

The Call

12/14/2005

'Father Misgivings' to bless Milk Fund with proceeds from Friday show

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Written for The Call

Beg forgiveness for your sins and this quirky Irish Catholic priest won't slap you with a sequence of penances -- he'll just absolve you with tear-gushing, gut-busting humor that will surely keep you praying for more.

That's right. He's back. But this time the irreverent "Father Misgivings" will be delivering his uniquely entertaining homily of anecdotes, jokes and one-liners on growing up Catholic, all to benefit this year's Milk Fund Appeal.

The one-man, hour-and-a-half show, performed by WNRI radio personality Dave Kane, will take place at St. Ann's Arts & Cultural Center on Cumberland Street on Friday at 7 p.m. Tickets, \$15, are available at the station or at the door, and all proceeds will go to benefit the Milk Fund.

"This is a great Christmas present," said Kane. "Normally the show is played as a dinner theater and can range anywhere from \$35 to \$65 per person. This show, in particular, is the cheapest you'll ever see it."

For the past 10 years, Father Misgivings has opened for notable celebrities including Art Garfunkel, Jerry Vale and Al Martino, and performed to thousands in locations all throughout New England. And as he transforms from miked-voice-devoid-a-face to a charcoal-cassocked-cleric-with-jesting-grace, Kane is hopeful that with this year's charitable theme, the show will draw the kind of crowd he's used to.

"This show is everywhere and has been done before thousands of Catholics all over New England," he said. "It was even performed for Father Edward St-Godard of the Holy Family Church for his 40th anniversary as a priest, and he loved it. It was a hit," said Kane.

With a touch of true Woonsocket sentiment, Kane added that he considers it his "responsibility" to get deeply involved in local charities and is "duly gratified and impressed that a community that doesn't enjoy a huge income is still so generous for the benefit of others."

"When I'm on the air I have people's ears, so I try to reach out accordingly," said Kane. "Someday God is going to say, 'I gave you all this time on the air -- what did you do with it?' With the Milk Fund in the workings for so many years, I just want to do my part."

The self-proclaimed "recovering Catholic" admits the show "pokes a little fun" at the church, but it's all about the comedy, he says.

"When I first started doing the act, people thought I was

drunk. They didn't know what to make of it," said Kane. "But the show is more of an observation of the church's members and teachings. It is very respectful of the church and its 'real' priests, those that do the right thing for their parishioners young and old alike. We kid around, but we are respectful."

Kane created the character some 32 years ago when he was producing a radio talk show for another host.

"The phones were slow, so I called in as an Irish priest for a few laughs," said Kane. "When the host asked me what my name was, I didn't have one. All I could only think of was Barry Fitzgerald who played Father Fitzgibbons in the 1944 comedy 'Going My Way.' The first word that came to my mind was 'misgivings' and after using it for a while, it sort of had a double entendre, so I stuck with it," he said.

And for skeptics of the show, Kane assures that you don't need to be Catholic to enjoy it, just bring your sense of humor.

"Everybody comes to the show from all different religious backgrounds, but Father Misgivings explains it all," he said. "The Good Father is the kind of priest that holds bingos, but calls the numbers out in Latin so the Protestants can't win."

A radio host since age 14, Kane is no stranger to putting his community first. He recalled 23 years ago, as a radio station manager for then Attleboro-based WARA-AM, he started a charitable program he called "Christmas Is for Kids."

"We got five social service agencies together that were struggling in the area and told them that I wanted to read stories on the air to kids that wanted gifts for Christmas. The difference was that I wanted to ask the kids what they wanted," he said. "I didn't want it to be, 'O.K., kid, here's a pair of jeans, I hope they fit.' These kids were like anybody else's kids except that they were poor."

"So we would read the stories on the air and say something like, 'Johnny is nine years old. Dad's gone. Mom's gone. But Johnny would like a G.I. Joe for Christmas.' And sure enough, one of my listeners would call up and say, 'I want to get Johnny's G.I. Joe for him.'"

In its first year, Kane says, Christmas Is for Kids pooled roughly 150 kids into the program and callers spent a total of \$5,000. Last year, he reports, "callers spent more than \$175,000 on about 1,400 children -- and we're still going strong after 23 years," he beamed.

Kane is confident that, if all 500 seats are filled at Friday's event, Father Misgivings will be able to chalk-up yet another triumph.

"The show is always very successful," said Kane. "It really sends the message that God loves you no matter what. That's what people need to get from this," he said. "It's the small things that make these fundraisers a success."

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