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PLAY SELECTION PROCESS OF MINNESOTA
CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

by

AMANDA PYFFEROEN

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTERS OF ARTS
IN
THEATRE ARTS

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ABSTRACT

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This document is a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts degree in theatre. It details the parameters and results of a survey distributed to Catholic high school theatre directors in Minnesota. The survey inquired about the process for selecting plays, what themes or lessons the directors refrain from presenting and if there is a need for a list of guidelines that could assist directors in selecting Catholic appropriate theatre pieces to present. There is further development of a proposed guideline and potential rating system that could be implemented into Catholic high school theatre programs.

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FORWARD

As a practicing Roman Catholic who attended Roman Catholic schools from kindergarten until high school graduation, I was unaware of any conflict between the Catholic Church and the theatre until I began my collegiate career; no longer under the protective branches of the Catholic school environment. Those first few years of college were very educational, not only in academic studies but in societal norms as well.

Today I am torn between presenting the theatre canon in its entirety regardless of Catholic teachings and doctrine, and limiting myself to the presentation of the type of theatre approved by the Catholic Church. Perhaps the best outcome is a compromise of the two, presenting plays with thematic elements that are deemed inappropriate but then having open discussions about why the themes are “risqué.”

I recently tested this idea with a cast from Lourdes High School in Rochester, Minnesota, while participating in the Minnesota state high school one act competition. After watching five other schools present their one act plays, we were able to critique the performances and subject matter. There was a general consensus from the ensemble that majority of the plays they watched had two or three elements that they all considered immoral, ranging from sexual affairs to drug usage to homosexuality (this is a particularly “hot topic” since one member of the cast is an openly gay student who has the full support of his peers, even though some still consider homosexuality to be a sin). The ability to

discuss these plays helped all of us learn and create individual opinions on the topics presented. It was through this experience that inspired me to further research the play selection process within Catholic schools.

I would also like to extend a thank you to all those who participated in the survey; Mary Bruns Pyfferoen, Angela Wagner Donlon, Mark Roeckers, Gregg Sawyer, Laura Vincent, John Wiater and Marcus Woodard. The time taken by these participants was greatly appreciated and very beneficial for supporting this thesis.

CHAPTER I

SURVEY DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOLS

This thesis outlines the results of an academic survey sent to Catholic high school theatre directors in the state of Minnesota regarding their play selection process in hope to support the hypothesis that Catholic high schools in Minnesota should offer supplemental material to assist in the play selection process for theatre directors. Catholic high schools should be able to present theatre in a way that adheres to Catholic teachings but also teaches students about controversial topics; therefore a system of appropriate material through a set of guidelines and a rating system could be implemented into Catholic high school theatre programs to assist in the play selection process.

Catholic education, particularly in high schools, and theatre should work together to educate students. Theatrical productions can be used to present key biblical passages, parables and the Stations of the Cross without challenge from religious officials, however, when a school wants to present a production with thematic elements that may negate Catholic teachings, the production is occasionally cancelled and students are deprived of the educational value, such as the cancellation of *The Laramie Project* at Notre Dame High School in Bowling, New Jersey (Duffy). Perhaps Catholic Church officials and Catholic high school theatre directors need to find a way to compromise and work together for the betterment of the students. According to the surveys collected,

administrative and religious officials question the subject matter by claiming that the play contains elements that are deemed immoral or sinful according to Catholic teachings. It is impossible to outline the entire canon of Catholic doctrine, for this thesis the focus on the teachings in relation to immorality and sin will assist in exemplifying what may or may not be appropriate material.

Father John Hardon's Modern Catholic Dictionary defines immorality as a "popular equivalent of licentious or dissolute [behavior], or acting contrary to established norms of behavior" (Catholicreference.net). This specifically means an act that is in direct violation to Catholic morality. The moral code of the Catholic Church is rooted in the belief that human beings are all made in the image and likeness of God who granted all humans with the ability to make their own choices. Those who are Catholic use this free will to make choices based on "good" moral behavior. In order for the act to be considered "good" it must possess three elements "the objective act [what is done], the subjective goal or intention [why the act is done] and the concrete situation or circumstances in which we perform the act" (usccb.org). A Catholic with "good" moral behavior adheres to Church doctrine and is fully conscious of the right or wrong decisions made in accordance to Catholic tradition. It is important to note that,

It is therefore an error to judge the morality of human acts by considering only the intention that inspires them or the circumstances (environment, social pressure, duress or emergency, etc.) which supply their context.

There are acts which, in and of themselves, independently of

circumstances and intentions, are always gravely illicit by reason of their object; such as blasphemy and perjury, murder and adultery. One may not do evil so that good may result from it. (Catechism 1756)

This implies that any action not in accordance to Catholic teachings is deemed immoral even if the reasoning could be justifiable and therefore the act becomes a sin.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines sin as “an offense [act] against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity” (Catechism 1849). Sin and immorality are seen as negative attributes in the Catholic community and should therefore be avoided, according to Catholic teachings. The only way for a Catholic to seek retribution for their sinful and immoral behavior is to pursue a moral path inspired by Church doctrine and to confess their sins in order to be absolved of his or her wrongdoings.

Based on these definitions, does this mean that censorship is needed for the theatre presented in Catholic schools? Some institutions may believe that censorship is the correct solution, but history has proven that censorship does not always work (Appendix B). The solution should not mirror any form of censorship but, instead, offer possible tools to assist directors in the play selection process. Therefore, the possible solutions included are a set of guidelines that Catholic school theatre programs can use that would suggest themes and material deemed appropriate via Church doctrine and teachings, and/or to introduce a “rating” system to inform the patrons what thematic

elements may be present in the show that would be in violation of Catholic ideology.

This will then give directors the opportunity to acquaint students to “controversial” topics in ways they can control.

In order to further discover the current situation regarding plays performed in Catholic high schools, a survey was sent to a majority of the Catholic high schools in the state of Minnesota. The survey posed questions to support the need to develop a system to assist high school directors select appropriate plays to perform for a Catholic audience. The results of the survey could also become a source from which to pull suggested material.

The first step was to create a survey that would provide information that the researcher would need to develop and prove the hypothesis. Each question needed to inspire more than a “yes” or “no” response, which are sufficient for statistics but would not yield the desired results. All questions were chosen with the understanding and intention of procuring various thoughts and opinions combined with facts about individual schools within the larger body of Catholic high school theatre in Minnesota. The goal was to take the information and comprise data that would reveal a solution.

The questions chosen were selected carefully to hopefully attain insightful information. It was important to understand the current protocol for the play selection process at each school, with follow up questions regarding the possible influence or restrictions governed by the school’s administration or the Catholic diocese affiliated with the school. The next few questions dealt with the themes and subject matter the

director tended to abstain from and the ones he or she looked for when selecting a play. These responses would be used to create a potential list of guidelines of appropriate or inappropriate material for the directors to refer to. The next question asked the director to list productions that the school had performed within the last five years, thus being able to note popular plays often done in Catholic settings in order to offer as a suggested list of previously approved plays. The next question dealt with “community standards” or the possible influence of the external “standards” from the community surrounding the school which are not necessarily connected to the Catholic Church. It then seemed applicable to inquire if the directors believed that there needs to be some form of “restriction” for high schools when selecting appropriate plays and whether or not, if there was a guideline set in place, they would use it. Lastly, inquiring about the school’s theatre department, if they offered classes or not, would help to understand the value placed on theatre by the school’s administration.

Once the survey was set, the search for Catholic schools in Minnesota began. According Catholiclinks.org, Minnesota has forty-four parochial high schools. This list was then validated by gathering information from the websites of each Catholic diocese in the state: the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, the Diocese of Crookston, the Diocese of Duluth, the Diocese of New Ulm, the Diocese of Saint Cloud and the Diocese of Winona. On the following page is a map of each diocese and the area of Minnesota to which each individual diocese administers.



Fig.1. Image from Diocese of Duluth website.

This information then led to a list of thirty Catholic high schools in the state that could be contacted to answer the survey. There were several schools from the Catholiclinks.org web page that have closed or were listed as a high school when they should have been noted as an elementary school.

The next step consisted of researching the theatre programs at these thirty schools. A majority of the schools have a website, which was used to gather information regarding the theatre program. About half of the school's websites listed who their theatre director is and how to contact him or her. There were several schools that noted that they had more than one director; in those cases both persons' contact information was available. A few schools did not provide this information but indicated that the school did present plays. For those schools, a secretary was contacted to acquire needed information regarding the program director or coordinator. Some schools also noted on their websites

that they did not have a theatre program or were unable to present plays due to the small student population, which reduced the amount of schools that could be surveyed to twenty.

Each school's director or directors were then contacted. An email was sent out on February 20, 2013, to twenty-four directors or secretaries at twenty different Catholic schools regarding the survey. The email included general information about the researcher, what the intended results of the survey were, what date to return the survey and the survey itself was included in an attachment. The directors were given a two week window to answer the survey and then return it to the researcher. Within the first week only one survey had been returned, therefore a reminder email was sent out on March 4 to all who had been initially contacted. Several directors indicated that they were interested in completing the survey but had been preoccupied with their winter productions. Surveys stopped being collected on March 8.

There was a thirty percent return rate, which resulted in a small demographic from which to pull information. However the varying degree of school size and participation in theatrical productions would be able to represent other schools in similar demographics. The returned surveys span across the state, from the South East corner to the North West corner (Appendix C). The following table displays some general information about the school and director of each received survey.

Table 1

Participating Schools General Information

School	City	Contact	Position at School	Diocese	Date Received
Lourdes High School	Rochester, MN	John Wiater	Social Studies Teacher	Winona	February 21
Academy of Holy Angels	Richfield, MN	Gregg Sawyer	Theatre Director and Teacher	St. Paul and Minneapolis	March 4
Cathedral High School	Saint Cloud, MN	Laura Vincent	Drama Director	Saint Cloud	March 5
Cotter High School	Winona, MN	Mark Roeckers	Math Teacher	Winona	March 6
Lourdes High School	Rochester, MN	Mary Bruns Pyfferoen	Third Grade Teacher	Winona	March 6
Bethlehem Academy	Faribault, MN	Angela Wagner Donlon	Choir, theatre and jr high art	St. Paul and Minneapolis	March 7
Sacred Heart High School	East Grand Forks, MN	Marcus Woodard	Theatre director	Crookston	March 8

Below are two graphs to help show the population and racial demographics among these six Catholic high schools. It can be seen that Catholic schools located in a more urban area are more likely to possess a larger student population and therefore far more able to produce multiple productions during the academic year. There are three population categories according to this graph; large (over 700), medium (between 300 and 699) and small schools (less than 299). Of the six participating schools, there are two representatives for each population category.

