

Bruce and Marie Wiljanen
2158 North Oakland Street
Arlington, VA 22207

April 15, 2014

Dear Sir or Madam:

The Keegan Theatre has worked with the Mt. Olivet United Methodist Church in Arlington, Virginia since 1995, directing a different full length play each year to assist the youth of the church in fundraising for their mission trips. This significant undertaking has involved multiple Keegan staff members in directing and teaching the youth how to act, as well as run lights and sound. Mark Rhea and his company set the bar very high for the middle and high school youth, and everyone works nights and weekends to bring the play together over three months. The Keegan staff always attends one of the performances each year in support of the youth. They are liberal in their praise and support, and the youth respond. It's a remarkable partnership that has raised over \$375,000 for the youth mission trips.

We are repeatedly impressed with how well the Keegan artistic staff works with the young actors. The Keegan directors seek their input on the characters and teach them how to perform on a stage in front of an audience. For example, speaking loudly and clearly is emphasized, standing slightly differently so that the whole audience can see your face, and pausing slightly for the audience laughter. And of course the actors are taught to stay in character no matter what happens -- even if a baby starts to cry loudly when you make a speech. One year they were even taught how to speak in English accents. Some of the youth are taught technical theater skills, for example learning how to coordinate sound and lighting effects with specific actions on stage. The Keegan staff also guide them in theater arts games, so they can learn how to become a company that works together and depends on each other throughout the run of the play.

This detailed instruction was very important for the 2014 play, since most of the youth were in middle school, and didn't have much experience on the stage. The instruction worked well, and the audience enjoyed the play so much that four of the six performances sold out. The play raised over \$26,000 for the youth missions.

Our own daughter Alana enjoyed participating in the fundraising plays from 2009 through 2013, and appeared on Keegan Theater's stage in *The Crucible*. She and her friends at church looked forward every year to working with the Keegan Theater on the play and learning from theater professionals. For them, the partnership between Mt. Olivet and the Keegan Theater is an irreplaceable part of their teen experience. Our daughter is now in college, and pursuing her interest in theater during her freshman year. But the next generation of youth stepped onto the stage in 2014, joyfully continuing the tradition of *"The Play"*.

Sincerely Yours,



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