

# Holy Cross speaker's view on abortion stirs alumnus to protest

*Chris Matthews calls himself pro-choice, former trustee says*

By William T. Clew

A former chairman of trustees at the College of the Holy Cross has asked the college to disassociate itself from what he called the pro-choice position on abortion of this year's commencement speaker, Chris Matthews.

Mr. Matthews, who graduated from Holy Cross in 1967, is an author and is host of the television show "Hardball" on MSNBC. In addition to being the featured speaker at the 157th Holy Cross commencement May 23 at Fitton Field, Mr. Matthews will receive an honorary degree.

Charles E. F. Millard said in a telephone interview Wednesday that he has no objection to the school honoring Mr. Matthews as long as the college disassociates itself from his abortion stand. Mr. Millard is a graduate of Holy Cross in 1954 and was chairman of trustees from 1977 to 1982.

A spokeswoman for the college took issue with Mr. Millard's accusation. Katharine B. McNamara, director of public affairs at Holy Cross, said Mr. Matthews' position on abortion is "not inconsistent with the position of the Church or the college." She said she thinks it is sad that people misrepresent Mr. Matthews' position and "take petty jabs at Holy Cross."

She said Jesuit Father Michael C. McFarland, president of Holy Cross, has had several conversations with Mr. Matthews on the subject of abortion. The college president said Mr. Matthews "views abortion as morally wrong."

Father McFarland said Mr. Matthews differs from some Catholics on how intrusive government should be in controlling abortion. That is a matter of practical judgment and is allowable in Catholic thought, he said.

He said pro-choice has several meanings. Some would say it means it is possible that any woman may have an abortion. Others would object to government enforcing moral principles. He said there is no "over-simplified purity test for honorees. If we checked their conformity with every point in Catholic teaching, we would have no honorees, including Mr. Millard."

He said he has received "a handful" of letters about Mr. Matthews from alumni who have criticized Holy Cross for being too secular.

In a press release, Mr. Millard said he wrote to the college administration and trustees of his

objection to an honorary degree for Mr. Matthews March 14 and April 2. He said he was disappointed in the lack of response. He said Wednesday that he has not yet heard anything from the trustees or the college. He said he has some support from alumni who know about his objection.

He said Father McFarland and the trustees "have a unique opportunity to 'stand for the unborn' and affirm the teaching of the Church, the Society of Jesus and the college. Failure to do so would be a stark repudiation of the right to life."

He said he did not want to embarrass Holy Cross by making his objection public, but said he had no alternative "given the silence of the administration and the board (of trustees) but most important, given the significance of the college's pro-life principles."

Mr. Millard said that, Mr. Matthews has said "five or six times" on his television program, "Hardball," that he is pro-choice. For example, Mr. Millard said that in June 1999, Mr. Matthews said in a discussion on the program that he is "pro-choice." Mr. Millard said that Mr. Matthews then was asked why he used that term after saying people should say what they mean on the subject. According to Mr. Millard, Mr. Matthews said he used the pro-choice term because "people know what we're talking about. I'm for abortion rights."

He said Mr. Matthews also said that he was for abortion rights in a discussion with former Vice President Al Gore on a program in December 2002.

Both Ms. McNamara and Mr. Millard cited Mr. Matthews' book, "Now, Let Me Tell You What I Really Think," to back their statements.

In attachments to his press release, Mr. Millard included a copy of a "Statement of Position on Abortion" issued by Holy Cross in 1991. The statement said, in part, that the college "has no desire to suppress intelligent discussion and debate on issues such as abortion."

"Nevertheless, Holy Cross wishes publicly to affirm and bear witness to Catholic Christianity's longstanding insight that all of human life is sacred in the mystery of its origins and that abortion thus cannot be condoned."

"... The college, therefore, will not grant official recognition to any organization that seeks to or is perceived to advance a right to abortion, nor will it allow college funds to be used to such a purpose."

Mr. Millard indicated that he sent copies of his correspondence with the college to Mr. Matthews.