

We Can't Do It Without You



By Rob Pue

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Wisconsin Christian News is now in its 25th year of publication. Prior to starting the newspaper, I owned and operated a photography studio in my hometown, which I started from scratch. We built up a great business there, with over 300 regular clients. I did wedding photography, baby and child photography, family portraits, high school senior portraits, and the circle then continued as the babies I once did portraits of called on me to do *their* wedding photography, and then their children's portraits.

I greatly enjoyed the creativity and working with people. We also specialized in formal portraits of senior citizens, and often times I took the studio to them, in nursing homes. I also did a lot of traveling for my work, as we set up a special program, which I coordinated with nursing home Activity Directors. Because it was often nearly impossible for nursing home residents to go out to a studio to have a nice portrait made, we went to them. And every time I went to a nursing home it was a special day.

First, the residents would have their hair and makeup done by either the facility's beautician, or we would call one in. The nursing staff would make sure the residents were all dressed in their finest. Sometimes we'd have husbands and wives photographed together, and often times, the family would participate too, so we were able to do the individuals, couples and family portraits. We even did Grandma and Grandpa

with their grandchildren; and great-grandchildren. And these were all formal portraits, complete with studio lighting and backgrounds, which I brought with me to give them the very best quality possible.

The portraits I made were cherished, and in most cases the last formal portraits people had of their elderly loved ones. After the work was done, everyone who was photographed would receive a free portrait, with no obligation to purchase anything. But many people ordered multiple copies to share with family and loved ones. As I said, these portraits were cherished, as they'd really have no other way to have such nice images of their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

At least one week a month, I would be traveling. I eventually ended up taking my mobile studio to nursing homes in nine states. The rest of the month, my schedule was full back at the main studio, and on weekends it was rare when I wasn't doing a wedding. We developed a style and a system to create the best wedding portraits of any studio for miles around. Word got out and I had couples coming to me to do their weddings from all over, including neighboring states, so again, I was doing a lot of traveling.

On those travels, I would often stop at the local Christian bookstore. This was back when just about every town in the country had a Christian bookstore. And as I traveled to these other states, I found Christian newspapers at these stores. I'd always pick one up.

As a side note, I've always been very interested in our family history, and in my studies, I learned that our family had the first newspaper ever published in Ireland, starting back in the 1600s. I also learned that in every generation of our family, there had been at least one person in the newspaper publishing industry and at least one person working in Christian ministry. I had also worked at a small county

newspaper prior to opening my photography studio. And it seems now, I'm the last one left, combining both vocations – newspapers and ministry – into one.

So apparently newspapering was in my blood, though I didn't know much about the business side of things. Still, as I traveled doing photography, and picking up copies of various Christian newspapers, I thought, *"this is a great idea, but it could be done so much better."*

And then God began speaking to my heart. *"YOU should start a Christian newspaper for Wisconsin, Rob,"* He said. *"Oh, no, no... I think it's a great idea, but You have the wrong guy, God... someone else should do this,"* was my reply.

I fought God on this idea for two years, with the Holy Spirit occasionally nudging me to start a Christian newspaper. *"I have no time for something like that! I have no experience in that, and besides, things are so busy with the studio, I couldn't possibly do both,"* I said. And God's response was, *"I don't expect you to do both. Sell your studio and start a Christian newspaper."*

"Great idea, wrong guy, God," I said. Well, long story short – you can run but you can't hide from God. His prodding became impossible to ignore. *"When are you going to start that Christian newspaper, Rob?"* And this was at a time when I was at the height of my creativity in the studio. I was making an excellent salary, and the business was prospering greatly. I had no reason to be unhappy. Yet every day I'd get up and go to work and I'd dread going there more each day, for no apparent reason.

Finally, I made a deal with God: *"Ok, I will do this, but You will need to sell the photography studio for me,"* I told Him. I did my part. I put some ads in newspapers around the country. I thought I was pretty smart. I thought I was "off the hook." I thought *"no one is going to be interested in such*

a highly specialized business in a small town like ours." But the first person to call and come see our operation offered to buy it, at the price I was asking.

I trained the new owner for about a year, and then on December 31, 1999, I handed over the keys, left the building for the last time, and was unemployed for the first time in my life, with only this "Christian newspaper" *idea*, which I had yet to set up. With the proceeds from the sale of my studio, I purchased the needed equipment and remodeled my basement at home to be my office.

I was so naive in those days. I thought everyone was going to want our newspaper. I imagined it would be in grocery store checkout lanes, next to the R-rated gossip magazines. I thought every church for miles around would want it to share with their members. I thought every Christian radio station would be on board with us, and every Christian bookstore would be eager to carry it.

In April of 2000, with virtually all of the funds from the sale of our studio now gone, our first edition came out. And then the hard truth hit me. Those gossip magazines at the grocery store checkouts pay massive fees to be located there. Not a single church would have anything to do with us because we weren't of their specific denomination. Christian radio stations told me they weren't interested because we were, as they said, "competing media." And Christian bookstore owners told me they had no room in their store for something that was given away free, that they weren't able to make a profit on.

