Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

Peace!

I am writing to discuss an important initiative involving all Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, and to encourage your active participation in it. In 2010, nearly 50 years after the Second Vatican Council and 20 years after the issuance of Pope John Paul II’s apostolic constitution on higher education, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the presidents of the American Jesuit colleges and universities, and the Jesuit major superiors (in Rome and the United States) began to ask themselves how these 28 institutions of higher education should be identified as Jesuit and Catholic in the 21st century. To that end, the university presidents drafted a guide, *Some Characteristics of Jesuit Colleges and Universities: A Self-Evaluation Instrument*, which quickly became an effective tool for the schools to assess their institutional mission integration.

Now, we are moving toward a more systemic mission reaffirmation by the Society of Jesus of every Jesuit college and university in the United States. Specifically, the international Society (operating out of the Jesuit Curia in Rome) is interested in knowing whether each school’s mission is a Jesuit mission, and whether its board’s priorities are harmonious with the educational vision of the Jesuit Order. This is both a practical matter and a spiritual one. Thus some people refer to this way of proceeding as a “communion” between the school and the Society. The deep purpose of the affirmation process is the positive and intentional reassertion of the spiritual and educational vision that underlies Jesuit higher education.
Under the guidance of Rev. Arturo Sosa, S.J., the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, the 28 colleges and universities (with the five Provincials) are engaged in a process called the “Mission Priority Examen (MPE),” which has been designed to help each school review its current Jesuit Mission priorities. The MPE is structured as a reflective and dialogic process, and – in the Jesuit tradition of the *Magis* – results in identifying the changes needed to improve mission effectiveness at each institution.

Over a period of five years (beginning in AY2015-2016), each of the 28 colleges and universities has or will participate in the MPE on its own campus. A detailed description of the process is available on the MPE website at [http://www.ajcunet.edu/missionexamen](http://www.ajcunet.edu/missionexamen), but its major elements are as follows:

- Over the course of a semester or more, the school engages in a reflective process, inviting all major constituencies, including trustees, to weigh in on two primary questions, posed by the Society of Jesus:

  1. Do you want to continue to be a Jesuit, Catholic university?

  2. If so, what are the two to four mission goals (and accompanying strategies) that you will prioritize for the next five years?

- Taking this input into account, the Self-study Committee appointed by the President writes a brief (roughly 20-50 page, including appendices) Self-study on its mission strengths and challenges. The Self-study denotes two to four major mission priorities for the next five years, and strategies for achieving them.

- Working with the regional Provincial Assistant for Higher Education, the school selects and invites a small committee of peers from other Jesuit institutions to visit the campus, meet with a wide range of community members, and offer advice (which the school is free to accept or decline) about the proposed priorities. The Peer Visitor Team writes a draft report,
and engages in an iterative discussion with the school. As a result, the school may decide to adapt its mission priorities, in light of the Peer Visitor Team’s comments and insights.

- The school sends its materials (including the report by the Peer Visitor Team) to its Provincial and the President of the AJCU, reaffirming the school’s intent to carry out its Jesuit mission, with emphasis on the priorities it has selected.

- The Provincial forwards the materials, along with his own comments, to the Jesuit Superior General, Fr. Sosa. The President of the Jesuit Conference (i.e., convener of the Provincials in the United States and Canada) also forwards his comments to Fr. Sosa.

- Fr. Sosa sends a reply letter to reaffirm that the school is a Jesuit and Catholic institution, and offers insights on the mission priorities and strategies that have been selected.

It is the intent of the Society of Jesus that this process will be repeated every few years, though the precise frequency is up for discussion. Specifics will be adjusted by the 28 presidents and the relevant Jesuit officials, in light of what seems to work best. I welcome your active participation in the MPE process, as together we deepen the mission integration and effectiveness of our schools.

Rev. Michael J. Sheeran, S.J.
President