Table 2

Maximum vs. Average Catholic School Student Population (2011-2012)

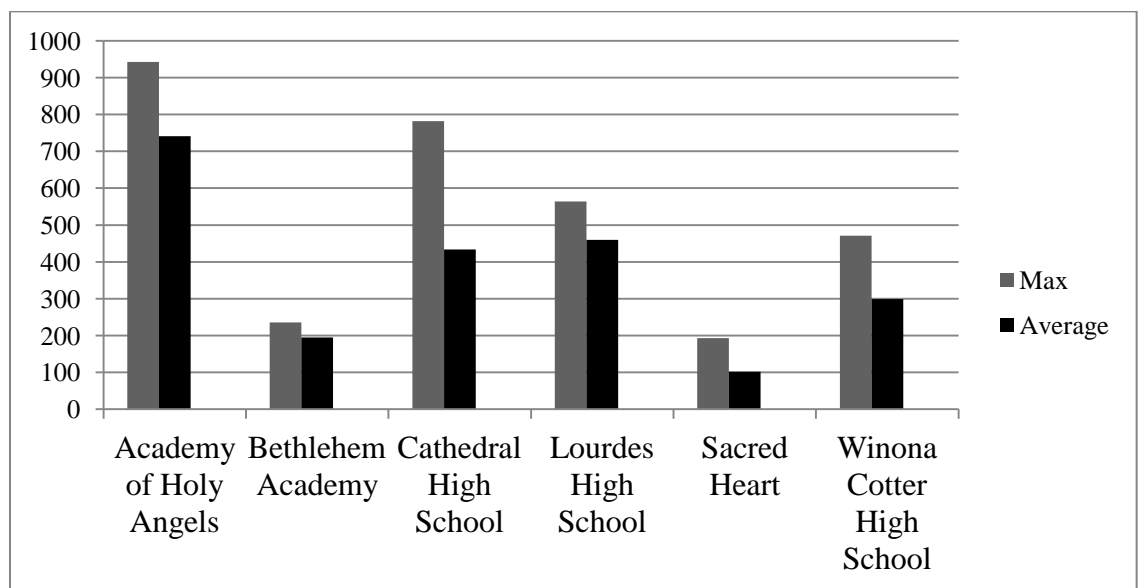


Fig. 2. Tables. Information from <www.high-school.com> and <www.mshsl.org>.

¹ Lourdes High School student population based on statistics from original downtown location, the school will be opening a new building in the fall of 2013.

The second graph presents the demographics of race among the schools. It is clear to see that in all six schools Caucasian is the predominate race with an average of ninety-two percent of the student population. The remaining six percent is comprised of students with Asian, Hispanic, African or Native American roots.

Table 3

Race Demographics in Catholic Schools (2010)

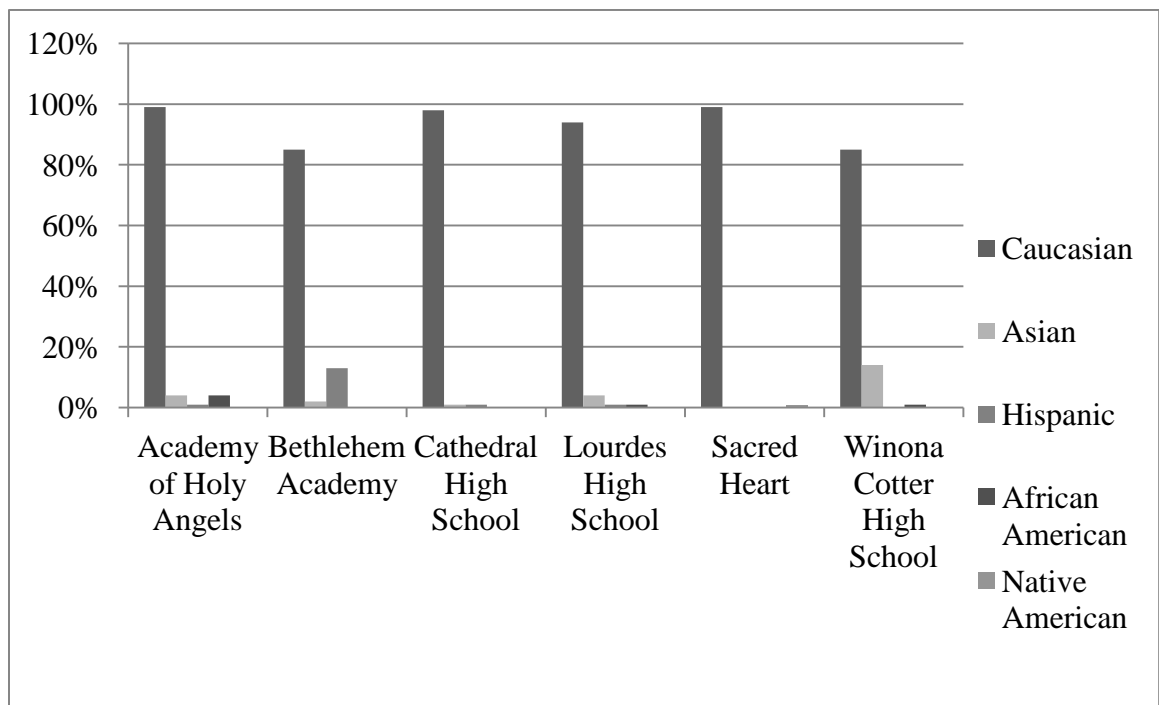


Fig. 3. Tables. Information from National Center for Education Statics <www.high-schools.com>.

This graph then indicates that the school environment most likely does not introduce students to various cultures. Therefore their ability to truly accept other races and religions is bound to be more difficult due to the lack of diversity within their schools.

A school full of similar demographics is more likely to yield the same social norms because they are able to relate with each other more easily than a school that possesses a more diverse demographic. Theatre presents the opportunity for these students to be introduced to varying social and racial ideologies when given the opportunity to do so.

The seven surveys submitted from six Catholic schools in Minnesota are now able to be synthesized. With the general information regarding the demographics and location of each school, it will most likely be easier to hypothesize what type of environment surrounds the Catholic high schools. Those students in an urban community will have a far different experience than those living in a rural environment. It is the hope that the results of the survey, detailed in the following chapter, will yield results to validate the researcher's hypothesis and to assist in creating a potential solution.

CHAPTER II

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

This chapter outlines the results of the surveys received in hope to support the hypothesis. All responses to each question can be seen in Appendix A. This chapter will highlight answers that best exemplify or represent opposing opinions or facts to the questions.

Question one asked about the school's general protocol regarding the play selection process. There appears to be an overall trend in the selection process for the Catholic schools surveyed. Generally, the director or directors select a play that he or she would like to present and then take the title to the school's administration to seek approval. Laura Vincent at Cathedral High School stated that she "will generally come up with a selection of shows and a description and we have a meeting with the principal and other administration that [sic] is involved. As a group we narrow it down and generally I have the final say" (Vincent 1). Her circumstances allow her to bring several options to the table at once in case one suggestion is denied. On the other hand, Bethlehem Academy director Angela Wagner Donlon mentioned that she was denied by the school board to present shows with controversial subject matter on three separate occasions (Donlon 1). Mary Bruns Pyfferoen, director of the fall play, one act and odd year musicals at Rochester Lourdes, once asked the administration to present a show that

dealt with the aftermath of a teen suicide but was told she could not perform the show due to the risk of “inspiring” students to possibly believe that suicide was an acceptable choice or solution to combat personal issues (Bruns Pyfferoen). The Catholic stance on suicide stems from the teaching that “suicide is seriously contrary to justice, hope, and charity. It is forbidden by the fifth commandment” (Catechism 2325). The survey indicates that majority of the directors need to seek approval from administration in order to present a play.

The results of this survey showed that none of the dioceses in question, Winona, St. Cloud, Crookston or the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, have any direct influence on the productions produced at the high schools in their diocese. It appears that most dioceses have more pressing issues than monitoring the appropriateness of the plays that students are directly involved with. During the 2008-2009 academic school year, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) informed each diocese that all Catholic schools needed to adhere to and adopt the film rating system devised by the Legion of Decency and Catholic News Service established in the 1950s (Bruns Pyfferoen). The system tends to mirror the rating system developed by the Motion Picture Association of America, but pays closer attention to morality and topics negating Catholic teachings (Appendix B). If Catholic officials insist that schools utilize their rating system for films, then one could assume that they would also like to place some form of parameters around the theatrical productions presented as well. Perhaps the

bishop of each diocese trusts that the administration of each school is able to assist directors in making suitable choices.

The next portion of the survey asked the directors to describe and discuss any themes, subjects or lessons they do or do not look for when selecting a play. John Wiater at Rochester Lourdes expressed the importance of upholding the school's mission and/or vision statement. Generally, the mission statements of schools are meant to encompass a wide array of academic and extracurricular activities. Here are a few examples of missions statements from Catholic schools surveyed;

Lourdes High School, as a Catholic institution, is a community of Christians whose mission is to foster mutual respect within a disciplined environment, to provide a challenging academic curriculum for all individuals, and to prepare students for a life of learning and Christ-like service to others. (Rochester Catholic Schools)

The "respect" portion of their mission statement is able to play into the realm of theatre, perhaps it can be used to help teach tolerance and therefore present plays involving that topic.

Bethlehem Academy, a Catholic school in the Sinsinawa Dominican tradition, strives to empower its students and staff to achieve personal, spiritual and academic excellence. We challenge ourselves to love as Jesus Christ loved, to lead, to serve, to inspire and to seek the truth: Veritas. (Bethlehem Academy)

Sinsinawa Dominican sisters spread the Gospel in words and deeds, specifically through education and creating strong, religious relationships (Sinsinawa Dominican). A central focus here is truth. If they strive to live as Jesus did, whose mantra was “love everybody,” then it seems natural that this school could present topics regarding acceptance.

Sacred Heart Catholic School exists to promote faith in Jesus Christ, to educate youth, and to minister to all . . . [and] Sacred Heart School’s vision is to be a community where the educational process is centered on the love of Christ and that all will become a living expression of His love.
(Sacred Heart Catholic)

This school’s focus is on Catholics living the way Jesus did, to love and respect everybody with the intention of creating peace.

It could be argued that the mission statement of the school might have no bearing on the plays selected. However, most organizations, including schools, possess a mission statement in order to firmly state their goals and objectives. Mission statements can be referenced but may not necessarily be a key component to the play selection process according to the surveys, especially since there was only one survey that mentioned the possible importance of the school’s mission statement.

The other surveys wielded a greater array of material and subject matter that directors tend to abstain from when selecting plays. Some general content that majority of the directors tend to avoid are suggestive language, sexually explicit topics, premarital

sex, sexual orientation, violence, rape, suicide, racism, drug use, alcoholism and any other topic that would directly conflict with Catholic school teachings or mock the Church itself (Appendix A). There are also several Catholic schools that do not require student actors to kiss on stage. This particular topic is mentioned in Marcus Woodard's survey in regard to a hypothetical list of "cant's" from school administration.

A few of the directors mentioned specific productions the he or she thought would not work in a Catholic school due to the fact that the show presents themes considered immoral in a positive light. However, they also indicated that the show is one that he or she has always wanted to direct, but know that they will never have the opportunity while directing for a Catholic institution.

