

## Do you believe in magic? Rev. Reed-Brown does

Old Saybrook, Connecticut  
By Steven Scarpa *Staff Writer*

### ESSEX - "Did you know you have magic in you?"

With these simple words, the Rev. David Reed-Brown can begin to evoke wonder. Reed-Brown, of the First Baptist Church in Essex, is an accomplished illusionist who will perform at a benefit for "My Brother's Keeper," a home for HIV positive men in New Haven. The benefit will take place at the Ivoryton Congregational Church Friday, May 14.

"A good magician will say, 'I am a magician and so are you,'" Reed-Brown said quoting one of his mentor's, the award-winning stage illusionist, Jeff McBride.

Reed-Brown, 31, has been performing magic since he was 8 years old. "My grandfather did parlor tricks for company and he passed it on to my father and brother," he said. Reed-Brown tells the story of how, at age 4, his brother would tease him by making pennies appear out of thin air in front of his face. "It drove me up a wall," Reed-Brown laughed. So, young David hunted through his brother's room while he was away at camp and found the magic set that his brother owned. By the time his brother returned home, Reed-Brown began mastering his own tricks. Although his performing looks effortless, nothing is further from the truth. Reed-Brown continues the process of improving his skills by rehearsing about 10 hours a week and attending a magic school under some of the foremost illusionists in the country, including Jeff McBride and six-time close-up magician of the year, Eugene Burger.

"Even though it looks smooth, every last detail I scrutinize," Reed-Brown said.

Reed-Brown equates his illusion act with a profound belief in the spiritual. "Magic is about 'wow,' amaze-

ment, mystery, and wonder. That is also what my ministry is about. The focus is that God is there and on all of God's mystery and wonder," Reed-Brown said.

Reed-Brown believes that both magic and religion provide similar outlets for human beings to examine the world. "It is sparking a sense of wonder and awe in something else," he said.

A trick Reed-Brown does in this vein is to ask a person to write their name across a playing card and place it into the middle of a deck. As this is done, he asks whether or not the person had ever been lost as a young child. After receiving an affirmative answer Reed-Brown speaks about how scary it can be to be lost and how you begin to fear that you might never be found again. As this happens he shuffles the cards and his reflection shifts to how similar that feeling is to being without God. By the time he is done speaking about the joy of being found by God, the card appears in a tiny box that has rested on the table the whole time. "The magical effect becomes a metaphor," Reed-Brown said.

Of course, as Reed-Brown is quick to point out, religious content in his shows is used only in the appropriate setting. But as he says, there is always "some mystery and goodness and hope."

"It is a lot of fun and extremely interactive," Reed-Brown said.

Interactive can also describe Reed-Brown's intense relationship with the community and his parish. He has been at the First Baptist Church in Essex, Connecticut, since 1994, and he is chairman of the Shoreline Soup Kitchen Board of Trustees. This summer he will also be taking young people to Vermont to help rebuild low-income housing.

