



COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS

Office of the President

February 25, 2004

Professor Emeritus Charles E. Rice
School of Law
Notre Dame University
Notre Dame, IN 46556

Dear Charlie,

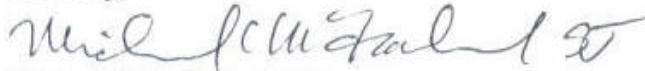
I received your note and the attached "Viewpoint" commentary from the Notre Dame *Observer*. Apparently, Notre Dame, like Holy Cross, is hosting its third annual presentation of "The Vagina Monologues." It seems that the dialogue about the controversial performance piece continues on your campus as well. The Holy Cross Women's Forum presented the *Vagina Monologues* again this year to raise consciousness about violence against women and to raise money for the area rape crisis center.

I do not agree that it is a "failure in judgment" at Notre Dame or here on our campus to allow the readings of the play. As you know, the award-winning off-Broadway play consists of a series of monologues by women talking about their personal experiences, particularly around sexuality and gender relations. At times it is funny, at times outrageous, at times tragic, and always compassionate, as it presents these women's voices, taken from actual interviews conducted by the author. The play contains crude language and some explicit descriptions of sexual matters, which you excerpted in your commentary. It also discusses some sexual encounters that could be seen as exploitive, and even illegal. You are not alone nor without reason in finding the subject matter and language to be offensive. Certainly, this is understandable; and you have every right to express your objections. But there are many others who can look past the language to the deeper meaning of the play, which they find insightful, even empowering. In the end, the play is not about sex, but about identity and gender relations and the social structures and attitudes that determine them for good or ill.

We have enough faith in our students and other members of our community to believe that they can approach the play in a mature and discriminating manner and engage with the serious issues underlying it. In the past they have lived up to our expectations, as the presentation has provoked serious and thoughtful discussions of those issues.

The presentation of the *Vagina Monologues* on our campus in no way implies that the College supports all of the values and sentiments expressed in the play or by its author. However, it is not the tradition of Jesuit education to hide from or suppress ideas or attitudes that are different from our own, but to engage them in respectful dialogue that everyone may come to a deeper apprehension of the truth. In that spirit we saw no reason to prevent the Women's Forum from going forward with the production.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael C. McFarland, S.J.", written in dark ink.

Michael C. McFarland, S.J.

President

MCM/at