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Keeping the Faith

By Jane Horwitz

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Actress Deborah Kirby co-founded Journeymen Theater as a reflection of her faith. Seeing companies focusing on African American life, Jewish themes and gay-lesbian issues, she and some friends thought, why not Christianity?

The company, which is wrapping up its first season with "The Colorado Catechism" at the Clark Street Playhouse through Saturday, is "not about evangelistic theater -- but is about producing plays that address moral and ethical issues and dilemmas" from a Christian perspective, the producing artistic director says.

Kirby's own faith is "fairly mainline Christian," and she is "not dogmatic, not condemning," she says. "I'm more about kind of the love that Jesus Christ said we were supposed to have for other people." Thus, while the company's core members are Christians, she says, its hiring practices for shows will be open. "My job and our theater company's job is to love and support and encourage these people in the theater community," Kirby says.

Earlier this season at the Church Street Theatre, Journeymen presented the medieval morality play "Everyman" and Stephen Dietz's "Private Eyes," which explores infidelity. In "The Colorado Catechism," two drug and alcohol abusers forge a friendship in rehab. Kirby co-stars with Cecil Baldwin. Jeff Keenan directed.

There's nothing wrong with "pure entertainment," says Kirby, 45, who worked for years as an Equity actress (and is a legal secretary by day), "but the plays that we pick, including comedies, I want to make sure that they're . . . addressing some kind of dilemma." She says she's in no hurry to grow the tiny troupe. "I would rather us make slow, steady steps and be around 20, 30 years from now than burn out."

Next season, Journeymen will present "The Boys Next Door" (Sept. 14-Oct. 15) by Tom Griffin, about a group home for mentally challenged men; "An Experiment With an Air Pump" (Dec. 28-Jan. 28, 2006) by Shelagh Stephenson, which looks at the eves of two new centuries, 1799 and 1999; and in the spring, "Manicures & Monuments" by Vicki Caroline Cheatwood, about a nursing home resident and the woman who comes in to give her manicures. The first two shows will be at Clark Street. Location and dates for "Manicures" are not set.