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

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When Fr. Mark Bosco, S.J., commissioned me to paint his dream of these three saints holding up the World – Francis of Assisi, Hildegard of Bingen, and Ignatius of Loyola – my question to myself was “How do they hold up the World?”

The answer you see right here, is a kind of map which might tell us where to go, but we have to actually make the journey. The map is a prayer, and the journey, I pray, will give us continual insights which will lead to action, so that with the holy three of Ignatius, Hildegard, Francis and the Holy Child Jesus, we might learn something about how the Holy Spirit continues to Green the World.
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 re-assertion 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.

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