Woodard discusses that he has seen some traditional Catholic teachings within plays that might not be suited for a Catholic audience. He specifically mentions that one can learn the same "good" Catholic values from participating in *Godspell* as they could in *Avenue Q*. "In *Godspell*, Jesus says (I am paraphrasing) that we should leave tomorrow's problems for tomorrow. I believe that this is epitomized in the song from *Avenue Q* entitled "For Now." So why is one better?" (Woodard 2). He makes a valid point, that the central themes can be seen in both shows; however, the fact that *Avenue Q* also promotes premarital sex, prostitution, homosexuality, masturbation, pornography, racism, and the excessive use of profanity would make the show unsuitable for Catholic schools to present. However, Music Theatre International worked with creators Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx to offer a school edition of *Avenue Q* that has cleaned-up the language,

eliminated a few songs, has less focus on drinking and altered a few character names (MTI). These legal alterations may make the show suitable for a Catholic high school audience, if it wasn't for the fact that there are still references to homosexuality.

Gregg Sawyer has been the theatre director at the Academy of Holy Angels for thirty years and is also the president of the Minnesota Educational Theatre Association.²

He states that:

There are some shows that I feel can wait for students to perform. I would feel this way regardless of our Catholic identity. [sic] (*Cabaret*, *Chicago*, *Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, for example.) I do not believe that students should be put into situations that make them uncomfortable . . . the directing team needs to be aware of that power instilled in them in all decisions that are made surrounding a production.

(Sawyer 1)

The main point Sawyer is addressing is the fact that high school students involved in theatrical productions are bound to be impacted in some capacity. Therefore, it is the director's responsibility to instill and inspire good moral ethics by selecting productions that exemplify "good behavior," whether or not those moral codes are from a Catholic viewpoint.

² The Minnesota Educational Theatre Association (META) is a state-wide organization for theatre educators operating in conjunction with The Communication and Theatre Association of Minnesota (CTAM) to promote theatre education in the state. META is a secular organization and has members from both private and public high schools.

Sawyer further discusses the difficulty in the play selection process for all high schools, regardless of their public or private status. He believes that all educators have an obligation to select a show because it is “artistically right for the moment, good for the school community . . . and is educationally sound” (Sawyer 2). Far too often, he fears, directors choose a show simply because they like the show, they want to shock or prove something or they want to be the first high school to present a particular production. Sawyer indicates that those are not valid reason to presenting a play, that there needs to be some sort of purpose or message. He goes on to exemplify this by stating how he personally would love to direct *Cabaret* or *Chicago* but knows that it would be highly inappropriate to ask young people to wear the costumes “necessary to do the show[s] justice” (Sawyer 2). This particular director has many years of experience working in a Catholic school environment and may be able to offer some practical advice to novice directors.

Based on the criteria gathered from the surveys regarding topics and themes that directors believe to be immoral and therefore in violation of Catholic teachings, one can take a closer look at plays with a supposed Catholic message that are set in a Catholic school. John Patrick Shanley’s *Doubt* would rarely be presented by a group of Catholics. Doubt in itself is seen as a negative thought in the Catholic Church because the person is consciously aware that he or she is questioning the authority of the Church, specifically the teachings and therefore may begin to doubt their faith. This thought is usually viewed as sinful because it can cloud the mind towards understanding the greater truth of God

(Catechism 215). The show also represents the Church, specifically the priesthood, in a negative light, especially during the current climate with many sexual allegations against clergymen. Damon Intrabartolo and Jon Hartmere's pop-opera *Bare*, also set in a Catholic school environment, would be difficult to find on a Catholic stage, mainly due to the major theme of homosexuality. According to Catholic doctrine, homosexuality is considered a sin or "act of grave depravity . . . [which] under no circumstances can they [homosexuals] be approved" (Catechism 2357). Both of these shows have received numerous accolades from the theatre community, but they represent the Catholic community in an unfavorable fashion or support acts deemed immoral by the Catholic Church and therefore would be difficult to find on a Catholic stage.

The survey also questioned the directors about any themes, lessons or morals they may look for when selecting a play. A majority of the directors mentioned that the most important aspects they consider are the general talent pool of students, will the students have fun working on the show, gender balance, does the show exhibit general themes that the Catholic Church teaches and what will sell. A majority also stated that they would rather present a comedy as opposed to a drama, most likely because they believe that comedies tend to sell better to the general public.

Cotter High School in Winona director Mark Roeckers specifically mentions that he tends to select plays that are "family friendly" (Rocker 1). Roeckers did not further expound on this term, however it could be inferred that the type of plays that he chooses might be suitable for all ages, it most likely would receive a "G" rating if it were a film.

Bruno Pyfferoen at Rochester Lourdes mentioned that she tends to look for a specific genre or style of show to direct. She states that she looks for “classic” shows; this is a very general term (Bruno Pyfferoen Survey). However, by referring to her list of past productions, perhaps she is referring to what she considers “American classic” drama. This can be seen with her productions of *The Crucible*, *The Miracle Worker* and *Harvey*. Bruno Pyfferoen also indicated that she looks for scripts that will “offer a challenge to young performers,” hence her production of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Sawyer also discusses the genres and types of shows he presents during a four year period. Each year the Academy of Holy Angels presents four productions and the directors “always look for one of those to address a social justice issue. This year’s [2013] production of *Hairspray* is that script” (Sawyer 1). Sawyer most likely has a specific element of social justice that he will be emphasizing in his production but the obvious social justice aspect of *Hairspray* would be the acceptance of different races and body types. He also stated that during their four year cycle, the theatre department does its best to ensure that a student has worked on “classical works, contemporary dramas and comedies, traditional Broadway musicals, newer musicals and original works” (Sawyer 1). It appears that Sawyer is doing his best to prepare his students to further their theatre knowledge before they enter their collegiate studies.

It is clear to see that the chief concern when selecting a play, for these directors, is centered on the talent pool of the returning students within their programs. Most

educational facilities practice this protocol, e.g., an institution cannot perform *Oklahoma!* unless the school already has a possible Curly. A majority of the directors also seem to place a great deal of importance on the “fun” factor. Of course one wants the students to enjoy their time working on and performing a play, that way they continually return to participate again and again. However, there still needs to be a reason for presenting a particular play, otherwise there is no point to even doing theatre (Sawyer 2). This task may be difficult for high school directors without theatre degrees, just because one participated in theatrical productions in high school or the community does not necessarily qualify him or her to direct theatre at any level.

The next question prompted the directors to list productions that he or she has directed within the last five academic years. A majority of the high schools surveyed listed non-religiously themed shows that they have produced. Some of the schools listed productions whose titles are not recognizable to a knowledgeable theatre practitioner. Perhaps these productions are original or they are from small companies that publish and sell the rights to their plays, e.g., Pioneer Drama Service.

Wiater at Rochester Lourdes has only directed a few plays over the past few years. He has directed *Exit the Body* and *Our Town* (Wiater 1). Both productions have been directed twice by Wiater within the past ten years; the first time as a student production and the second time *Exit the Body* was performed it was a staff only production and *Our Town* was remounted as a student, staff and alumni production to honor the closing of the original school location.

Academy of Holy Angels presents four shows per each academic year; therefore Sawyer was able to provide an extensive list of productions. Starting from the 2008-2009 school year the shows presented include; *Play it Again Sam*; *A Child's Prayer for Christmas*; *Sonnet: Shakespeare's Sonnets in Conversation*; *Les Miserables*; *Steel Magnolias*; *Star Child*; *The Elephant Man*; *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*; *The Glass Menagerie*; *As You Like It*; *Third*; *Curtains!*; *Much Ado About Nothing*; *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*; *Rabbit Hole*; *Hot Mikado*; *Once in a Lifetime*; *God of Carnage* (one act cutting) and *Hairspray* (Sawyer 1). There are several scripts that may be surprising to see listed as past production due to the subject matter, such as *God of Carnage*, however the school's location could offer some insight into the ability to perform shows that may be considered immoral to other Catholic high schools. Perhaps Academy of Holy Angels is more liberal than other schools surveyed.

Vincent has been directing at Cathedral High School for the past two years, but was able to include a short list of their recent productions: *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Harvey*, *Guys and Dolls*, *The King and I*, *Grease*, *Singin' in the Rain*, *The Butler Did It*, *The Pajama Game* and *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (Vincent 1-2). Some of the musicals listed here may have needed some additional cutting in order to make the show match Catholic teachings, e.g., *Grease* is full of crude language that would most likely be deemed inappropriate based on the previously listed elements that a majority of the directors tend to avoid. However, according to the contracts with the publishing house, any sort of cutting or editing is illegal due to copyright laws and the schools could

risk all persons involved with the production being held liable for the violation of breaking the contract (MTI). Vincent did not mention that she cut or changed any of her shows but it is important to remind high school directors of this contract with licensing agencies.

Cotter High School director Roeckers included a list of plays that range from well-known productions to some that are practically unrecognizable. The list includes; *Where's Charley?*, *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *Honk!*, *Seussical the Musical*, *The Loathsome Lady*, *The Ever After*, *Man of the House*, *A Family Reunion to Die For*, *Hospital Hijinks*, *Larry's Favorite Chocolate Cake*, *You Can't Be too Careful* and *Honeymoon at Graveside Manor* (Roeckers 1).

Rochester Lourdes' Bruns Pyfferoen included the entire list of productions done within the past five years. Shows that have been directed by Bruns Pyfferoen include; *The Crucible*, *Bro White and the Dwarves* (original one act), *The Good Doctor*, *Lost in the Fire* (original one act), *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Faith and Hope* (original one act), *Children of Eden*, *The Miracle Worker*, *DMV* (original one act), *Harvey*, *Deceptive Death* (original one act), *Godspell*, *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Waiting Room* (original one act). All of the original once acts were written by Bruns Pyfferoen. She also listed *Call Me Madam* and *Sunday in the Park with George*, which were both directed by the third director at Rochester Lourdes, Robert S. P. Gardner, who directs the even year musicals and teaches theology.

Donlon of Bethlehem Academy and Woodard of Sacred Heart High School are both in their first year of directing at their respective high schools. Donlon listed *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Mouse that Roared* as plays that have been performed recently. *Brigadoon*, *Into the Woods*, *Godspell* and “Plays in a Week,” a weeklong original theatre experiment akin to the popular twenty-four theatre projects in which a short play is written, rehearsed and performed within twenty-four hours, were listed as productions done within the last two years at Sacred Heart (Woodard 1). Woodard further explains that when his predecessor directed *Into the Woods* the ending of the show was changed in order to make it appropriate for a Catholic High School. The specific reasons nor what was actually changed are not mentioned in the survey in regards, however Woodard points out that changing the script is in direct violation of the contract with Musical Theatre International and he believes “if you don’t like the show’s content, don’t do it. Pick another show” (Woodard 3). He makes an important statement about the authority of the contract and one aspect that high school directors without a theatre education may not be aware of.

From the results of the survey, it appears that there are some commonly produced productions for Catholic high school. First, *Godspell* appears to be the most popular choice. Both Rochester Lourdes and Sacred Heart have performed the show and at least three other Catholic schools in the state have advertised about presenting the show this spring on their website. Another popular show is *Disney’s Beauty and the Beast*, the musical presents themes and morals that would most likely be approved by Catholic

administration, both Academy of Holy Angels and Bethlehem Academy have done the show recently. Only a few of the schools listed plays written by William Shakespeare, but the most popular of those was *Much Ado About Nothing*, presented at Academy of Holy Angels and Rochester Lourdes. Another nonmusical that has been done by Rochester Lourdes and Cathedral High School was *Harvey* (Appendix A). The repetition of these productions within Catholic communities indicates that they have been deemed appropriate by several administrations and could then be inferred to be suitable for most Catholic high schools to present.

