

# Light hearts at work on heavy issues

When Father Tim Farley takes the pulpit, he's used to feeling the love of his Catholic congregation — so nothing prepares him for being heckled from the pews by Mark Dolson.

But the young, firebrand seminarian challenges the play-it-safe priest to go out on a limb and take a position in *Mass Appeal*, an excellent Red Deer Players production that opened Friday night at the Scott Block in Red Deer.

Brash idealist, Dolson, played by Jason Steele, debates the ordination of women and celibate gay priests, as well as other controversies with his diplomatic but non-committal mentor, Farley, portrayed by Paul Boulton. Their discussions soon begin transcending Catholic Church issues. The two men examine such universal concepts as right and wrong, and the value of standing up for your convictions, despite personal risk.

A sort of father-son bond develops between the seminarian and older priest, and difficult choices must ultimately be made by both men. Audience members could leave the theatre questioning where their own convictions would lie.

It's been more than three decades since this play was written and then turned into a 1984 movie with Jack Lemmon, but the witty script by Bill C. Davis still stands up — even though the issues in the play aren't nearly as shocking as in 1980.

*Mass Appeal* remains relevant because similar philosophical debates continue, whether you're a Catholic priest, teacher, or anyone with a moral choice to make.

This two-actor production, insightfully directed by Lori Lane, deals with heavy-handed subject matter in a light-hearted way. Heated exchanges between Dolson and Farley are very funny — and you don't have to be Catholic to get the jokes.

For instance, after putting in a word to have Dolson made a deacon, Father Farley dryly tells him, "And my good deed did not go unpunished — you



LANA  
MICHELIN

REVIEW

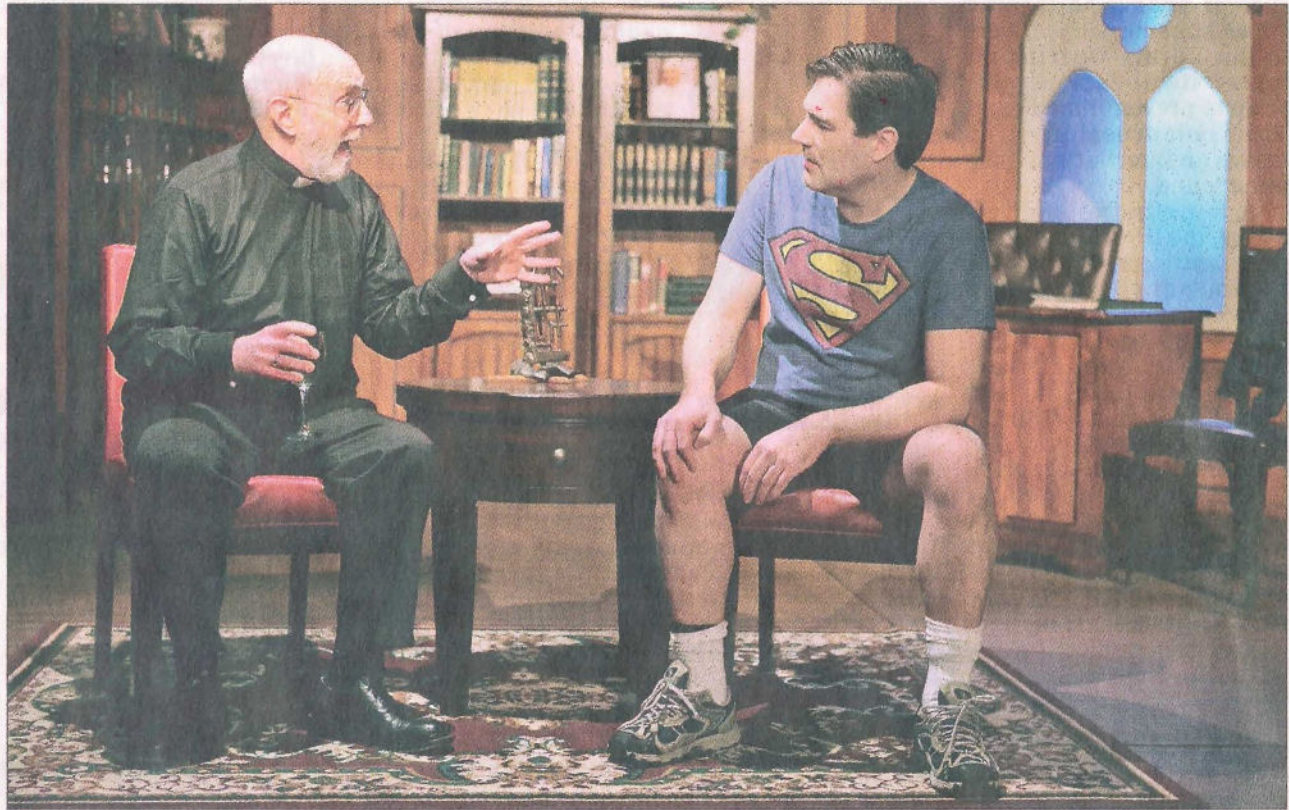


Photo by JEFF STOKOE/Advocate staff

Paul Boulton as Father Tim and Jason Steele as Mark Dolson rehearse a scene from the Red Deer Players production of *Mass Appeal* at the Scott Block.

have been assigned to me."

Later, Dolson blames one of his inflammatory sermons on "the spirit moving me." But Father Farley isn't snowed. "You lost control," he responds.

Steele and Boulton, both veterans of the local theatre scene, share great chemistry, as well as comic timing. They pull off convincing characters that don't backslide into stereotypes (although the script has Farley drinking wine, driving a Mercedes, and enjoying golf and the race track...)

In short, the community actors pull off profession-

al-quality performances.

Lane also does a fantastic job of pacing the play and helping Steele and Boulton find the humanity in their roles.

With an impressive wood-paneled set by Nigel Lane and authentic-looking vestments care of the costume team of Elena Rousseau, Lane and Lawrence Hobbs, *Mass Appeal* deserves to be seen. The play's name says it all.

The production continues through Feb. 20.

[lmichelin@reddeeradvocate.com](mailto:lmichelin@reddeeradvocate.com)