

***Mass Appeal* is a projected 2025 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is Kino Ken's review of it.**

14 of a possible 20 points * = excellent film**

**United States 1984 color 100 minutes live action feature tele drama
David Foster Productions / Operation Cork Productions / Jalem Productions /
Turman-Foster Company Producers: Lawrence Turman, David Foster,
Ted Swanson**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 2 Direction: Glenn Jordan***
 - 1 Editing: John Wright**
 - 1 Cinematography: Don Peterman**
Still Photography: Robbie Robinson
 - 1 Lighting: Michael Schwartz**
 - 2 Screenplay: Bill Davis***
 - 1 Music: Bill Conti**
Music Mixing: Dan Wallin
Orchestrations: Angela Morley
 - 2 Production Design: Philip Jefferies***
Set Design: Donald Woodruff
Set Decoration: Robert Checchi*
Costume Design: Shari Feldman and Bruce Walkup
Makeup: Richard Blair
 - 1 Sound: David Kelson**
Sound Recording: Robert Nichols II
Sound Mixing: Steve Maslow, Barry Thomas, Greg Landaker
Casting: Dennis Tracy
 - 2 Acting**
 - 1 Creativity**
- 14 total points**

Cast: Jack Lemmon* (Father Tim Farley), Željko Ivanek* (Mark Dolson), Charles Durning* (Monsignor Thomas Burke), Louise Latham (Margaret). Alice Hirson (Mrs. Hart), Helene Heigh (Mrs. Hart's Mother), Sharee Gregory (Marion Hart), James Ray* (Father De Nicola), Lois De Banzie (Mrs. Dolson), Talia Balsam (Liz Dolson, Mark's sister), Jerry Hardin (Mr. Dolson), R. J. Williams (j) (boy), Noni White (mother), Gloria Stuart (Mrs. Curry), Maggie Gwinn (Mrs. Quinn), F. William Parker (Mr. Hartigan), John Vargas (Scott Alvarez), Fran Robinson (Robin), Richard Doyle (faculty member), Terry Wills (Bill Kelly), Suzanne Kent (Mickey Kelly), Christopher Carroll (Salvatore Fitzgerald), John Devlin (choir leader), Ann Nelson (Miss Barber), John Becher* (Mr. Jennings), others

Religious Advisor: Father Joseph Battaglia

***Mass Appeal* is a typical American teledrama with an atypical trio of A-List actors and an exceptionally intelligent teleplay. Heading the cast is Jack Lemmon as Father Tim Farley, a popular priest who's built career success on accommodating congregational desires for superficial serenity. His immediate superior, Monsignor Thomas Burke, has followed a similarly democratic path to a current post among church hierarchs. He obviously has experienced some rather bruising battles regarding priests abusing children under their supervision. From those experiences, the monsignor seems to have developed hostility toward possible unannounced homosexual clergy candidates.**

Early in this drama, Monsignor Burke places a pair of what he considered overly friendly young prospects for diaconry under investigation, an action Father Farley and advisor priest Father De Nicola both consider too hasty and unwarranted.

At about the same time, another young seminarian, Mark Dolson, runs afoul of Father Farley by taking seriously his invitation to participate in what the latter refers to as a "dialogue sermon." In reality, this outreach for audience participation is simply a rigged question-and-answer session, with parishioners offering opinions about heatedly debated topics and Father Farley responding with neutral remarks he claims constitute objectivity. Dolson's not fooled by those. At least a few women present, perhaps favoring youth over age, side with him about women being accepted into the priesthood.

Fresh from this antagonistic face-off, Father Farley is confronted with another, also revolving around Mark Dolson and himself. It seems Monsignor Burke is tired of Father's alibis for not paying him social calls and sees a way to punish him. He assigns the comfortably established priest mentoring of a wave-creating seminarian. In his opinion, Mark is neither sufficiently mature nor adequately respectful of church doctrine to function capably in a deaconate. He will permit his continued trial service in that capacity only if Father Farley undertakes to edit the youth's sermons and instruct him in tactfulness and empathy.

Though this is about the least enticing offer an entertainment-oriented cleric can imagine, he feels forced to accept it as more tolerable than watching Monsignor's vacation trip movies.

Based on a play by Bill Davis which originally involved only Farley and philosophical opponent Dolson, Glenn Jordan's film version tosses in two important auxiliary characters: a busybody housekeeper for Father Farley, who acts in a classical Chorus role as his moral conscience, and Monsignor Burke, representative of an entrenched conservative church hierarchy that preaches conformity and obedience, not love. Counterpointing these is Mark Dolson, wrapped in selfish arrogance and clearly carrying the banner of social progress, and dodgy peacekeeper Father Farley, whose primary concern is living the secular good life except when standing behind the pulpit. Despite fancying himself the apostle of absolute honesty, Dolson is clearly not ready to confess past unorthodox activities to a church full of faultfinding listeners. Nor is Father Farley willing to step out from behind his amiable persona and reveal what he actually thinks to a potentially unaccepting audience.

The problem with this drama is a lack of character development. Nobody changes, not even at what is supposed to be a third act climax. Each principle player ultimately falls back into a customary slot. An observable chasm between word and deed is blatantly apparent. Perhaps the playwright believed he had achieved fashionable ambiguity. If so, it was only at the loss of forward momentum. There's no sense of awe produced by this final showdown, merely a directionless conclusion sure to offend nobody.

Aside from Philip Jefferies' appropriately majestic church interiors, polished one-liners supplying a steady stream of glib repartees for Jack Lemmon and verbal fireworks whenever two or three leads engage in dialectic fencing

comprise sufficiently magnetic treats to sustain viewer attention. Željko Ivanek's touchy hothead, Mark Dolson, is quite convincing, as is Charles Durning's frosty hypocrite in vestments, Monsignor Burke. Jack Lemmon, handed a role tailor-made for his usual friendly good neighbor screen persona milks it for full value.

There are no bonus elements on this Universal Studios Entertainment dvd-r release and nothing extraordinary about its photography, music, lighting, or sound. The efficiently-edited teledrama is appropriate for adult audiences exclusively. For them, Glenn Jordan's skill in eliciting fully credible interactions among three accomplished performances cited above, and Bill Davis's satisfyingly literate, if dishearteningly shallow, screenplay will suffice to deliver one hundred minutes of dramatic satisfaction.