The next question pertained to the possible influence of external community standards. Community standards can be defined as “precise or imprecise notions that govern people’s ideas about what is acceptable behavior within a specific community” (wiseGEEK). The schools are already required to prescribe to the Catholic community standards, however there may be outside communities that have influence when the school selects a play. Most directors mentioned that there are no other community standards, besides those from the Catholic Church, that they are concerned with when picking plays. Sawyer mentioned that it is important to at least consider the audience who regularly attend productions, therefore he informs the audience as to the “age appropriateness” of the production. Overall, it appears that there are no exterior community standards that affect the productions chosen.

The first five questions of the survey were meant to gather general information regarding the schools surveyed. Question six is meant to gather opinions about the

current situations regarding plays being performed at high schools and if there needs to be a form of regulation placed to restrict certain material. A majority answered in accordance with each other, that they all believe there should be some type of regulation in place. Some reasons for this restriction include the general audience, the age of the students and the maturity level of the students (Appendix A).

Vincent specifically mentions that,

Theatre can be a very morally questionable art form. Sometimes even more so than the movies. In the Catholic setting we should be careful what we are producing. I think it mostly depend[s] on the maturity of the students and the audience that will be watching. (Vincent 2)

Vincent is talking about the impact that a piece of theatre can have on an individual, how an audience member has the capability to become absorbed in the world of a play.

Therefore, it is the obligation of high school directors to select plays that will not deter the developing minds of today's youth.

Another opinion regarding restriction comes from Roeckers. He states that "if a boundary is being pushed I think there should be some reason or support for it." There is no qualification given for his use of the term "boundary," however he could be referring to schools presenting shows just for the sake of being the first to present a particular show even though the themes may be deemed "risqué" by the administration. Overall, the director needs to have an underlying reason or lesson in order to "cross the line" to present a specific show.

There was one director surveyed who disagreed with the others and believes that high school theatre should not be regulated. Woodard believes that schools should be able to present what they want, to some extent. He states that,

. . . if you (as a director/administrator/selection committee/whoever) don't like the show because it uses some "foul language" (a concept I absolutely detest) or the content is too "gruesome" (*Sweeny Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* might not fly in some schools) don't do it.

(Woodard 3)

In his opinion, expletives should not be so sensitive of an issue because when schools attempt to "cover it up" the word is still obvious. His overall point is that if a director needs to adjust a script in order to encompass the Catholic ideal it would be far easier to select a different show because there are others to choose from that will most likely present the desired subject.

The survey then posed a question in relation to a potential guideline of appropriate material and/or content regarding the play selection process that could be implemented into Catholic schools and if he or she would use the guidelines or not. The bulk of those surveyed stated that he or she would willingly utilize a set of guidelines. Some indicated that they would only use it as a guide, an assisting tool in the selection process. Wiater indicated that something like this has the possibility of being adopted by various dioceses and would therefore become enforced in the schools. Woodard stated,

Well, that depends, if I only was permitted to do certain plays from an approved list, and the list wasn't absolutely terrible, sure. If I could do musicals that people had heard of like *Godspell* or *The Pirates of Penzance* or *Beauty and the Beast* or plays such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Rumors* or *And Then There Were None*, sure, I could probably abide by that list. If that list was a list of plays that Father Jeff wrote in his spare time that were heavy handed sermons that were, at best, mildly amusing, no I could not abide by such a list. (Woodard 4)

The intentions of a list of guidelines are meant to inform one of specific elements to either do or not do. It appears as if Woodard is delving into a different form of guidance, more like dictation in which the Catholic Church would present a list of appropriate plays and all schools must present plays only from that list. This almost falls into the form of censorship from the Catholic Church that once controlled the theatre of the early twentieth century and the film industry from the 1930s to the 1950s (Appendix B). The question was meant to specifically inquire about a list of suggested material, not to create a limiting list of shows. Sawyer was the only director who said that he would not use a set of guidelines issued and gave no reasons for his answer. The overall consensus of the group shows that they would be interested in receiving a list of suitable material or themes to use as a guideline when selecting their plays.

The final question inquired if their school currently offers any type of theatre classes to their students. The majority of schools surveyed do not offer any theatre

classes. Both Bethlehem Academy and Cathedral High School did not have classes available for the 2012-2013 school year but are working to offer an introduction to theatre class for the 2013-2014 academic year. An acting and directing class has been offered in the past at Rochester Lourdes but, due to scheduling conflicts, the class is no longer offered. However, the school hopes to offer an entire theatre curriculum with the opening of their new school in the fall of 2013. Likewise, Cotter High School previously offered theatre classes but no longer does. Sacred Heart High School does not offer any classes and there is no indication that the school is working towards providing any theatre based courses in upcoming years (Appendix A).

Academy of Holy Angels offers “a complete four year theatre school within its general curriculum,” which includes introduction to theatre, classes in acting, auditioning, design, directing, dance, movement and stagecraft (Sawyer 2). The school has both a design/technical and an acting track depending on the student’s interests. Holy Angels has a rather extensive program but one must remember that Holy Angels is a school situated in the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan area so there are more resources available as opposed to the smaller Catholic schools in the more “rural” areas of Minnesota.

The results of this survey reveal that there are several extant theatre programs within the Catholic schools in Minnesota in a time when arts programs are being cut from school systems. Some schools present only one production during the academic year whereas others present at least four productions. The majority agree that there are

specific topics and themes that should be avoided due to the fact that they directly negate Catholic teachings. Plays with a Catholic plot line or contain strong Catholic moral thoughts are commonly presented. It is also apparent that the directors of these programs, mostly, would greatly appreciate having a guideline or frame of reference when selecting their plays. The survey also indicated that there is a lack of theatre classes currently being offered at the bulk of these Catholic schools.

The next step is to synthesize the data in order to create possible solutions or scenarios to combat the increasing need to have a frame of reference for Catholic high school theatre directors. Using information gathered from the surveys, a list of appropriate and inappropriate subject matter can be comprised to help assist directors to select plays that will encourage and uphold Catholic teachings.

CHAPTER III

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

Using the results of the survey, a system can be constructed to assist directors to select Catholic appropriate shows. The system can be developed from creating a list of positive and/or negative themes, lessons or morals that directors should be looking for in their plays. Another system can also be devised to help support directors who wish to present plays with thematic material by introducing a rating system inspired by the one that the Home Box Office (HBO) and other movie stations utilize.

Based on the results of the survey, one may infer that the course of action to combat the growing concern of theatre presented in Catholic high school would be to devise a form of censorship over it. In researching the history of Catholicism and the theatre, there has already been an attempt from the Catholic Church to place strict parameters on the theatre viewed by a Catholic audience. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the Catholic Theatre Movement, for example, was chiefly concerned with offering the Catholic community a list of approved plays that would not “negatively influence” young people; however the group disbanded after nearly thirty years (CTM Bulletin 15). CTM’s main goal, essentially to protect the youth, appears to be a universal goal, however the group catered to a select group, Catholics, and narrowed

that down even further to Catholics in New York City attending Broadway productions. The limited scope of their networking is one reason for the organization's downfall.

Censorship, whether for political or social reasons, is often met with criticism and revolt, neither of which would benefit the Catholic Church. The enforcement of these limiting parameters is in direct conflict with the first amendment of the United States Constitution, freedom of speech. Censorship also tends to prevent or diminish creativity, it is often used to control people and ultimately hides information from people (Pillai). Generally, censorship is viewed as a negative authority and met with unfavorable criticism and should therefore be avoided.

In order to achieve the intended goal, making high school theatre at Catholic schools appropriate for the community they serve, it must be done in a way that encourages individuals to use it. Catholic high schools want to give their students the opportunity to perform plays, but how do the directors select plays that are appropriate for their students? The survey wielded a positive response in favor of creating and using a set of guidelines. Therefore, there are two possible solutions to assist Catholic high school theatre directors in the play selection process.

Based on the answers from the surveys regarding the subjects, themes or lessons that the directors tend to avoid, a suggested list of guidelines can be composed. The document could include both positive and negative attributes that the directors should be using as qualifiers for the production he or she is interested in directing. Some of the topics that may be listed as themes to avoid are expletives, sexually suggestive dialogue,

the approval or indication of premarital sex, sexual orientation, all types of violence, suicide, racism, drug use, alcoholism, any plot line that mocks the Catholic Church or its clergy members and any other material that would be in direct violation of Catholic teachings and doctrine from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Appendix A). It is possible that some of these themes could be presented, but only if the lesson catered to the Catholic beliefs pertaining to that topic, e.g., homosexuality could be presented but only if the production presented homosexual acts in a negative light.

The contents of a guideline could also include a list of themes or lessons that are deemed appropriate for a Catholic audience. The surveys did not yield a list that could be used to create a potential list of positive themes to look for. A majority mentioned that they mainly picked shows based on the talent of their students and if the show was appropriate for Catholic teenagers without mentioning specific examples (Appendix A).

One alternative suggestion for this portion of the guideline is to include a list of shows that have been commonly done by Catholic high schools which have been well received and uphold Catholic traditional values. Some of those listed could include popular plays indicated from the survey: *Godspell*, *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Harvey* (Appendix A). Perhaps this portion could also include a list of religiously themed plays or musicals that would most likely work well at Catholic institutions because the messages of the plays tend to match the teachings of the Church, which can include supplemental information giving validity to the appropriateness of the plays.

Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Jesus Christ Superstar* would be a good example of a musical to include in this section but only if the school possesses the correct talent pool to draw from. The musicality of the show may be too taxing on the young, developing voices of teenagers. For a show that is inspired by the Bible depictions of the last days of Jesus' life, it is rare to see it performed at a Catholic high school. However, Gabriel Richard High School in Riverview, Michigan, presented the show in March of 2013, a few weeks before the celebration of Easter (Kasuba). Weber's *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* is extremely popular to perform among religious organizations due to its connection to the Biblical story of Joseph and his dreams; Academy of Holy Angels has performed this show in the past (www.ahastars.org).

Another popular composer of Christian themed musicals is Stephen Schwartz. *Children of Eden* has been presented at Catholic schools. The stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Able and Noah and the flood are commonly known within a Catholic community. The music is relatively easy, has flexible casting, includes the chance for young children to appear on stage with high school students and also presents general human emotions not necessarily connected to a Christian identity. Another musical by Schwartz, *Godspell*, inspired by the Gospel of Matthew, has been produced by many Catholic high schools; there are at least three Catholic high schools in the state of Minnesota who are currently working on this production for the spring of 2013, including Sacred Heart (Woodard 1). Similarly to *Children of Eden*, the music is enjoyable and capable for high school students to master, the many parables presented also give

students the chance to play around and to simply have fun presenting the life of Jesus via Matthew and Schwartz. Both of these shows were listed as past productions at Rochester Lourdes (Bruns Pyfferoen Survey).

