

Choice of college speakers criticized

Kevin Luperchio/CNS

WORCESTER, Mass. — Citing his responsibility to teach and preach the church's position of the value of human life, Worcester Bishop Daniel P. Reilly decided not to attend the May 23 commencement at the College of the Holy Cross over the choice of broadcaster Chris Matthews as its speaker and an honorary degree recipient.

In a similar case, Bishop James C. Timlin of Scranton, Pa., decided not to attend the May 25 graduation ceremony at the University of Scranton, a Jesuit-run university in Scranton, also because of the scheduled commencement address of Matthews.

Matthews, who graduated from Holy Cross in Worcester in 1967, is a best-selling author and host of the show "Hardball" on the cable news channel MSNBC and has been criticized by alumni for espousing views that support laws favoring abortion.

"I cannot let my presence imply support for anything less than the protection of all life at all its stages," Bishop Reilly said in a May 18 statement.

The bishop added that his absence did not imply that he was "questioning the fidelity of the College of the

Holy Cross to its mission as a Catholic college or its dedication to the mission of the Catholic Church."

Following the bishop's announcement, Katherine McNamara, director of public affairs at Holy Cross, released a statement saying, "Bishop Reilly is a devoted friend of the college and we're sorry he won't attend commencement this year."

McNamara defended Matthews, saying he has not questioned the Catholic Church's stance on the morality of abortion.

"Chris Matthews represents Holy Cross in a wonderful way," she said. "He has a probing intellect, engages in passionate discussions on the most important topics of our day, especially moral issues, and shows a special care for the poor and marginalized in our society."

The selection of Matthews as honorary degree recipient and commencement speaker has drawn criticism since it was announced in March. Several weeks ago, 11 Holy Cross alumni wrote an open letter to Matthews asking him to withdraw.

C.J. Doyle, executive director of the Catholic Action League of Massachusetts, called the bishop's decision not to attend the graduation "an act of courage, integrity and fidelity, which underscores the irreconcilable incompatibility between the Catholic faith and any philosophy which permits the deliberate destruction of innocent human life."

In the similar case in Scranton, The Associated Press quoted Bishop Timlin as saying he would not go to the commencement because Matthews "espoused a view on abortion which Catholics believe to be contrary to the moral law."

Meanwhile, Marist College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., formed by Marist Brothers but an independent college since 1969, was criticized for choosing New York Attorney Gen-

eral Eliot Spitzer as its May 10 commencement speaker.

Tim Massie, public affairs officer for the school, told Catholic News Service that the college "accepts no money from the church" and does not "feel obligated to use the litmus tests of abortion, the death penalty or any single issue in determining who we invite to speak or honor."

About 100 graduates of St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia walked out before Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., was introduced to receive an honorary degree and deliver his address.

The students objected to the senator's comments in an early April interview where he called homosexu-

al acts "a threat to the American family."

St. Louis University replaced its scheduled commencement speaker, Donald Carty, former American Airlines chairman and chief executive, with St. Louis Post-Dispatch columnist Bill McClellan by mutual agreement.

The decision came after the news that, while American Airlines had asked workers to accept huge pay cuts, the company had approved of the bonuses and pension payments for its executives. Carty has since resigned.

Contributing to this story was Carol Zimmermann in Washington.



Reuters/CNS

Earthquake aftermath

Algerians search the site of a destroyed mosque in the town of Boumerdes May 23 after a devastating earthquake hit Algeria two days earlier. Rescue workers probed mountains of rubble with dogs and listening devices in a race against time to find survivors of the quake that killed at least 1,500 people and injured thousands more along Algeria's Mediterranean coastline.

Man is charged with making threatening calls

A Conesus man was arrested, jailed, released and rearrested May 22 for making threatening phone calls to area churches, the Livingston County Sheriff's Office said. At least two of the churches are Catholic.

According to Maj. Ray Ellis, head of the county sheriff's Criminal Investigation Division, Alan M. Vanepps, 44, was arrested in Geneseo and sent to the Livingston County Jail. He was released on \$2,500 bail, but later that same day was arrested in Avon on an outstanding

warrant and was returned to jail.

Ellis said that Vanepps made calls to "eight or nine" churches over a period of several months, including St. Mary Church in Geneseo and St. Agnes Church in Avon, as well as churches of other denominations in Livingston County.

Vanepps has been charged with multiple counts of aggravated harassment that would normally be classified as misdemeanors. Yet Ellis said that because these were multiple calls targeting religious institutions, they are considered hate

crimes and are being treated as felonies.

Ellis added that more charges could be filed as the investigation continues. He also said that police confiscated eight guns from Vanepps' home.

Michael Tedesco, diocesan spokesman, confirmed that he received complaints May 16 from two Livingston County parishes about a man making threatening phone calls. However, Tedesco could not verify that Vanepps was the caller.

— Mike Latona

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