

A Special Theater For Special Children

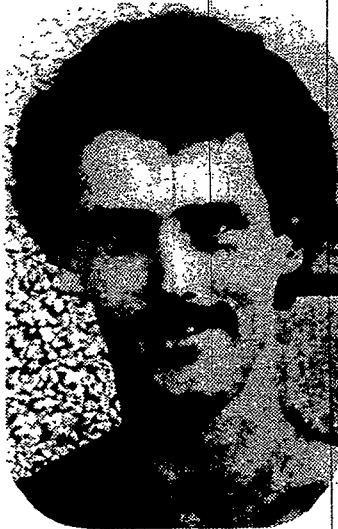
By JOHN DASH

Students at the School of the Holy Childhood had a treat a weekend ago when they participated in a unique program staged by Theater for Special Audiences (TSA), a student-funded group from SUC Brockport.

The troupe of TSA presented "The Mirror Man," an "audience participation" play by British writer Brian Way.

The troupe, which includes students Helen Henry, Linda Shirey, Daniel Conway, Emily Conable, Cameron Murray, and Michael Sheeran, performed under the direction of Ann Hartegen for 22 special audiences this Spring. Sheeran, who played the role of the narrator for The Mirror Man, estimates that more than 2,000 developmentally handicapped children saw the play.

Sheeran explained that the story-line to The



SHEERAN

Mirror Man is akin to that of Pinocchio. In the TSA play, however, the audience is urged to signal its approval or disapproval of the events occurring onstage, and thus to alter the story line.

Shortly before the final performance, Sheeran noted, "We haven't been to a place yet where the kids haven't been enraptured by it."

The play, he said,

provides the children with "a total experience," and is "so structured that although it's very light, it appeals to all levels" in the special audience.

It is also a great teaching tool, he avers. "That's the power."

Sheeran is no stranger to working with handicapped children, or with normal children, for that matter. He says "It seems I've been working with kids forever."

Following a stint in the Air Force, Sheeran left his home in Troy, where his parents are daily communicants at Sacred Heart Church, and took a position with Boston's Perkins School for the Blind. On the volunteer side, he helps the Multiple Sclerosis drive and is now helping plan the national Special Olympics which will be held in the area next year.

In September he enters his senior year at Brockport.

The Church 1978

By Father Andrew Greeley

Is PTA Confusing The Facts

One can understand why the public school monopoly is threatened by the kind of educational freedom of choice tuition tax credit would make possible. No one likes comp-

Fr. Greeley's edition; no monopoly gives up exclusive control of the marketplace willingly. When your clientele has no choice, your service can be rotten and it can't take business elsewhere. The performance of the public schools in recent years has been abysmal. If parents had the option to choose other schools, public educators would be in real trouble.

High-school graduation test scores go down, the reading and writing performance of young people deteriorates, inner-city public schools are mostly custodial institutions where serious attempts at education have been virtually abandoned. But education costs go up, salaries increase and the massive and oppressive waste of "administrative" bureaucracy is ever heavier.

No way do those folks want competition.

But it is nonetheless unfortunate that such front organizations for public schools as the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) sink to falsehood in their

desperate attempt to preserve the monopoly. When an association which allegedly speaks to the parents and teachers of America engages in blatant falsehood in public debate, it is hardly reassuring for those who wonder what is happening to young people.

Thus Grace Baisinger, the head of the National PTA, in a self-congratulatory press release, boasted of the organization's effective resistance to the tax credit bill and asserts that it provides four times the per-pupil subsidies for children in private schools than is now provided for children in public schools. Ms. Baisinger knows better. She arrives at this absurd statistic by assuming that tuition tax credits are a subsidy and tax deductions for state and local school taxes are not, an assumption which is patently wrong.

Another error easily missed is in Ms. Baisinger's denial that public education is a monopoly. There are 16,000 public school boards across the country, she said. Right. And each of them has a monopoly within its district. Sure, you have educational freedom of choice so long as you move to another district. She had the audacity to end her press release with the statement, "One-sided or misleading arguments are not responsible when so much is at stake."

How can Ms. Baisinger get away with so much trickery? The answer, I think, is that while everyone knows that tuition tax credits would be especially helpful to Catholic schools, you

would never know it from reading Ms. Baisinger's press release. Say almost anything you want about Catholic schools in America today so long as your appeal to the nativist bigotry is subtle—especially because you don't want to offend the Catholics who are members of the P.T.A.

But the tip-off of what Ms. Baisinger is really about comes in a single sentence packed with all the old symbols of nativist bigotry: "The demand that a small minority be lavishly rewarded for not using the free public education that has been considered to be an American birthright has no legitimate place in public thinking." Note all the code words: "Demand"—in the platform of the Democratic Party? "Lavishly rewarded," "not using... an American birthright"—the signals are all there. Tuition tax credits are just one more raid by the Catholic hierarchy on the public treasury.

The PTA's propaganda tactics include a sample letter to be sent to your congressman. I wonder what would happen if every parent of a Catholic school child in the country (including the black non-Catholics who exercise the only available freedom of choice by turning away from the public schools) sent a similar letter? Meanwhile, the Catholic hierarchy meets in its semi-annual meeting in Chicago and pretends that the tuition tax credit issue doesn't exist, that anti-Catholic-nativist bigotry is not being stirred up by organizations like the PTA, and continues to have a dialogue with Protestant denominations who call Catholic schools segregationist. What is sauce for the goose is obviously not sauce for the gander.

Fr. Dorsey A Fisher Trustee

Father Joseph B. Dorsey, CSB, who is the representative of the Basilian Fathers in the Eastern United to their order's General Council, has been elected to the board of trustees of St. John Fisher College, Martin Birmingham, chairman, announced last week. Father Dorsey was with the college as a teacher and in high administrative posts from

1961 until 1977. He also served on the board early in the 1970s, and was active in public affairs. Early in his priestly career — 1944-47—

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