If Catholic high school theatre programs are willing to adopt a set of guidelines then they should be able to present plays that are deemed appropriate according to Catholic teachings. The list should be used as a supplemental tool, something to assist in the process and to not dictate what can be performed. Offering suggestions of popular and/or religious plays can also assist in the selection process, but it should be clearly stated that these are purely suggestions and should not be inferred as rules that have to be followed.

A second proposition is inspired by the film rating system currently in place. The system originally stemmed from the Motion Picture Production Code, commonly referred to as the Hays Code, and the Catholic based Legion of Decency for their work combating the obscenity they believed was depicted on the silver screen during the 1930s. Eventually their form of censorship morphed into a system of letters that were meant to signify that only a specific age range of people should view a certain film (Appendix B). The end result was to create a voluntary system to inform parents what films they can take their children to, which are still used in today's society.

Catholic high school theatre programs could adopt their own form of rating based on the subject matter and maturity level needed to attend the shows. This system does not necessarily need to be a carbon copy of the Motion Picture Association of America's

system nor would it need to comply with the Catholic News Service's rating system (Appendix B). Both of these rating systems are meant for film; however, a classification could be set using the film rating qualifications as a guideline for theatre.

There are theatres that have begun to adopt a type of rating system over the past decade. This system is comprised of stating that this show is suitable for an indicated age and above, e.g., this production is suitable for ages thirteen and up. The Hennepin Theatre Trust Organization in Minneapolis, who operate the Orpheum, the State, the Pantages and New Century theatres, have begun to include this information in their online advertising for their Broadway touring shows that use their spaces (Hennepin Theatre Trust). A system like this exhibit's the same characteristics provided by the film industry but are rather generic.

Television has also begun to adopt various rating systems ranging from the film system to specifically stating age appropriateness. The rating system that HBO has been using for the last few years may be more appropriate in regards to the theatre. Unlike the film rating systems, this one specifically states, via a code, what "risqué" or "immoral" elements are present in the film or series. Therefore the decision is ultimately in the viewer's hands and parents are fully aware of what their child may or may not be watching. Some of the extant codes are:

"MV" for "Mild Violence"

"V" for "Violence"

"GV" for "Graphic Violence"

“AC” for “Adult Content,”

“SC” for “Strong Sexual Content”

“AL” for “Adult Language”

“GL” for “Graphic Language”

“RP” for “Rape.” (Cantor 2)

These codes may still not be enough for the Catholic community; however it is a clear starting point. Church officials could easily add codes for many of the previously mentioned topics and themes that directors tend to shy away from. For example, “RC” for racism, “PM” for premarital sex, “DU” for drug use, “AL” for alcoholism, “SO” for anything regarding sexual orientation, “AT” for items that are obviously in violation of or attacking Catholic teaching and lastly “MO” for theatre that may mock or present the Catholic Church in a negative light. Granted that these are merely suggestions and there are bound to be plenty more that could be added, but this offers a way for Catholic schools to present material that may include these elements and be able to warn their audience of the presence in the play they are about to see. By using this form of rating system, schools would be able to present shows with the artistic merit from the theatrical community without overstepping the boundaries created by Catholic teachings.

These two systems, a set of guidelines and a rating system, are possible recommendations as to what Catholic schools could implement into their theatre programs. The first suggestion is meant to be used as a supplemental tool to assist directors in the process of selecting appropriate plays. Whereas the second proposal

could be used to help Catholic schools who wish to present theatre that may be more controversial. It is the school's opportunity to counter any possible ramifications from presenting an immoral play by indicating that all patrons were made aware of the content presented in the show.

Should the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops consider enforcing schools within their dioceses to adopt a play selecting system along with their film rating system? Perhaps this is a topic that could be addressed in the future, but ultimately the decision to present a play or not should be left in the hands of the director and/or administration. Individuals working in a Catholic environment are generally aware of the higher moral code and responsibility to uphold Catholic traditions when he or she accepts the position. Laura Vincent addressed this in her survey, "I think that as directors we should be trusted enough to choose the material that we pick." Catholic school teachers, and therefore directors and coaches, are held to a higher standard because they also should be a model for their students as a person who upholds Catholic beliefs. Based on the results of the survey, a formal system would be beneficial and used by many Catholic high school theatre directors.

CHAPTER IV

CATHOLIC THEATRE IN OTHER STATES

Catholic high school theatre has been well represented in Minnesota throughout this thesis; however, it may also be pertinent to look into the theatre occurring in Catholic high schools in other states. There are examples of schools that embrace the theatre, finding morals and lessons within the piece of theatre that may be considered immoral in accordance with Catholic teachings. Then there are some schools represented that end up canceling the production due to the inappropriate material.

The Society of Jesus, more commonly known as the Jesuit order of the Roman Catholic Church, is one Catholic sect that utilizes the theatre to teach their beliefs. Established in 1540, the Jesuits were inspired by the works and teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola, who founded the order along with St. Francis Xavier.

The Jesuit community has been highly regarded for their educational skills, specifically during their “golden age” in the seventeenth century. Schools were established within a few years of the order’s inception and theatre became a central tool in education. Plays were used “to teach the vanity of worldly pursuits and the certainty of divine retribution” (Brockett 255). They also wanted to inspire the audience to humility and piety, being aware of the ever present temptations of fame and fortune. These shows were often full of spectacle and included music and ballet to help further

their message. “Performance was to be an irresistible appeal to senses and emotion rather than to intellect and reason . . . virtually hypnotized by a concerted attack of all known theatrical devices (Schnitzler 285). The shows, written by Jesuit priests and brothers, often depict a character’s reversal or eternal damnation in accordance to his actions. Jesuit schools helped to advance theatre during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and still thrive in today’s society.

Modern schools run by the Jesuit order are still educating their students and the surrounding community with their theatrical productions. Xavier High School in New York City staged a production of *The Laramie Project* by Moisés Kaufman in 2003 (Anderson). The somewhat controversial play regarding the hate-crime murder of Matthew Shepard, a homosexual college student in 1998 in Laramie, Wyoming, is a show that one might not equate with being performed in a Catholic school. Brother Derby, the director of the play, said that,

[the play] focused as it is on the issue of intolerance . . . [demonstrates] the dangerous degree to which prejudices—in this case, those surrounding sexual orientation—can explode with devastating force if they remain unexamined. (Anderson)

The goal was to teach students to respect and understand diversity regarding race, culture and especially sexual orientation.

To combat potential controversy and backlash from the community, a letter was sent to all parents, informing them of the sensitive nature of the production. Xavier High

School only received one anonymous complaint from a parent. The production was a success; in fact the High School remounted the play 2010.

An original cast member of the 2003 production, George M. Anderson, the author of an article in America regarding the presentation of this play, said that “the lesson might be described as the need to respect diversity throughout all levels of society.” It appears that Xavier High School is one of the few Catholic institutions who are willing to be more progressive and stay in step with modern society.

Perhaps other Catholic institutions who wish to present topics that have been deemed immoral or inappropriate could follow Xavier High School’s example and send out letters to all parents regarding the controversial topic. This may or may not “solve” the issue nor will it necessarily prevent any parents from issuing complaints, but at least the school is able to inform the parents and open a dialogue about the subject matter of the play.

Another example of a Catholic high school presenting a potentially controversial play occurred in Salt Lake City, Utah. In the fall of 2009, Judge Memorial Catholic High School presented *RENT: School Edition* undeterred by criticism from the Catholic community. The school edition of *RENT* does not include the song “Contact,” most of the foul language has been eliminated or changed, and some of the keys are altered to make it easier for a teenage voice. A few priests in the area attacked the school for presenting such a “morally destructive” play that is “initiating young people into the unseemly subculture and fetishes of the homosexualist movement” (Moulton). Even

though a majority of the components that would make the show “risqué” have been removed, the Catholic community surrounding Judge Memorial Catholic High School still did not approve of the show being presented at a Catholic institution.

Upon the request of the Bishop of the Diocese of Salt Lake City, the superintendent of schools for the diocese, Sister Catherine Kamphaus, looked into the production. Sister Kamphaus stated that “there is absolutely nothing that would be offensive . . . it wasn’t condoning the gay and lesbian lifestyle . . . the play shows friends forming a loving and caring community while facing AIDS and other challenges” (Moulton). The high school planned to use the show as a way to teach about compassion for the outcasts, the sick and the hopeless. Principal Rick Bartman also joined Sister Kamphaus in validating the importance of presenting the production. Bartman expressed that “it discusses issues of homelessness, community, helping each other, helplessness and hopelessness . . . we felt it was a good, teachable moment for our kids” (Moulton). He also mentioned that he had received complaints from the Catholic community but that none of those complaints came from any students or parents. Regardless of the complaints from clergy, the school presented the musical. It appeared as though the school was able to teach their valuable lesson of acceptance by presenting a supposed controversial play.

The success seen by Xavier High School and Judge Memorial Catholic High School prove that Catholic schools have the ability to present controversial plays. If the school states specific reasons for the production to be done, to teach specific traditional

Catholic values, then the school should be able to present the show without much resistance from Catholic officials. However, there needs to be a specific protocol set in place so schools can inform the general public of these controversial elements.

Catholic high schools who want to present plays that do not correspond to Catholic ideals appear to not receive the opportunity to do so. They could be told “no” by administration initially, parents could voice their concerns or the diocese that administers to that school could force the school to cancel the production. If a system is in place to combat the potential onslaught of concerned parents and if the theatre department can include viable reasons to present the “controversial” production, then the high school should be able to present the show. Perhaps situations like this could open a dialogue within the Catholic community regarding topics of an immoral nature in order to further understand the church’s stance or to even inspire the students to make his or her own opinions.

There have also be circumstances when directors have attempted to present plays with thematic elements that go against Catholic teaching and tend to be met with concern from school officials or the diocese. A Catholic high school in New Jersey was instructed to close their production due to the subject matter of the show. Notre Dame High School in Bowling, New Jersey, was set to present *The Laramie Project* during the spring of 2012. The choice to perform this play, which had been approved by president Berry Breen and principal Mary Ivins, stated that,

[The play is] a powerful and appropriate vehicle to address issues of respect and tolerance. But as calls questioning the play's content rolled in, officials worried that the controversy would become distracting, and the decision was made Tuesday [March 20, 2012] to cancel the show. The expression of these concerns opened our eyes to the realization that different eyes will see radically different messages than the ones we intended. (Duffy)

There was an overwhelming concern coming from the surrounding Catholic community and from a select group of parents. It was therefore decided that the most appropriate action would be to cancel the production.

Many of the students who were involved with *The Laramie Project* were saddened by the abrupt cancellation of the spring production. Notre Dame High School senior Tess Holtenrichs said,

I wanted to do a show that had meaning and purpose to it and when I found out we were doing *The Laramie Project* I got really excited because this show teaches the values I've been taught my last 12 years of Catholic education . . . my director, Ms. (Diane) Wargo, said something pretty powerful . . . She said Jesus didn't die on the cross for us to have so many rules about who to love and how to love. I thought that was great.
(Duffy)

Holtenrichs does not specifically mention what “values” she is referring to, but the article does mention that the students at Notre Dame High School are taught tolerance and respect for everyone regardless of their personal choices. Additionally, junior Kim Woodstock posed the question “if students can handle something like this, why can’t the parents?” (Duffy). It is clear to see by the response of these two teenagers that they were able to grasp the lessons mentioned by the school administrators.

