

How the Holy Spirit Orchestrated This Romantic Comedy Starring an Award-Winning Cast

On a hot weekend in mid-July, 2016, auditions were held for a faith-based Romantic Comedy titled *False Hopes*. The co-producers and screenwriters, David Dietrich and Cyndi Monroe, were unsure what to expect with the auditions, but they were confident that God would bring the right actors to fill the roles they had worked years to develop into rich and believable characters.

As the actors arrived and began preparing to audition, Dietrich (who is also the director for the film) asked if he and the team could pray for them. It took many (if not all) of the actors by surprise. Most told Monroe and Dietrich that they had never before been to an audition where the producers prayed for them. For Dietrich and Monroe, it was just one more step in the journey to make a film that would be glorifying to God and excellent in content.

The *False Hopes* journey actually began in 2000, when Dietrich was a film student at USC. He conceived the idea for the film and began writing the screenplay. It was a project he never completed but never forgot. Fast forward to 2011 when Dietrich, now working full time in church media and doing short films on the side, was introduced to Monroe through a mutual friend. Monroe, the founder and artistic director for a nonprofit theater arts education program for children called Christian Arts and Theatre, is also a playwright but who had never attempted writing a screenplay.

At first glance, they are the unlikeliest pair. Dietrich (30s)

and his wife, Dawn, were preparing to start their family. Monroe, on the other hand, was a single woman with four grown sons and three grandkids. They were drawn together through their strong faith in Christ and their passion for the arts.

In 2012, Dietrich introduced Monroe to a barely begun script for *False Hopes*. Monroe loved the story, and so they began collaborating.

False Hopes asks the universal question “How can I find real love?” Every romantic comedy produced in Hollywood asks the same basic question. Director Dietrich explained it this way, “The difference is that *False Hopes* answers that question through the lens of God’s perspective, through the perspective of faith. Searching for and finding true love is a universally applied topic, universally experienced and certainly not just with people of faith. Finding the answer through a vehicle of both humor and human imperfection opens opportunity to consider the options that God gives us.”

The whole project really does have a “David and Goliath” feel. The “Goliath” of Hollywood versus Dietrich who is committed to the idea of creating film that is glorifying to God but still possessing mass appeal to the movie-going public. Is that even possible? Monroe and Dietrich, a couple of unknowns with no studio backing? Could this movie actually get made without compromising who they were or, more importantly, compromising the story they wanted to tell?

In 2016, Dietrich and Monroe gathered potential investors they knew through their own sphere of influence and together raised about \$105,000: A pittance by today’s studio film budgets but enough for them to accomplish their goals.

Totally committing the film to prayer—from casting to filming to post-production, filming began on Feb. 1, 2017. The cast that God provided was amazing. Some they knew already: Vicky Dawson, an accomplished, veteran actress in film, television

and stage to play the role of Martha McKenzie, for example. Others came through casting notices where the actors made the long drive from Hollywood to Corona, not knowing what to expect. Justin Ray, who plays the lead character, Thomas McKenzie, submitted a reel of his work and then came to audition. Both Dietrich and Monroe felt like they had struck gold. Ray was perfect for their leading man. A committed Christ-follower, he is funny, clever, handsome with excellent acting chops. The other characters' actors fell into place:

An Emmy-awarding winning actor, David Lago (*The Young and the Restless*) who came to the project after performing in a play Monroe produced for her theater company. Aaron Groban, who plays Thomas' comedic goofball best friend, Lawrence, said, when asked why he was willing to travel so far for a fledgling film, "I was excited to take part in a film with romantic themes and to mix that with listening to the voice of the Lord and allowing Him to be center of a relationship—that's exciting!"

Irish-born actress Claire Bermingham, who plays Desiree Sinclair in the film, said, when asked why she wanted to be a part of this film, "I always pray to God and ask him to bless me with acting jobs and career opportunities, always in the hopes that I can use my given gifts and talents to love and to serve. When I saw the casting notice for *False Hopes*, I thought, *Wow, what if I could be a part of a film that puts God at the forefront, that is for Him first?* I need to do this. Not for my career, not for me but to give back to God. To acknowledge Him, thank Him and celebrate Him!

The final piece for the cast was the character of Peter McKenzie, the patriarch of the family. Dietrich really wanted to find a man who was known throughout the Christian community to play this pivotal role. A long-time friend, Victor Marx, seemed the perfect choice. Although not an actor, Victor is an internationally known humanitarian, speaker and child/youth advocate. Marx's ministry, All Things Possible, (), is a

faith-based organization that works on a global scale to free children from abuse and the effects of trauma. When asked why Marx wanted to be part of *False Hopes*, he replied, "I've known David Dietrich, the director, for quite some time and thought it was a project that would be both impacting in content and have positive outcomes for those struggling or needing hope in relationships." Marx went on to say, "The film is timely and rich in real life subject matter that people will relate to in a big way, yet at the same time is uncompromising in its reflection of what God would want for us."

False Hopes is now completed and the world premiere is set for Wednesday, Aug. 15, in Corona, California, where the journey really began. The film's journey will continue as the Lord opens the doors for distribution. Dietrich's film company, Deo Volente Media (), will be offering pre-sale copies of the movie (DVD, Blu-Ray and streaming) in the days to come. {eoa}

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