We'd gotten our first issue out, but it appeared there was little hope for a second one. I thought we'd have plenty of advertisers to cover our expenses. But try selling ads in a newspaper that doesn't really exist yet. Even my own church, which my family had attended since I was a baby, and which my wife and I had tithed to faithfully for years, took six months to decide to support us, and when they did, they chose the

smallest possible ad they could – giving us a whopping \$50 a year.

I remember sitting down at the dinner table many times, with my wife and three small children, and thanking God for what I truly believed was our last meal, because there really was no money for another one. I thought to myself, *“What have I done?”* And I took the situation to God, *“Lord, I did what you said. I thought You would bless this work and take care of us, but now You’ve left me in this ‘wilderness’ with no way to even feed my family or pay the bills.”*

And thus began my ‘wilderness experience’ and my education regarding pastors, churches and ‘Churchianity’ in general. I learned a lot, most of it not good, to say the least. The Lord put me through many tests and trials, and it was more than ten years before the financial stress let up, even a little bit. Yet somehow, God always made a way for another edition of *Wisconsin Christian News*, and for our family to survive. We’ve learned to live one day at a time, on God’s grace and provision.

There was a point when we had a very good advertiser base, as the newspaper expanded and word got around. Instead of distributing in churches, we rented space on racks in grocery store entry ways and gave the newspaper away for free. In other locations, we purchased our own news racks and placed our paper in there. My original vision for *Wisconsin Christian News* was to be Wisconsin only, but God had bigger things in mind. People in neighboring states began picking it up and taking it back home. Soon we had distribution points in Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois and Iowa, as well as throughout Wisconsin.

And the newspaper grew in size as well. For many years now, we’ve published 48 pages every issue. Today we have more readership than ever before, with bulk distribution in 18 states, subscribers in all fifty states plus Puerto Rico. And

the quality of our content has increased as well. I believe we have some of the very best writers in the nation, and we aren't just "fluff" – we're not just "poetry and recipes." *Wisconsin Christian News* is richly filled with *substance*. If we were just full of nice "poetry and recipes," there's no doubt we'd have plenty of paid advertisers. Instead, because we are not politically correct, and because we address the issues and topics that 99% of pastors wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole, our advertising revenue doesn't come anywhere close to covering even a portion of the needed budget each month.

And although we have many paid subscribers now, subscription fees only cover the cost of printing and postage, with about a \$4 margin per year. Still, God has increased our reach beyond anything I ever could have dreamed of. We're literally reaching people around the world. In addition to the printed newspaper, I also do a twice-weekly radio commentary, we maintain a very busy website, and I host a weekly internet TV program called "WCN TV."

Many times each week, I get wonderful testimonies from people who are still finding *Wisconsin Christian News* for the first time, and they're telling me there's nothing else out there like it. Hearts, minds and lives are being profoundly touched. People are coming to know the Lord for the first time, or returning to Him after many years away, after encountering our newspaper. And because we're in newspaper format, with something of great interest on the front page every month, people pick it up and read it – even those hostile to the things of God. Whereas a Bible, book or tract would be easily discarded or disregarded, people seem to be drawn to our newspaper. By God's grace, we're having a world-wide impact now.

I believe all the years of work we put in have led us to this point in time. We cover the most vital news and information of the day that the churches and pastors will not... and we do

it all from a biblical perspective, regardless of political correctness. We tell people the real truth, in a day and age where telling the truth is not popular, to say the least.

But while we now have greater readership than ever before, we also have enormous expenses. For several years now that this publication has been *primarily* reader-supported. We survive *only* by the gracious donations from individuals. Advertising and subscription revenue is a mere drop in the bucket compared to what we must raise every month to keep this all going. Our printing bill each month alone, can only be described in one word: “staggering.” I’ve cut every expense possible to the bone, I have no staff, but I’m grateful for our distribution volunteers who help me get the paper out to news racks far and wide. But starting this month, after being 48 pages for longer than I can remember, this next issue will only be 40 pages.

Cutting out eight pages of content is not an easy task, but I’m confident that we’ll still be the best Christian newspaper you can find, and the best source of news and information on the most important things you need to know in the days, months and years ahead, as you walk through this crazy world and honor the Lord.

When I started *Wisconsin Christian News*, we were one of about 225 Christian newspapers throughout North America. Today, there are less than a dozen left. I know there are many wonderful ministries that need your support and I realize it’s a sacrifice, but if the Lord provides, I’d ask you to also support *Wisconsin Christian News*. We’re definitely not a huge organization, but we’re having a significant impact, with eternal consequences for so many, all around the world. If you appreciate the work we’re doing, please know that we need you – God’s people – to help keep this all going. We can’t do it without you.

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