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Bishops, colleges find good collaboration in 'Ex Corde' review

by Catholic News Service

Washington — During the last decade, U.S. Catholic college presidents and local bishops have experienced greater collaboration, according to a review of the Vatican document that clarified the relationship between these leaders.

The bishops and college leaders gave a 10-year review of "The Application of 'Ex Corde Ecclesiae' for the United States," a document that went into effect in 2001 and outlines how U.S. Catholic colleges and universities should implement the 1990 Vatican document on Catholic higher education called "Ex Corde Ecclesiae" ("From the Heart of the Church").

The 10-year review, called for in the application document, began in January 2011 when bishops were asked to conduct conversations with college and university presidents in their dioceses.

More than 100 bishops reported on their conversations at regional meetings during the November 2011 General Assembly and, the report said, "the prevailing tone was positive and the news was good."

Bishop Joseph McFadden of Harrisburg, Pa., chairman of the Committee on Catholic Education of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, issued a one-page report summarizing the review completed in June 2012. The USCCB released the report Thursday.

"Bishops reported that they believe our institutions of Catholic higher education have made definite progress in advancing Catholic identity," the report said. "The relationship between bishops and presidents on the local level can be characterized as positive and engaged, demonstrating progress on courtesy and cooperation in the last 10 years."

It also noted that "clarity about Catholic identity among college and university leadership has fostered substantive dialogues and cultivated greater mission driven practices across the university."

The report gives an outline for continued dialogue on the topic of Catholic higher education. It recommends that a working group of bishops and college presidents be formed under the auspices of the USCCB Catholic education committee to "continue the dialogue about strategic subjects on a national level."

The aim of this working group, according to the report, would be to gather information on best practices, offer suggestions for local conversation and develop resources on topics including:

- Continuing dialogue between bishops and presidents toward greater cooperation in advancing the mission of the church.
- Hiring for mission.
- Formation of trustees, faculty and staff regarding Catholic identity.
- Addressing the need for improved, accurate and deeper theological and catechetical knowledge through curricular and pastoral means.

"Ex Corde," issued by Blessed John Paul II, outlined the identity and mission of Catholic colleges and provided universal norms to ensure colleges maintain these standards.

The document was issued after more than a decade of research involving Vatican departments and Catholic educators around the world. It specifically defines the "mandatum," or church authorization, granted by the local bishop to teach theology.

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"The Application of 'Ex Corde Ecclesiae' for the United States" was approved by the U.S. bishops in 1999 and then approved a year later by the Vatican before going into effect in 2001.

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