

Former Holy Cross trustee resigns fund-raising post over honorary degree

By William T. Clew

Charles E. F. Millard, former chairman of the trustees at the College of the Holy Cross, has written an open letter to Jesuit Father Michael McFarland, president of the college, resigning as honorary chairman of the Campaign for Holy Cross.

Mr. Millard, who graduated from the college in 1954 and was awarded an honorary degree in 1999, said he finds himself "in conscientious objection to the trustees' persistence in awarding an honorary degree to Chris Matthews in spite of his pro-abortion views."

The Campaign raises funds for the college.

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

The trustees met last Saturday, according to Mr. Millard. He said the chairman, Dr. Michael F. Collins, called him after the meeting and told him the college will award the honorary degree with no compromise.

Mr. Millard's open letter to Father McFarland is contained in an advertisement in today's Catholic Free Press. He said he will send a copy of the newspaper containing the letter to Father McFarland.

Father McFarland has said he has talked several times with Mr. Matthews. He said Mr. Matthews views abortion as morally wrong but differs with some Catholics about how intrusive government should be in controlling abortion. He said that is a matter of practical judgment and is allowable in Catholic thought.

Mr. Millard, who chaired the Holy Cross trustees from 1977 to 1982, began writing to the college trustees in March about the choice of Mr. Matthews as an honorary degree recipient.

He asked that the college disassociate itself from what he calls Mr. Matthews' pro-abortion stand. He cited instances in which he said Mr. Matthews stated on television and in articles that he is "pro-choice" and "for abortion rights."

In a letter dated April 29 to the trustees, Mr. Millard suggested that the college amend the honorary degree citation to Mr. Matthews. The amendment would say; "We pray that you will ameliorate your pro-choice position, thus further demonstrating your worthiness to receive this honor."

An advertisement from Mr. Millard in last week's Catholic Free Press contained an open letter to Mr. Matthews. It congratulated him on being selected for an honorary degree and praised

him as "a worthy and loyal son of Holy Cross who has achieved excellence both personally and professionally."

The letter then called Mr. Matthews' "pro-choice position" troubling and suggested that he withdraw from the commencement ceremonies "rather than mire the school in controversy." The letter was signed by Mr. Millard and several other Holy Cross alumni.

Mr. Millard said the advertisement containing the letter was made available to the trustees in copies of The Catholic Free Press at their meeting last Saturday.

"I don't believe I was treated in good faith by the chairman," Mr. Millard said, because the chairman did not read his letter at the meeting. He said Mr. Collins called him after the meeting and told him the college will award the honorary degree.

Katharine B. McNamara, director of public affairs at Holy Cross, said the meeting last Saturday is the meeting where the trustees vote to confer honorary degrees and degrees for members of the graduating class. Specifics of those meetings are private. She also said that Mr. Millard is a member of the steering committee of the Lift High the Cross campaign; the successor to the Campaign for Holy Cross.