

# 'Hardball' host opposed as speaker

## Ex-head of trustees at Holy Cross objects to commencement choice

By Emilie Astell  
TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

**WORCESTER** — A former board of trustees chairman and alumnus of the College of the Holy Cross is raising objections over this year's commencement speaker, MSNBC's "Hardball" host Chris Matthews, for his pro-choice abortion stance.

Mr. Matthews is the featured speaker at the 157th commencement ceremony May 23 at Fitton Field. A 1967 graduate of Holy Cross, Mr. Matthews will receive an honorary degree during the ceremony. Bestowing honorary degrees on commencement speakers is a common practice.

The alumnus, Charles E.F. Millard, class of 1954, is not trying to stop Mr. Matthews from speaking, but would like the college to distance itself from him by adding a disclaimer to the honorary degree with the following words:

"We honor our loyal son today. As we do, we disassociate the college from his pro-choice position on abortion and pray for a change of his heart in line with the church teaching on abortion, so eloquently set forth in the recent Society of Jesus document, 'Standing for the Unborn.'"

Mr. Millard, who received an honorary degree from the college in 1999, sent letters to alumni asking for support on the issue.

"A substantial number of alumni share my dismay," Mr. Millard said from his home in

Hobe Sound, Fla. "The college shouldn't honor him with their highest honor. It's inconsistent with everything they stand for."

He cited quotations from Mr. Matthews to prove that the political talk show host is pro-choice. In a "Hardball" interview with former vice president Al Gore in December, Mr. Matthews said, "I am pro-choice."

And in his book "Now Let Me Tell You What I Really Think," Mr. Matthews wrote, "Clinton promised to make abortion safe, legal and rare. Still needed is a president who will make and keep such a promise."

The Rev. Michael C. McFarland, president of Holy Cross, said Mr. Millard's reading of Mr. Matthews' abortion stand is inaccurate, unfair and oversimplified.

"His whole premise is wrong from my point of view," Rev. McFarland said. "Chris Matthews said he feels abortion is immoral. Where he would differ from some Catholics is on the role of government and how intrusive government should be in controlling this. It's a matter of practical judgment. That's allowable in Catholic thought."

Pro-choice has many meanings, he continued, so it is wise to look beyond slogans. Some would say pro-choice means it is permissible for anyone to have an abortion, he said, while others would have a problem with the U.S. government enforcing moral principles.

While Mr. Millard seems the

most vocal on this issue, the president said he received a handful of letters from what he called "the usual suspects," meaning alumni who have criticized the college for being too secular.

Trustees and the campus community are very supportive of Mr. Matthews, he said, and happy to give him an honorary degree. The suggestion to place a disclaimer on the degree is not a serious possibility, Rev. McFarland added.

"We don't support an oversimplified purity test for honorees," he said. "If we checked their conformity with every point in Catholic teaching we would have no honorees, including Charlie Millard."

Rev. McFarland equated debates over Mr. Matthews and other speakers at Holy Cross to similar arguments within the Catholic Church.

"People I respect will disagree on this, but that doesn't mean we're going to back off," he said. "We get involved in values in ways other institutions don't. You're not going to get this at Clark."

Mr. Matthews is the author of three other books: "Hardball," "Kennedy & Nixon" and "American: Beyond Our Grandest Notions."

He was a reporter for The San Francisco Examiner, serving as Washington bureau chief for 13 years, and was a speech writer for former President Jimmy Carter and a top aide for the late House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr.

Messages left at MSNBC were not returned.

Mr. Millard served on the college's board of trustees for 27 years, from 1973 to 2000. He was chairman for five years, from 1977 to 1982.

In addition to writing to alumni, Mr. Millard posted his letter on the Web site of the Holy Cross Cardinal Newman Society. A local chapter of the society was organized by Shrewsbury businessman Victor J. Melfa, class of 1957. Mr. Melfa has said the society works to return a Catholic identity to Holy Cross.

Mr. Melfa was also a persistent voice last year in criticizing the college's production of "The Vagina Monologues" performed on Ash Wednesday.

Commencement speakers at Holy Cross are chosen by a committee headed by college spokeswoman Katharine B. McNamara. A list of potential speakers is drawn up by the committee, she said, and forwarded to Rev. McFarland. The president reviews a likely candidate with the board of trustees, which approves the final choice.

Last year, retired Milwaukee Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland declined to receive an honorary degree at the Holy Cross commencement after a former Marquette University theology student accused him of sexually assaulting him. The archbishop was not the featured speaker. That honor went to U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins.