

The Welcome Wagon

by Scott Hahn

In 1986, when I left the Protestant ministry for full communion with the Church, I was elated about my new discoveries—the sacraments, the Blessed Mother, the papacy, Sacred Tradition, and a new way of reading the Bible.

Yet I felt quite alone. I knew very few Catholics who shared my enthusiasm for the faith. My still-Evangelical wife, Kimberly, who had opposed my conversion, was somewhat scandalized by this situation. “Where’s the welcome wagon?” she asked wryly. I had no answer.

Then, one night in Milwaukee, I attended a meeting of Catholics United for the Faith (CUF). It was a lively group; members obviously knew one another very well. The president, Dr. Al Szews, seemed genuinely excited. He stood next to a television set as he announced the program he’d planned for the night. We were going to watch a videotape of one of the Pope’s addresses in America.

This is too good to be true, I thought to myself. And it was. Dr. Szews turned on the TV, but nothing happened. He toggled the VCR switch. Nothing happened. He jiggled some wires. Still nothing.

Soon it became clear to everybody that we wouldn’t be watching the Pope that night. Dr. Szews smiled and looked out at our little crowd. “Well,” he said, “are there any newcomers here?”



Scott and Kimberly Hahn with Kimberly’s sponsors, Margo and Al Szews

I raised my hand, and he invited me to introduce myself. “I’m Scott Hahn,” I said, “and I’m a new Catholic. I was a Presbyterian minister. I came in just a few weeks ago, at Easter Vigil.”

Dr. Szews seemed genuinely interested in my reply. “Isn’t there more to your story?” he asked. So, for the first time, I was asked if I could give my testimony. I told of how my intensive biblical studies had led me from strict Calvinism to the Roman Catholic Church. When I had finished, the entire chapter broke into applause. They peppered me with questions. They embraced me as a new member of the family. This, at last, was the welcome wagon!

I ran to the nearest pay phone and called Kimberly. “I found them!” I cried. “I found them!”

Before long, Kimberly too would “find them”—a community of informed, enthusiastic Catholics—at CUF. Eventually, when she was received into the Church, she chose Dr. Szews and his wife, Margo, as her sponsors. So the welcome wagon welcomed her home, too!

People are still “finding” CUF today. In fact, CUF’s unique apostolate—to deliver true Catholic doctrine to the laity—is more active and effective than ever. Yet it’s lost none of the familial intimacy I saw that first night in Milwaukee.

What has happened since then? CUF has refined its techniques of

dynamic orthodoxy and lay diplomacy to a fine art. CUF's methods work.

That's why, from the night of my first encounter, I've embraced the mission of CUF. I've served on its Board of Directors for many years. I helped launch CUF's publishing division, *Emmaus Road*, and I edited its first title. I've written two more books for *Emmaus Road*, and I've written Bible studies for *Lay Witness* magazine.

I've also had the privilege of seeing some of my best and brightest former students assume positions of leadership in CUF. When I look at their work, I'm filled with gratitude, excitement, and pride. For what I see in them is what I saw on that long-ago night when providence shut down a VCR in Milwaukee. The welcome wagon that welcomed me, welcomed Kimberly, and it's still rolling along, welcoming others to a faith that's perennial, fresh, energizing, and dynamic.

CUF's dynamic orthodoxy continues to change lives. After all these years, it's still making Catholics of unbelievers—and it's making Catholics into better Catholics. ■

As Catholics United for the Faith celebrates its 35th anniversary, I am happy to commend the zealous efforts of *Lay Witness*, aimed at carrying on the inspired work of Vatican II in regard to the laity. The constant reminder of the dignity of all Christ's faithful people and the repeated call to the laity to embrace the Church's mission of bearing witness in the world to Jesus Christ and His Gospel must go on. With the help of the Holy Spirit this apostolate will continue.

—CARDINAL JUSTIN RIGALI
ARCHBISHOP OF PHILADELPHIA, PA

My acquaintance with CUF has brought me in contact with so many devoted Catholics who want to know and respond to Christ's teaching and His Church. I have seen so many people who recognize this as their assurance that they were still thinking with our Holy Father, the visible head of the Church, when in varying local areas, other teachings had been promoted as true. The lay leadership has made every effort to clearly support the Church, and to defend her and those who have been maligned because of their fidelity to Christ.

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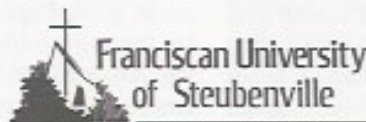
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