Even though the main endorsement for the cancellation of *The Laramie Project* came from parents, there were still some parents who supported the production. Alumni of Notre Dame High School and parent of a current student, Diane Steinberg wrote in a letter to Breen and Ivins,

I think the people had the assumption that the play was going to do something it never would have done, to encourage students to become homosexuals instead of not killing homosexuals . . . the school missed the chance to turn any controversy into a teachable moment . . . Allow the play to go forward, and also allow a nonartistic forum to discuss the Catholic Church and GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) people. Can the presentation of the play be accompanied by a speaker or speakers that present Catholic teaching on human sexuality? (Duffy)

Based on the comments from both students and parents it is clear to see that the intended presentation of *The Laramie Project* was welcomed by those who adhered to the Catholic

teachings of intolerance and respect. It was the outpour of people regarding the homosexual aspects of the show that ultimately cancelled the production.

Notre Dame High School did not receive the same support for their production of *The Laramie Project* as Xavier High School had. Perhaps the cancelling of the production would not have happened had some sort of system been in place to combat concern from the Catholic community. By utilizing the second system proposed, stating what inappropriate elements were going to be featured in the show, Notre Dame High School might have been able to present their production.

The enforcement a diocese has over a Catholic school, to some extent, is a viable chain of command. After all, public schools must adhere to the city's school board and any form of superintendent set to govern all schools within a district. However, there have been situations when a diocese has governed the performances of a non-Catholic theatre company.

In Lansing, Michigan, a production was cancelled at Lansing Catholic Central High School due to the subject matter. The Lansing Civic Players, a theatre group not linked to the Catholic Church, were using the stage at the high school to present *Breaking the Code* (National Catholic Reporter 2002).

The play was written by Hugh Whitmore in 1986 and chronicles the life of Alan Turing. Turing was a British mathematician who helped break Nazi codes during WWII among other mathematical and scientific breakthroughs. He was a closeted homosexual until a former lover divulged Turing's sexual orientation to the British government. At

the time homosexual acts were illegal in Great Britain. In 1952, Turing was convicted and chose to receive hormonal injections to suppress his urges. He passed away two years later from cyanide poisoning (Hodges).

The play has a central theme of homosexuality which is the main reason that the Diocese of Lansing told the Civic Players that they could not perform a show of that nature on school grounds. There was also support for the production from a local gay rights group and this “was not only an embarrassment to the Diocese, but an affront to the Catholic school teachings” according to a spokesman for the diocese (National Catholic Reporter 2002). Unlike Xavier High School who embraced the opportunity to present a contentious topic in a positive way, Lansing Catholic Central High School officials stuck to the traditional Catholic belief that homosexuality is a sin.

The Lansing Civic Players were using the theatre on the grounds of a Catholic high school. Does that give the diocese the right to cancel a production because it did not meet Catholic teachings? The answer to this question is yes, the Diocese of Lansing does have the legal right to cancel the production because the Players were using the diocese’s property. A contract had to have been signed which would give the diocese legal determination over the productions presented on their stage. The Lansing Civic Players were most likely aware of the fact that their production should uphold Catholic traditions therefore they should have selected a production that would have adhered to the community standards. This situation may not seem “fair” but legal contracts trump societal norms.

The Catholic Church, it appears, is still attempting, on occasion, to censor productions presented at Catholic educational establishments. Theatre programs have had productions stopped due to the show representing thematic elements that are in direct violation of Catholic beliefs stemming from The Catechism of the Catholic Church. This leads to questions regarding the authority of a diocese or affiliated group to stop or protest the presentation of these plays. They have the constitutional right to protest and due to the Catholic school's affiliation with the Catholic Church, they maintain some authority over what occurs within the school systems in their diocese.

These schools that are still receiving backlash from Church officials help to prove that there needs to be some sort of change. There appears to be a growing desire for Catholic schools to step over the boundary of what has previously been deemed as safe and explore productions that are meant to strike up dialogues about controversial topics in today's society. This desire tends to come from the students, select groups of parents and often the director(s) of the theatre program, but they are met with negative responses from school administration and on occasion the diocese will intervene. If Catholic high school theatre departments want to present "controversial" plays there needs to be an understanding and compromise set between the department and those in authority as to how these topics can be presented in a safe, educational and sacred manner. This change can be implemented in various ways; either the guideline or rating system could be proposed changes and offer ways to accommodate all needs.

In conclusion, the survey, sent to two thirds of the Catholic high schools in the state of Minnesota revealed that there is a need for a system to assist in the play selection process. The survey was meant to ascertain information regarding the play selection process, which seems to consist of seeking approval from the school's administration. It also indicated that there is currently no system that has been implemented from the school's diocese.

The survey also inquired about any themes or subjects that the directors would refrain from presenting on their stage. From that information, a generalized list of topics that do not directly reflect Catholic teachings was comprised. This list then created the foundation for a suggested list of guidelines that directors could use as a supplemental material when selecting plays. A list of guidelines has been proposed as one possible way to ensure that Catholic high schools are choosing appropriate plays for a Catholic audience. Ultimately, a majority of those surveyed indicated that they would be willing to use a guideline administered from their diocese or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The second proposal dealt with a rating system. The system would be used to specifically state what types of thematic elements would be present in the play being performed. Using this type of informational tool could allow Catholic schools to produce "controversial" plays because they are explicitly stating what it is the patron is about to see. The school may also need to give some justifications with some type of moral or

social lesson(s) linked to Catholic teachings in order to further prove the worth of the production.

Conclusively, the surveys yielded a response similar to the hypothesis that the researcher made regarding the current conditions surrounding the plays presented at Catholic high schools. Through the answers from established and novice Catholic high school theatre directors it is clear to see that there is a need for the Catholic community, from clergy or laity, to develop a system to assist in the play selection process or to devise a rating system to justify the presentation of plays deemed inappropriate via Catholic doctrine.

APPENDIX A

SURVEYS

John Wiater – Rochester Lourdes High School

Gregg Sawyer – Academy of Holy Angels

Laura Vincent – Cathedral High School

Mark Roeckers – Winona Cotter High School

Mary Bruns Pyfferoen – Rochester Lourdes High School

Angela Wagner Donlon – Bethlehem Academy

Marcus Woodard – Sacred Heart High School

1. What is your school's protocol regarding play selection?

The people who have directed plays at Lourdes have generally told the administration what play they would like to do. If it is unfamiliar, the administration is asked to read the play and respond.

The Artistic Director makes the final selection up consultations with the design team.

I as the director will generally come up with a selection of shows and a description and we have a meeting with the principal and other

administration that is involved. As a group we narrow it down and generally I have the final say.

There is no protocol that I know of. The decision is mine.

Play selection is chosen by the director and presented to administration for approval. The protocol is really non-existent. I told the Principal what play I wanted to do, he spoke to the School board and they denied my request. I did this 3 times until I suggested a play that was approved.

As far as I know, there isn't a formal method for selecting plays or musicals. I should say however, that I came to this job as a respondent to an advertisement in the local newspaper, The Grand Forks Herald. I came to the job in I believe early September (of 2012) with a play already scheduled for that November, before a new Drama Director was named, and was beginning student teaching, so my availability was limited. In consultation with the principal, we decided that a scripted play would not be a good idea, so I devised a show, based off of something I had done in college that was met with some success, namely a 24 Hour Play Festival, plays written, directed, teched in one day. Except given the nature of the high school schedule, it was expanded to one week, rather than 24 hours. The next semester's show (The show I am currently

working on) could be a bit more demanding and involved, since I would only be working full time at a gas station. There had been some requests from students to do a musical. My predecessor (who only stepped down so that she could focus raising a family), had only done musicals every other year, last year (2011-2012) being the musical *Brigadoon*. Since there had been some demand for a musical, and in my working with the students the previous semester, I felt that not doing a musical would be a waste of some really good talent, so, I then asked the principal if I could be approved from a financial standpoint for a musical, given that musicals cost more than plays for royalties. Getting that permission, I then thought about what musical I could do. I needed something that offered quite a few featured roles, and since Sacred Heart was no exception to most high schools, offered sizable female singing roles. I had a short list, namely *Pippin*, and *Godspell*. I ultimately chose *Godspell*, given its limited needs for sets and costumes, and given that the music isn't incredibly difficult.

1a. Do you have restrictions from administration?

Generally not, as long as the play does not go against the Vision and

Mission statements of the school.

No, generally speaking, I am charged with making these decisions. If I feel that a script under consideration needs administration review and consult, then I bring it to them.

I do have some restrictions as far as appropriateness and things of that nature.

The restriction I go by is thinking if it is appropriate for a Catholic school to do the show. So I limit myself by sexual situations and violence and such.

There are no written restrictions at this time.

no response from Donlon

I believe (I haven't tried to do anything too outrageous), that such restrictions ultimately lie with the principal, but since I haven't done anything (or tried to do anything) that 'controversial', I haven't known of any formal restrictions. If you mean, there is a great big list of 'Can't's' like kissing, pre-marital sexual relationships, language, etc., that list has not been shown to me.

1b. Does the Diocese have any influence or guidelines in your play selection process?

Not usually.

No

This is my second year here and I have not heard of any guidelines given directly or indirectly from the Diocese, although, the administration might hear from them.

No

Not directly

None of which I am aware

I would imagine that if The Diocese had any objections to a show agreed upon by me and the administration that they would have final say over the issues, but again, I have not attempted to do anything controversial, and I haven't asked for their approval (My principal has never told me to ask for it, so I merely assume he has taken care of it, if he needs to.)

2. Are there any subjects that you, as director/coordinator, deem inappropriate?

Again, it is pretty wide open as long as we do not go against the missions statements.

There are some shows that I feel can wait for students to perform. I would feel this way regardless of our Catholic identity. (*Cabaret*, *Chicago*, *Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, for example) I do not believe that students should be put into situations that make them uncomfortable. They wish to please

the directing team, the directing team needs to be aware of that power instilled in them in all decisions that are made surrounding a production.

Yes, I look for shows that have redeeming qualities to them. I try to avoid shows that are about senseless violence, overtly sexual, have a immoral quality to them or communicate anything that would be against biblical standards. Generally I look for upbeat positive morals and themes.

I tend to avoid shows that would have too suggestive of dialogue and am careful about appropriate language. I try to pick shows that are family friendly.

Sexually explicit topics, excessive language, sensitive topics (rape, suicide, racism)

At a school such as Bethlehem Academy, I would shy away from the subjects of sex, sexual orientation and any subjects that are in direct conflict of what the Roman Catholic Church teaches.

NOTE: I would not put on plays where any of these three were in any way shown or discussed to the extent of being either the main or a sub plot. The mere mention of such things, depending on the context, would not necessarily preclude me.

