

Meet the Staff

ERIC STOUTZ

Director, Catholic Responses
Catholics United for the Faith



Fact File:

Marital Status/Children: Married to Monica. We have six children: Micaela (10), Philip (8), Hannah (6), Bridget (4), Lucy (3), and Eleanor (1).

Education: B.A. in political science, with a minor in communications from Vanderbilt University; certification (California) for secondary education social studies, California Lutheran University; B.A. in liberal arts from Thomas Aquinas College.

Favorite Saint: St. Philip Neri

Favorite Authors: J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Jane Austen (it's a marriage thing), and Shakespeare.

Books Currently Reading: *More Catholic Than the Pope* by Patrick Madrid and Pete Vere, and *The Chronicles of Prydain* (keeping up with my daughter).

Favorite Things: Sunshine, birds, and a well-executed game plan.

Favorite Hymn: Holy God We Praise Thy Name; Lo, How a Rose 'Ere Blooming; and *Sicut Cervus* (simple and beautiful).

Most people don't know that I: enjoy tie-dying t-shirts and once drove an orange '74 Superbeetle.

You have been working at CUF for many years. When were you hired, and what was your first assignment?

In 1996 Monica and I were in Ventura, California, working at Behavioral Science Technology, Inc., an international performance solutions company. The *Faith and Life* series, CUF's catechism series for children, was due for a new edition, which has just recently become available. Carole (Puccio) Kennedy was working on the project by herself. Curtis Martin and Leon Suprenant gave me a call, and I came to Steubenville to help.

What do you consider to be the greatest effect of the *Faith and Life* series?

Personally, I think its faithfulness is so evident that it's just one less thing home schooling families and Catholic school teachers have to worry about. It's hard to guess the overall impact with regard to passing on the faith, but people can always trust our materials.

You were trained as a schoolteacher. It seems that your training would suit you well for your current job. How heavily do you rely on your training to do your work at CUF?

I would first look to the intellectual formation I received at Thomas Aquinas College. This didn't make me knowledgeable or intelligent, but gave me habits of thought for critical thinking, analysis, expression of ideas, etc., which I constantly rely on here at CUF. The teacher's training has helped me in the area of effective communication of the Church's teachings and in training the Catholic Responses staff.

As the director of Catholic Responses, will you comment on what role your department plays for CUF?

Our department serves CUF in three main ways. First of all, CUF members are generally active in their faith and contact us for support in their efforts. They'll ask for information on Church teachings, disciplines, persons and organizations, and sometimes for advice. Second, Catholic Responses also provides information "in house," usually with regard to the publication of materials such as Emmaus Road books and *Lay Witness* magazine. Finally, because CUF members generate so many responses and support the toll-free line with

donations, Catholic Responses has become an outreach—we can make these responses available to anyone who calls, not just members. Pastors, teachers, and other apostolates refer people to us. We take calls from Catholics and non-Catholics alike, and often find ourselves in the trenches, helping people to learn and live the faith.

As the director of Catholic Responses, you receive a lot of interesting requests and questions. Would you share some of the more important or interesting ones?

While preparing responses to these questions, I received two calls. The first was very interesting: John Paul II has just passed away, and we do not have a pope. If a plenary indulgence requires one to pray for the intentions of the pope, can the faithful still receive an indulgence? The second question was very important: A person after twenty years away from the Church is considering returning, but she is not sure about the validity of her marriage and whether she should receive Communion. She also does not understand that she should find a way to participate in the Eucharistic celebration each Sunday. The first question is typical of those that help bring us to a greater understanding and love of Christ's Church. The second is typical of those that call us to evangelical zeal.

The Catholic Responses department is responsible for producing FAITH FACTS. Are you currently writing any new FAITH FACTS?

We have in the works FAITH FACTS on the canonization process, tattooing and body piercing, and church renovation. These were tabled while we worked on FAITH FACTS concerning nutrition and hydration and papal succession. Future topics include worthy reception of communion, apparitions, norms for liturgical music, and the penitential nature of Fridays.

Could you explain the role of CUF's long list of advisors and episcopal advisors? How do they relate to your work?

When we respond to a question, we first see whether the Magisterium has explicitly provided an answer. If not, then we use Scripture commentaries, writings of moral and doctrinal theologians and, when our usual resources are not fruitful, CUF's advisors. There's a certain humility required in providing the Church's teaching. While we can be fairly confident in our own understanding and will likely be correct, providing our own opinions is generally discouraged. Advisors often confirm an opinion or provide a helpful insight. There's also something to be said for practicing what we preach: Thinking with the Church includes exchanging ideas with her bishops and theologians.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

Constant learning and short-term gratification. I find that I do not read as many books as I once did, but I read as much material as I ever have. Further, I try to surround myself with people who are wiser and more knowledgeable than

myself. I also learn from the people asking questions and from the staff answering these questions. The instant gratification comes with the "mustard seed" approach to success. To paraphrase Cardinal Ratzinger, the kingdom of God is made manifest not on a world-wide scale, but where we are and as we are able. Each response is, in a sense, a success.


In the past, Catholic Responses has helped people mostly over the phone and via postal mail. Now it seems that many requests come in via the Internet. Is this trend increasing and how do you think questions will be answered in the years to come?

The way questions are answered is usually determined by the way they're asked. Emailed questions receive an emailed response. People who use the toll-free line tend to be less inclined toward the use of email in general. It usually boils down to convenience. Members using the phone still make up the largest group, whereas only a few members use email and the postal service. Non-members use email more often than the phone. They search for answers on the Internet, come to our website, and see that they can simply ask their questions. As more people find email to be convenient, our members will likely increase their use of it. Also, whatever the future holds, we'll need to provide a way that ensures anonymity for some people. Currently the toll-free line (800) MY-FAITH and email do this. Most convenient would be telepathy, and we're hoping for practical developments in this area in the near future. ■

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