

# Holy Cross College Continues with Planned Parenthood Event

by Gail Besse

WORCESTER, Mass. — A clash over whether Holy Cross College deserves to be called Catholic intensified when its president defied the bishop's call to stop a Planned Parenthood/NARAL-affiliated "Preventing Teen Pregnancy" conference on campus. In spite of the college president's assurances that the school has no affiliation with the Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy and that the location of the conference on campus does not mean the college was participating in it, the Register learned that the college is referring students to Planned Parenthood.

The controversial forum went on as scheduled Oct. 24 despite a forceful Oct. 10 warning from Worcester Bishop Robert McManus that the Jesuit-run school risked losing the right to "continue to be recognized as a Catholic institution." The forum for health care professionals was held in space rented by the Alliance. It included workshops by Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice America. Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, an advocate of abortion, same-sex "marriage," cloning and tax-funded human embryonic stem-cell research, received its leadership award.

Jesuit Father Michael McFarland, the college president, said in refusing to revoke the contract, "The location of the conference in no way indicates participation by the college in the event." He cited the school's "mission of engaging with the larger culture." But Bishop McManus pointed out a Catholic institution "conducts its mission and ministry in accord with Catholic Church teaching, especially in cases of faith and morals." The complicity of letting the event occur on campus created scandal as it fostered the perception that the administration "supports positions contrary to the fundamental moral teaching of the Church," he added. "To deny Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice a forum in which to present their morally unacceptable positions is not an infringement of the exercise of academic freedom but a defensible attempt to make unambiguously clear the Catholic identity and mission of the College of the Holy Cross," said the bishop.

He made clear the stakes were high, saying "it is my pastoral and canonical responsibility to determine what institutions can properly call themselves 'Catholic.'" According to Canon 808 of the Code of Canon Law, a diocesan bishop has that obligation: "No university, even if it is in fact Catholic, may bear the title 'Catholic university' except by the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority." And integral to a college's Catholic identity is "fidelity to the Christian message in conformity with the Magisterium of the Church," according to Pope John Paul II's 1990 apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (On Catholic Universities). Holy Cross spokeswoman Ellen Ryder said Oct. 22 that the majority of reactions the college has received supported the president's decision.

## Wheat and Weeds

But more than 800 people wrote opposing it, according to [holycrossalumni.org](http://holycrossalumni.org), a website organized by concerned alumni. One who swung into action was philanthropist Raymond Ruddy, who offered to pick up the \$10,000 cost and all legal fees involved in canceling the event. Ruddy, a 1965 graduate who now heads the Gerard Health Foundation in Natick, Mass., made the offer in an Oct. 1 letter he sent to Fr. McFarland and Bishop McManus.

Because Catholic Charities of Boston belongs to the Alliance, Ruddy also shared this letter outlining his concerns with Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley and other archdiocesan and agency officials. Asked whether there were plans for Catholic Charities to resign its Alliance membership, spokesmen for both the agency and Cardinal O'Malley declined to respond. Alliance spokeswoman Patricia Quinn said Holy Cross has held the forum in past years. She speculated that more attention might have been paid to it this year because of the consortium's "higher profile." The Alliance actively lobbied against abstinence education in public schools, and with Patrick's help, defeated the state's chance to receive a \$700,000 federal grant. Quinn was "surprised by the controversy."

Emily Turner, co-chairwoman of Holy Cross Students for Life, didn't buy that claim. "We're talking about human lives here," she said in an Oct. 8 e-mail to Father McFarland. "It's not by accident that Planned Parenthood will be here — and what a triumph it will be for them to be able to say, once again, that they made it on to supposed pro-life territory." In his Oct. 8 response, Father McFarland said Turner was viewing the Alliance "simplistically" and cited Catholic Charities' affiliation with it. The 19-year-old Louisville, Ky., sophomore and a small band of her peers

displayed a "cemetery of the innocents" near the forum. She said in an interview, "It's one thing to say, 'Don't pull up the wheat with the weeds.' It's another thing to invite a poisonous vine to infiltrate your field and strangle the fruits of your labor."

Although Holy Cross denies any affiliation with Planned Parenthood, the school's website does list that agency's Worcester phone number as a referral for testing for sexually transmitted diseases. The U.S. bishops' 2001 Application of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* for the United States says, "It is important for Catholic universities to implement in practical terms their commitment to the essential elements of Catholic identity, including the commitment to provide health care in conformity with the Church's ethical and religious teaching and directives."

Jesuit Superior General Peter Hans Kolvenbach was once quoted by Father Richard John Neuhaus as saying "For some [Jesuit] universities, it is probably too late to restore their Catholic character." The campus newspaper barred an advertisement about an Oct. 23 counter-forum held at Worcester's St. Paul Cathedral. That forum, "Preventing Teen Pregnancy: The Catholic Approach," was organized by alumni, the diocese and the Cardinal Newman Society, which seeks to renew Catholic higher education. Dawn Eden, director of the Newman Society's Love & Responsibility Program, detailed how chastity offers a better solution than condoms. She outlined steps Catholic colleges should take to promote Catholic values on sexuality.

"Obviously, bringing Planned Parenthood and a pro-abortion politician to campus is not the way to do this," Eden said. The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities declined comment on the controversy, but the Massachusetts Catholic Action League labeled the event "a callous insult to faithful pro-life Catholics struggling to protect the unborn." League Director C.J. Doyle said it "remains to be seen what action" the bishop and cardinal will take. "It seems that the leadership of the Catholic Church in Massachusetts is in for a time of testing."

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