



COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS

Office of the President

April 5, 2002

Ms. Julicann Dolan
Box 793

Dear Julicann,

Thank you for your letter in which you expressed your distress regarding the two readings of "The Vagina Monologues" on campus in February. I appreciate your concerns, and regret that you felt humiliated, but I encourage you to look beyond the posters and explicit parts of the play that made you so uncomfortable to more closely examine the messages contained in those images.

I agree that the play certainly contains explicit parts that many audience members find uncomfortable or offensive; yet the overall message is to express and affirm the identity and experience of women. From the title to the intimate subject matter, the play was meant to be provocative and it certainly makes a political statement. You may disagree with that, and you might be right in doing so. The real question though is whether you can impose your view of what it means to be "Catholic" on everyone else by not allowing the play to be performed, especially when there are many with exemplary records within the Church who would differ from you. When Christ instructed, as you quoted, "Go into the whole world," he never promised that it would be a comfortable experience.

In your letter you may be projecting your own feelings about the play, when you say that it "offended the personhood of every woman on campus, and deeply insulted the Catholic Church." Most who saw it felt that it was not primarily about body parts or sex, but used those images to get to deeper issues about what it means to be a woman and about the gender-based power relationships in our society. Those issues are worth exploring, especially within the setting of a Jesuit, Catholic college whose mission is to form leaders who will provide a strong voice for the victims of social injustice in this world.

Reactions to the performances on our campus were as varied as the ages, genders and experiences of the audience members. While parts of the play may be objectionable (to me, as well as others), it raises serious moral issues about which our students should be thinking.

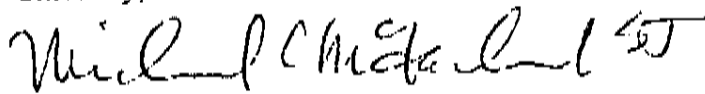
I recently heard from the mother of a Holy Cross student who attended the play with her daughter. She said, "The production used humor, raw and sometimes vulgar language, poignant testimonials and sheer tales of horror to bring forth the essence of being a woman. The young women who presented the play were remarkable and very talented..... The evening ended with the opportunity for my daughter, her friends and I to have a candid discussion about many of the issues that the play brought forth."

It cannot be dismissed that the Holy Cross Women's Forum staged the play as a fundraiser for Abby's House, a local shelter for battered women and their children where many of your classmates volunteer. The two sold-out performances raised more than \$6,000 in ticket sales. The Women's Forum donated \$5,400 of that to Abby's House. The remaining \$600 went to help widows and orphans in Afghanistan.

Julicann, thank you for writing. I understand your concerns. However, I do believe that allowing the play was justifiable, not, as you suggest, "a horrible sin," and that considerable good and necessary dialogue has come from it.

May God bless you as you near the end of your first year on the Hill.

Sincerely,



Michael C. McFarland, S.J.
President

MCM/at