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Michael J. Sheeran S.J.

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## Reaffirmation of Jesuit Mission by the 28 Jesuit Colleges and Universities in the United States – A Brief Overview

By Michael J. Sheeran, S.J.

The Saints are grounded in the Blood of Christ, which feeds the World, as our Mother's own blood feeds us in the womb. If you look at nature closely in the early spring, all green things begin with red (wounds) buds, shoots, and branches. Then they flower into green and abundant colors of life. The leaves, vibrant rocks and stones are living examples of how nature praises the Creator.

Earth's atmosphere, usually a thin line of blue, is, in this version, green, with the life of the Holy Spirit. Twelve tongues of the Spirit's flames hover round the World as in a New Pentecost which Pope St. John XXIII and Pope St. John Paul II prophesied for the 21st Century.

The Holy Spirit is seen just at that moment when God speaks the Word from Genesis: "Let there be Light" and life as we know it began to swirl from the void.

The gorgeous frame by master woodworker Roberto Lavadie of Taos, chants the Holy Holy Holy ... as with Hildegard's inspired chants, she claims to have heard immersed in God, the Living Light; Heaven and Earth are full of God's glory. Christ the Deer, or hart, is at the bottom standing in precious water which nourishes all life.

*Father McNichols is a priest of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.*

50 years after Vatican II, 25 years after "Ex Corde Ecclesiae," American Jesuit presidents and Jesuit major superiors (in Rome and in the United States) think it's the right time to ask how the 28 American Jesuit colleges and universities identify ourselves as Jesuit and Catholic in the 21st century. To that end, university presidents drafted the document "Some Characteristics of Jesuit Colleges and Universities: A Self-Evaluation Instrument" to be used as an evaluative tool and have tried it for a couple of years. Provincials have approved its use.

We are moving here to the regular reaffirmation that the school's mission is a Jesuit mission, that the board's priorities are harmonious with the educational vision of the Jesuit order. Some people call this an affirmation of "communion." The deep purpose is the positive reassertion of vision.

So the 28 schools and the provincial superiors are experimenting, looking for as simple and non-burdensome a method as possible for making this occasional reaffirmation. Here is the overall approach:

- Over the next five years, each of the 28 schools will use its own

process to review its current Jesuit mission priorities, deciding – in the Jesuit tradition of the *magis* – what changes to make to improve mission effectiveness. The school invites a small committee from other Jesuit universities to visit and offer advice (which the school is free to accept or decline) about the proposed priorities.

- The school sends a letter to the Jesuit Superior General through regular Jesuit channels, reaffirming its intent to carry out its Jesuit Mission with emphasis on the priorities it has selected.
- The Jesuit Superior General sends back a letter reaffirming that the school is a Jesuit institution.

This sort of procedure will happen once in the next five years and will be repeated every few years. (How frequently is up for discussion.) But, after the first five years, on the basis of knowledge gained from the first round, specifics will be adjusted by the 28 presidents and the relevant Jesuit officials in light of what seems to work best.

*Michael J. Sheeran, S.J., is the president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities.*