catholic sitcom pilot.

So when I had the idea for a Catholic sitcom pilot, I really didn't want to do it unless Father Reed and CatholicTV were involved, because I knew they understand **the need to try new things and take chances.**

After four long days of filming, we completed the 22-minute pilot. Father Reed, who saw the first few minutes of completed footage, could barely contain his glee. The crew at CatholicTV has said they're not sure they can ever work on any other project now that they've taken part in such a historic event as this.

So ... that's it.

That's exactly what happened.

Sort of.

OK. OK, maybe not. My wife, who is looking over my shoulder as I write this, just told me I now need to go to

confession this afternoon for stretching the truth so much (she actually said "lying," but I think that's a bit extreme).

So, fine. Here's the real story:

I am so blessed to work full-time in Catholic media. While I'm constantly coming up with new ideas, in the world of Catholic media, it's sometimes difficult to convince people of the need to push the

envelope and try new things.

Creating a Catholic sitcom pilot is definitely something unique.

I trust CatholicTV, and have since the first time I worked with Father Reed years ago. I believe wholeheartedly in the vision of CatholicTV and I love the fact they constantly push the boundaries of Catholic television.

So when I had the idea for a Catholic sitcom pilot, I really didn't want to do it unless Father Reed and CatholicTV were involved, because I knew they understand the need to try new things and take chances.

Knowing my wife and I are only moderately funny, we also didn't want to attempt this unless our friends Mac and Katherine Barron were involved, as they are much funnier than we.

One of our goals for *Mass Confusion* is simply to prove that not only is this kind of content possible, but it's also something audiences like. But productions are not cheap.

My wife and I, along with the Barrons, wrote and starred in this pilot without being paid a dime. We did this because we believe that in a world inundated with programming that you wouldn't let your grandmother see, we need content that is not only Catholic, but entertaining.

Will there be more episodes? Well, the answer depends on you.

We hope you'll tune in when the program premieres on the CatholicTV Network on Thanksgiving night at 8:30 p.m. EST. But, more importantly, we hope you'll help get the word out to your friends and family. When the pilot appears on CatholicTV.com, send the link to everyone you know. Post about it on Facebook and Twitter. Ask your



pastor to include information about it in your parish bulletin.

If we can get a million views of the sitcom by the end of 2011, then we'll have proven people desperately

want family – and Catholic-friendly entertainment like *Mass Confusion*. And maybe then the Catholics in the pews with the thicker wallets will be willing to support future productions like this.

But even if this pilot is the only episode ever produced, we hope you tune in. I genuinely think you'll love it. And, besides, it may be your only

chance to see a Catholic sitcom especially one with scenes recorded at a liquor store.

For a sneak peek, visit:
www.YouTube.com/CatholicTV

Greg and Jennifer Willits co-hosts *The Catholics Next Door*, a daily three-hour talk show on SiriusXM's The Catholic Channel 129. Franciscan University of Steubenville has named Greg a leader in Catholic New Media, and he's won several awards for his various productions. Married since 1995, Greg and Jennifer are the parents of four sons and a daughter. Their first book will be published by Servant Books in Spring 2012.

Faith+Family Weekend

In addition to *Mass Confusion*, Thanksgiving weekend we premiere a new episode of the original CatholicTV reality-style series, *House+Home*. Tune in for a marathon of Father Reed and the CatholicTV crew visiting Catholic families and enjoy our other original, faith-filled, family programming all weekend.

On Thanksgiving (**Nov. 24**), at 4 p.m., the latest installment of *House+Home* airs. Earlier this year, the Henry family invited Father Reed and the CatholicTV cameras into their home. On Thanksgiving evening, have pizza for dinner with John and DeAnn, their



four children Grace, John, Faith and Hope and the family pet, James Rabbit Henry.

Each episode is recorded on location in the home of Catholic families. Discover how real people living the Catholic life make their house, condo, apartment or even the apostolic palace into a home.

Beginning with the 4 p.m. premiere of the Henry family's show Thanksgiving evening, we will air every episode of the *House+Home* series. After a break, for *Daily Mass*, *The Rosary*, *ClearVoice*™ and the premiere of *Mass Confusion*, the marathon continues with a visit to the pope's place at 9 p.m. until his weekly general audience at 10:30 p.m.

An encore presentation of the *House+Home* marathon repeats **Nov. 26**. Beginning at 10:30 a.m. until *Chaplet of Divine Mercy* airs (3 p.m. everyday). *The Mass Confusion* pilot also will air throughout the weekend: **Fri. 11:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., Sat. 8:30 a.m. and 10 p.m. and Sun. 3:30 p.m.**