Well, I certainly do not want to blatantly conflict with Catholic

teachings. However, I think that there are some issues that can be talked about. I would have no objection to directing *Jesus Christ Superstar* in a Catholic school. I know that there are some issues that some Catholics have, but that's just it, SOME Catholics. I certainly wouldn't want to do the new musical *Bare*, due to its blasting of The Catholic Church on gay issues. But, the fact that *Bare* is in conflict with The Catholic Church is not my primary reason for not doing it. I wouldn't choose to do it because there aren't the resources to 'do it right' at my school. I don't have a band capable of pulling off the score, the sets, etc. I suppose you could say, when it comes to plays and musicals that approach controversial themes, I would be more inclined to do them than not, unless they were just way too controversial, but I would find reasons other than their controversy to not do them. We are a small school that doesn't have a lot in the way of a scene shop, sound system, lighting system, etc. When it comes to swearing, drinking, drug use, no, I personally have no issues like that. My principal swears, I have on occasion sworn in front of students (apologizing of course). The

school is situated across the river (literally) from Grand Forks, ND, which is home to one of the Top 5 Binge Drinking Schools in the country (University of North Dakota) and the town as a whole has a bit of a reputation for binge drinking. I think that a little drunkenness is not going to be new to many students, either from witnessing it, or from personal experience. Drug use is a sad, but harsh reality of life, and there aren't a lot of plays where the drug addict has a happy ending, so explicitly teaching kids that drug use is bad seems, to me, unnecessary.

3. Are there any themes, lessons or morals that you look for in the productions your school presents?

Personally, I am not too heavy on those. I like to do comedies and let the audience just sit and relax and have a good time.

We do four shows a year and we always look for one of those to address a social justice issue. This year's production of Hairspray is that script.

I look for anything that has positivity spoken throughout the show. I have done productions that have had some negative themes but they will always have a positive lesson to be learned.

At this point I haven't picked any shows for their lessons or morals.

I have looked for “classics” either by author or genre. I also look for scripts that offer a challenge to young performers.

(no response from Donlon)

I don't look for specific morals in plays. I think that when I choose plays

I consider the talent I have to work with. Ie, for a musical, I think of musicals that have small casts, limited sets and costumes, etc. I believe that any theme that can be dealt with in a play has merit, and I don't see why one theme is better than any other.

Can we not learn the same good Catholic values in *Godspell* as we could in *Avenue Q*? (A stretch I know, but go with me on this.) In *Godspell*, Jesus says (I am paraphrasing) that we should leave tomorrow's problems for tomorrow. I believe that this is epitomized in the song from *Avenue Q* entitled “For Now”. So why is one better?

4. Please list all productions performed within the past five years.

Our Town, Exit the Body, and You Can't Take it With You.

2012-13: *Once in a Lifetime; God Of Carnage* (One Act Cutting);

Hairspray 2011-12: *Much Ado About Nothing; Haroun and the*

Sea of Stories; Rabbit Hole; Hot Mikado 2010-11: *The Glass*

Menagerie; As You Like It; Third; Curtains! 2009-10: *Steel*

Magnolias; Star Child; The Elephant Man; Disney's Beauty and the Beast 2008-2009: Play it Again, Sam; A Child's Prayer for Christmas; Sonnet: Shakespeare's Sonnets in Conversation; Les Miserables

Bye Bye Birdie, Harvey, Guys and Dolls, King and I, Grease, Singin' In The Rain, The Butler Did It, The Pajama Game, All I Really Need To Know I Learned in Kindergarten

Where's Charley?, You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown, Meet Me in St. Louis, Honk!, Seussical, The Loathsome Lady, The Ever After, Man of the House, A Family Reunion to Die For, Hospital Hijinx, Larry's Favorite Chocolate Cake, You Can't Be Too Careful, Honeymoon at Graveside Manor

The Crucible, Bro White and the Dwarves (One Act), Our Town, The Good Doctor, Lost in the Fire (One Act), Call Me Madam, Much Ado About Nothing, Faith and Hope (One Act), Children of Eden, Miracle Worker, DMV (One Act), Sundays in the Park with George, Harvey, Deceptive Death (One Act), Godspell, The Diary of Anna Frank, The Waiting Room (One Act)

Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast, Mouse that Roared

Godspell, Plays in a Week, Into the Woods

4a. Are there any specific elements prompted you to select any of these plays?

Comedy and Appropriateness.

By the time a student has completed four years at AHA, we try ensure that they have done classic works, contemporary dramas and comedies, traditional Broadway musicals, newer musicals, and original works. The ability of the students at the time, the cast size within a particular season, audience appeal and gender balance all play a part in the season selection.

I chose *Grease* and *Singin' In The Rain*. *Grease* because I knew it would be a really great seller and I would have a good turnout. I also chose *Singin' in the Rain* because I really like it and we had the right kids for it. I generally choose shows based on the students/talent that we have in the school.

In picking a show I look for shows that I think that the audience would enjoy and the cast would have a good time performing in. I have a tendency to pick comedies much more frequently than dramas.

I have looked for "classics" either by author or genre. I also look for scripts that offer a challenge to young performers.

This is my first year here as Director. The prior plays were selected by other directors.

I spoke briefly about why I chose what I did. I was under narrow time

constraints due to my student teaching obligations, and I took the job with a play already schedule for a particular weekend, so I had to do something that weekend, and the 24 Hour Play Festivals I had participated in my undergraduate seemed to work well to a limited time frame

5. Do the external “standards” of the community surrounding the school have any influence on play selection?

No

To an extent. It would be foolish not to take into consideration of your audience who supports the program. Having said that, not every play we do is for everyone. We try in as much as we can to alert our audiences to age appropriateness of any show.

Yes. I try to make my list of potential shows based on the standards set by the school and my superiors and then I narrow it based on things more currently relevant to the students.

I would say that the standards of the school have more influence over the selections than that of the community.

Not usually, there are 3 public high schools in town that offer 1 production a year. They have different budgets and charge to participate (we do not).

I am new to this community, as well as the school, but I believe there is a generally conservative nature in the community.

I don't think so. I feel like I am somewhat 'getting away' with something, because I feel my predecessor chose some shows she did not have the resources to do. (*Brigadoon* or *Into the Woods* with no pit orchestra, just a Clavinova. I mean, who does that? That to me is blasphemy) I am having a full pit for my current production of *Godspell* (Only three instruments, but still). That is a big deal here. I bought the rights to use the *Godspell* logo which hasn't been done before, that is a big deal. And I just graduated from college with two degrees in Theatre and English Education. I think that there are some people who just want to see what I can do when I have the ball. On a side note, back to the *Into The Woods* example, my predecessor rewrote the ending, because it was deemed too inappropriate for Catholic High School Students. Ignoring the fact that MTI (the licensing agent) absolutely does not allow this, it seems to me that if you don't like the shows content, don't do it. Pick another show. There are literally dozens out there. When it comes to my production of *Godspell*, I can't imagine anything they would get upset by. If they can find something objectionable in *Godspell*, I think that it

would be something so narrow and esoteric, that I wouldn't give it much thought.

6. Do you think that high school theatre, either public or private, should be restricted in any way? If so, why?

I think private school productions need to respect the vision and mission statements of the school. I feel public schools have a little more leeway, but still need to remember audience and age group.

Yes. I think we as educators must be very careful in our selection of shows. If a school is going to do *Rent*, for example, it should be done because it is artistically right for the moment, good for the school community, advances the school's mission, and is educationally sound. All too often, I am afraid, shows are picked because the director wants to shock or prove a point or be the "first high school" to do a particular title. As the president of the Minnesota Educational Theater Association, I am often asked to consult a director who is having issues with script selection. Most of the time, I have found that the reason there is resistance to their selection is that they have been able to justify the script beyond the mere "I really like the show". Not good enough in

my opinion. There are many shows I would love to direct. *Cabaret* is one of them. I do not think it is appropriate to put young women (or young men, for that matter) in the kinds of costuming necessary to do the show justice. The same is true of *Chicago*. That does mean a high school can't do sophisticated work; our show list over the years proves that; it simply means that the director must be sure as to the community standards and the reasons behind the decisions made. (clearly I could write an essay on this topic!)

Yes. Theatre can be a very morally questionable art form. Sometimes even more so than the movies. In the Catholic setting we should be careful what we are producing. I think it mostly depends on the maturity of the students and the audience that will be watching. I take all that into account when choosing a show.

I do think that some restrictions are acceptable in both private and public schools. Some material is definitely not meant for high school productions. If a boundary is being pushed I think there should be some reason or support for it.

Restricted to the extent that the age of the performers needs to be considered and that adult themes are not appropriate for a high school setting.

Yes. Each school should produce shows based on their best judgment about what the community would respond to favorably, as well as make decisions based on whatever (if any) goal they might have in producing a particular show (to make a statement, etc.). Not really. Going back to my example about high school theatre, if you (as a director/administrator/ selection committee/whoever) don't like the show because it uses some "foul language" (a concept I absolutely detest) or the content is too "gruesome" (*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* might not fly in some schools,) don't do it. There's enough out there to pick from. Were show selection up to me, I wouldn't balk at some cursing. Fuck, shit, nigger, etc. are all words. And the cover ups don't fool anyone. Saying "The N Word," doesn't fool anyone into thinking "Neighbor" or "Necktie" and I have almost no patience for those that think it is somehow "OK" because you've taken away most of the word in question. Now, I might decline on doing such a show due to technical reasons, or audiences may not want to come, but if I believe in the show and I got a green light, I would do it. I would love to do *The Laramie Project* in a public school, and if The Westboro Baptists came, I would consider it a victory. There is a great play out there by Stephen

Adly Giurgis called *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* where various historical figures question how evil Judas Iscariot was. Not only does it provide nearly theological debate, but secular debate as well on (among many other things) treatment of mental illness, fate, etc.

7. If there was a guideline of appropriate material and/or content regarding play selections for Catholic high schools, would you use it?

I think I would have to.

No.

I would definitely use it depending on how restrictive it was. I think that as directors we should be trusted enough to choose the material that we pick, but I would most definitely use the guideline as an assistance to what I choose, to help me along in the process.

I would probably use it as a guide. I would think that all of the selections I have made to date would be acceptable by any guide I would be given.

Yes, they could be helpful in choosing productions.

Yes.

Well, that depends, if I only was permitted to do certain plays from an approved list, and the list wasn't absolutely terrible, sure. If I could do musicals that people had heard of like *Godspell* or *The*

Pirates of Penzance or *Beauty and The Beast* or plays such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Rumors* or *And Then There Were None*, sure, I could probably abide by that list. If that list was a list of plays that Father Jeff wrote in his spare time that were heavy handed sermons that were, at best, mildly amusing, no I could not abide by such a list. But for a theoretical list of guidelines, it seems to me that such things are pretty flimsy. What defines “good Catholic lessons,” please refer to my earlier *Avenue Q* example.

8. Does your school offer any theatre classes? If so, what?

We did, but scheduling time became more difficult as students needed to meet other requirements. With the new school we hope to offer more options.

Academy of Holy Angels has a four-year theater school within its general curriculum. It includes three levels of Acting (One: contemporary scene study; Two: Shakespeare; Three; Advanced scene study focusing on pre-21st century literature.) Audition Techniques, Theater Design, Introduction to Theater, Introduction to Directing, Art and Society (a humanities class)

Dance and Movement, and Stagecraft.

It will next year. It will offer a very general theatre class for students wanting to be more involved and learn more about theatre in general.

We have in the past but not at the present time.

I do not teach at the high school.

