

Holy Cross alumni turn up heat on grad speaker

By William T. Clew

WORCESTER — A former chairman of the trustees of the College of the Holy Cross and the president of the Holy Cross Cardinal Newman Society are among the signees of an open letter to author and television talk show host Chris Matthews suggesting that he withdraw as this year's commencement speaker at the college.

Mr. Matthews is scheduled to speak at the college's 157th commencement May 23 at Fitton Field and receive an honorary degree.

An advertisement titled "An Open Letter to Chris Matthews With Copies to the Holy Cross Board of Trustees" appears in today's Catholic Free Press. It was signed by Charles E. F. Millard, a 1954 graduate of Holy Cross who chaired the trustees from 1977 to 1982. He received an honorary degree from the college in 1999.

Also signing the letter was Vic Melfa, Class of 1957, who founded the Holy Cross Cardinal Newman Society and is its president. Nine other alumni are listed as signees.

The letter congratulates Mr. Matthews on his selection for an honorary degree but suggests that, because of what it says is his pro-choice position, he considers withdrawing as speaker. If he does so, it will be an act of great service to the college, the letter says.

The letter also suggests that, if Mr. Matthews does not withdraw, the college include in his

honorary degree citation the statement: "We pray that you will ameliorate your 'pro-choice' position, thus demonstrating your further worthiness to receive this honor."

Mr. Millard has written to the college president, Jesuit Father Michael C. McFarland and to the trustees, in recent weeks, asking that the college disassociate itself from what he said is Mr. Matthews' pro-choice position on abortion.

Mr. Millard said he received no reply from Father McFarland or the trustees and felt he had no other alternative but to make his objection public. He placed an advertisement in last week's Catholic Free Press citing examples from television broadcasts and newspaper and magazine articles which quoted Mr. Matthews as saying he is pro-choice and for abortion rights.

Father McFarland issued a statement in which he said that Mr. Matthews views abortion as morally wrong but differs with some Catholics on how intrusive government should be in controlling abortion.

Telephone calls made to Mr. Matthews for clarification of his position have gone unreturned.

Mr. Millard said that copies of The Catholic Free Press with the advertisement containing the open letter will be sent to Mr. Matthews and to the Holy Cross trustees.

Mr. Melfa said that if Mr. Matthews comes to Holy Cross to speak at commencement, pro-life people will be there to protest his appearance.