Currently, no. However, the curriculum will be re-formed and the committee is considering a general Theater or 'Intro to Theater' class either next year or in the near future.

It does not.

APPENDIX B

CATHOLICISM AND FILM CENSORSHIP

Censorship has always been a topic of much dispute. A community rarely thrives under a government run as a dictatorship. Ultimately, the art and the people suffocate due to the strict set of rules dictated to govern society. The importance of the Catholic Church and film censorship, specifically with the Hays Code and Legion of Decency, is important to look at because their initial aims and concerns are still present in today's society.

As Hollywood grew in popularity, there was a general concern from the Catholic community over the content of the films shown in movie theatres. Film impacts a greater audience than theatre, therefore providing some sort of censorship seemed like a natural step. The Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America, Incorporated (MPPDA) president Will Hays adapted a set of laws that were to "establish and maintain the highest possible moral and artistic standards of motion picture production" (Maltby 558). Hays was greatly influenced by Martin Quigley, a Catholic laity who owned Herald, and Father Daniel A. Lord who created "the Cardinal's Code," which was essentially a list of "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" for the Catholic film viewer (Walsh 60).

In March 1930 the Association of Motion Picture Producers, Incorporated and the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Incorporated formally systemized

the Motion Picture Production Code, more commonly known as the Hays Code. There are three general principles that this code adheres to,

1. No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirement, shall be presented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation. (Bynum)

Taking these general ideals, they then proceed to develop rules under specific areas of concern; e.g., crime, sex, vulgarity, dances, religion and repellent subjects. The code emphasizes the fact that films are a form of entertainment and should be thought of as a piece of art. The film industry had become the art of the masses due to its ability to reach a multitude of people at once, therefore the only step to take to ensure the morality of America was to govern the films being produced.

The Hays Code appeared to be successful but the Catholic community feared that the movie moguls would eventually stray from the path of morality. Archbishop of Cincinnati John Timothy McNicholas formed the Legion of Decency in 1934 as a “pressure group [to] condemn indecent and immoral motion pictures” and McNicholas specifically stated that, “we are not fussy and narrow about entertainment. We have not objected to many things that have worried other people, but in this matter where we touch youth, we feel that we must act to save them” (“Changing”). It appears as if the group

only wanted to protect the youth from becoming privy to immoral behaviors depicted on the silver screen, which on the surface gives the indication of a righteous cause.

Parishioners across the United States were encouraged by their parish priests to boycott immoral films and to participate in a yearly pledge said during the mass, which increased the membership of the Legion of Decency. The Legion strictly promoted movies that depicted “an honest picture of life” (Blanshard 500). Films with plots regarding unnatural occurrences, not of the “natural” world, were often categorized as being immoral or improper for the Catholic community to view.

A major shift in the Legion of Decency and the Hays Code came with the expansion and accessibility of television. Television was governed under stricter laws than film and with the convenience of viewing from the comfort of their own home Americans were not as apt to attend movie theatres. In order to compete with the growing popularity of television, movie companies began to stray from the Hays Code in order to offer “something different” for the masses. Movie studios began to release pictures without the authority of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), which meant that enforcing the Hays Code had become virtually impossible. Hays retired from his position in 1945 and created the MPAA, who overtook the control of deeming a movie acceptable or not. In 1952, the Supreme Court interceded and declared that film was a form of expression and was therefore protected by the First Amendment (MPAA.org).

The MPAA saw the decline and began working on a system to grade movies based on the content of the film. November of 1968 saw the abandoning of the Hays Code and the adoption of a rating system (Jeff). The original rating system, developed by the Classification and Rating Administration (CARA), contained four categories; G, M, R or X. Over the years there have been a few modifications and inclusion of additional categories. In 1972, M was replaced by PG, the need for a level between PG and R was apparent which added PG-13 in 1984 and in 1990 the X rating was abandoned and replaced with NC-17 (MPAA.org). The adoption of a film rating system seemed to be very beneficial and is still in use today.

The Legion of Decency also foresaw a change in the power they held over the American Catholic public. The group had often boycotted a film, which tended to equal a film's failure, but these boycotts began to decline and have little control over what the public was going to see. This eventually led to several rules of the Hays Code being rewritten to remain in congruence with the progressive change around them (Schumach 163-164). With these changes came a new way to view the purpose of the Legion of Decency. Pope Pius XIII, in 1957, suggested that the Legion change to a body that was "more concerned with encouraging good movies than condemning bad ones" ("Changing"). This led to Church officials strongly encouraging their congregations to attend one film over the other.

With the disbanding of the Hays Code and the integration of the rating system, the Legion of Decency felt the need to create their own system. The rating system began

with four categories; “A1 for general audiences, A-II for adults and adolescents only, B was objectionable in part for all and C was considered to be condemned,” and in 1965 two more categories were added “A-III for adults only and A-IV for adults with reservations [also] dubbed ‘the thinking man’s category’” (Changing). By using their own system, Catholic officials were still able to maintain control over movies seen by those in the Catholic Community.

The Motion Picture Association of America, Incorporated (MPAA) currently oversees the rating of films. Many changes have occurred since its inception in 1968, including the change of classification names, inclusion of new levels and defining what each letter actually means. The system is still used today by many Hollywood production companies.

The rating system first introduced by the Legion of Decency in 1968 is also used today. The Catholic rating classification is now controlled by the Catholic News Service (CNS) under the direct control of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). There are also a few general subject areas that help CNS decide on a film's rating. They take into account the negative behavior or moral actions of a character versus the larger context of the action in the film. Thus, asking if the director is glorifying the behavior or if it is a necessary plot point in order to move the story along. Another topic that is closely looked at is human sexuality. Displaying images “like abortion and euthanasia, premarital sexual encounters, non-marital cohabitation, adulterous relationships, homosexual activity, artificial birth control and masturbation,”

have been documented as normative behaviors, however the Catholic Church strongly discourages the viewing of films with any of these acts because they are in direct violation of Catholic teachings (uscgb.org). Lastly, they take caution with films pertaining to Catholic ideology, and films that portray the Church or clergy in a negative light are intently considered. Based on these basic criteria, the CNS further expounds on five classifications for films.

The first classification is the “A-I” rating, indicating that the film is for “general patronage.” This does not indicate that the film is necessarily for children, it implies that the film meets the requirements set during the Hays Code days of Hollywood. “Adults and adolescents”, or “A-II,” is the next level and was original meant for older teenagers. Both of these first two classes will rarely feature images of “nudity, overt sexual activity, bloody violence or the use of foul language” (uscgb.org). Thirdly is “A-III,” which is for “adults” only. CNS understands that adults have varying tolerance levels of risqué subject matter and that, on occasion, films with this rating may be suitable for older teenagers, which will be noted in the review from the CNS. Films fall under this category for their inclusion of language, sexuality, violence and questioning of religious infallibility. The next level “L,” replaced the “A-IV” rating in 2003, is clarified as films for a “limited adult audience, films whose problematic content many adults would find troubling.” Films in this class usually are placed here due to their nudity, sex, violence, language or moral dilemmas that are to only be viewed by those sure of their faith. These films are generally very gritty but do not risk any wayward behavior. The final

classification from the CNS is “O” which refers to movies that are “morally offensive” due to the central themes of euthanasia, abortion, suicide, adultery, sexuality, homosexuality, vigilant killing, revenge, excessive language and other forms of non-stop vulgarity. Regardless of the artistic merit or critical acclaim for a film, it will be placed in this category for directly opposing the Catholic Church’s stance on specific topics. Majority of practicing Catholics are unaware that this system of film classifications is even in existence and readily available. Within the last five years, several Catholic school systems have been instructed by their diocese to refer to this list when selecting films to show in their classrooms.

The use of the current rating systems has become so entrenched in modern culture that majority of citizens do not recognize it as a form of censorship. Both groups aim at protecting youth from viewing imagery and themes that are far too mature for their age. The CNS also strives to help adults select films based on Catholic teachings. Adopting their rating criteria is not a requirement. Perhaps the basic principles and areas of concern can cross-over into the realm of theatre, specifically with productions produced in the Catholic high schools of the United States.

APPENDIX C

MAPS OF CITIES

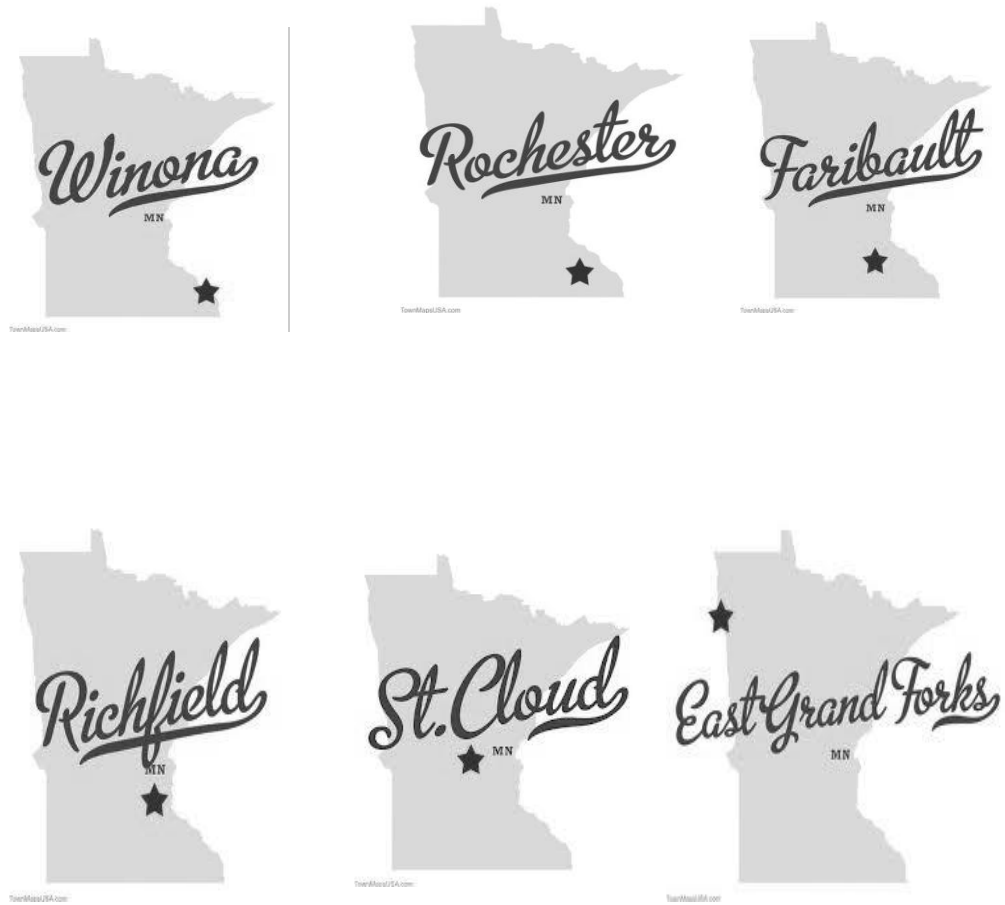


Fig. 4. Maps. Images from TownMapsUSA.com

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[believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/epub/index.cfm#](http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/epub/index.cfm#)>. 29

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