



On the Journey to a Mercy Education System

To know Mercy is to know Catherine McAuley.

To share in the mission is to embrace the charism, mission, core values and tradition of the Sisters of Mercy.

To walk with, in and for Mercy at this particular moment in time is to join the implementation phase, Phase 2 of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy initiated process, designed to insure Catholic, Mercy secondary and elementary education into the future.

To share leadership and a role in governance in Mercy requires one to situate Mercy education within the ministry of the Sisters of Mercy and its canonical and governance structures.

To walk as a lay Mercy educator is to claim the unique call of this time for Mercy, for the Church. It is to join a long heritage of lay women and men who have led and served in and for Mercy education. It is at this time to accept and claim new leadership and roles to insure Catholic, Mercy secondary and elementary education into the future.

To walk as a Sister of Mercy, and Sister of Mercy educator, is to walk a parallel congregational journey into the wholeness of an Institute – envisioned as an evolutionary step from Reimagining and Reconfiguring.

May we individually and communally **know, share, walk with, in and for** Mercy and Mercy education into the future.

Catherine McAuley – Are you meeting her for the first time or recalling her charism, her gift to the Church anew, in your role for Mercy education?



Some background: Mercy's story begins in a special way in 1827 as the now Venerable Catherine McAuley, who after a lifetime of struggle amid a society that did little to address the needs of the poor, especially women, opened the doors of Baggot Street in Dublin to women and girls. Here they were sheltered and received an education. Catherine intended to work with a group of committed lay people but to ensure the future of the ministry, took the needed steps to establish a religious congregation. On December 12, 1831, Catherine and two colleagues became the first Sisters of Mercy, thus founding the congregation.

Catherine's decision to form a religious congregation to ensure the work of Mercy, particularly at that time in Dublin at the House of Mercy, will become the first of many structural changes for the

congregation over the next nearly 190 years. Moreover, it can be a witness to all in our time asked to address the need for change to insure the future.

Then and now - There is little evidence that Catherine McAuley ever envisioned all that would come from her first House of Mercy on Baggot Street. She herself would open foundations in England and Ireland. It would be her followers, Sisters of Mercy and lay colleagues, who would expand Mercy and particularly Mercy education around the world.

One can assume Catherine would be amazed at the breadth of Mercy ministries in the twenty-first century. There are seven Institutes of the Sisters of Mercy. You now share particularly in the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Mercy secondary and elementary schools will be found in the United States, Argentina, Belize, Guam, Honduras, the Philippines and Jamaica.

To share in the mission is to embrace the charism of Mercy, its tradition and core values; to walk with, in and for Mercy at this particular moment in time is to join the implementation phase, Phase 2 of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy initiated process, designed to insure Catholic, Mercy secondary and elementary education into the future.

Phase 1 of the process, *Visioning Process for Mercy Education: Envisioning a Preferred Model of Sponsorship for Mercy Secondary and Elementary School Ministries* was initiated by the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas in November 2012.

In its reflection leading to an October 2014 decision point leaders recalled, "So in our passion for service and our love of this ministry, it is no wonder that we as the elected Institute leaders of today, would raise up and empower a process to develop a preferred vision for its future and a structure to support that future.... a process of discernment, including wide-spread consultation of constituencies, and a focus on what is needed at this time in our history for Mercy secondary and elementary education. Fundamentally, we agreed to design a model to insure that Mercy sponsored schools and educational ministries are identified within the mission of the Catholic Church and are faithful to the charism, mission, core values and tradition of the Sisters of Mercy. "

The decision of October 2014 - The ILC affirmed **that there will be one Mercy System of Education organized under the Institute Public Juridic Person with governance and administrative components.** The ILC communication further stated, "Be assured that in each phase of implementation, whatever structures evolve will be attentive to our international reality, to our sponsored schools, cosponsored entities, to educational centers, and to historically non-sponsored schools that continue to foster the Mercy charism." Going forward, the ILC Ministry Group (IMG) will give shape to the implementation phase, which now moves to designing the governance and administrative models that will be part of the Institute Public Juridic Person. This is Phase 2.

(As reference, the ILC in March 2014 affirmed "to envision one Mercy Education System organized under an Institute-wide governance model with appropriate international dimensions." The October 2014 decision identified the locus of the Public Juridic Person.)

In communications in April and May of 2015, further plans for Phase 2 were shared, including the identification of the Project Director, situating the leadership for Phase 2 in a sub-committee of the ILC Ministry Group and initial steps for the formation of task forces to move forward the implementation

process. Key words in communications: the work would reflect input from the visioning process and consultations and fulfill the intent to insure Catholic, Mercy secondary and elementary education into the future.

In July/August 2015 task forces were in initial stages of formation. The task forces identified were in response to the needs and hopes of the Visioning Process. For example, **Governance** – that the Mercy Education System would be organized under the Institute Public Juridic Person with governance and administrative components; tasks forces for **Mercy Education Programs and Services and Leadership**, faithful to the call and commitment to ongoing education and formation; **Financial plan** for the Mercy Education system itself, including analyzing existing resources and transitional processes and identifying as possible new resources.

Throughout the consultative process the concept of accountability was viewed as both a responsibility and an opportunity. It is a responsibility as a school “carries the name of Mercy” and with that are obligations. It was also looked upon as an opportunity, with processes in place for new leaders and Mercy educators to be brought into the Mercy world, knowing what it means to be a Mercy school and accountable for mission and stewardship. Therefore one task force would be empowered to consider **Mercy Charism/Standards. International reality** - throughout the visioning process there was the firm commitment to be Catholic and Mercy in all the Mercy schools in Belize, Jamaica, Honduras, Argentina, Guam, and the Philippines understanding that each country is unique in its governance relationships. A task force would be named to recommend appropriate dimensions for the international schools in the system. Committed to witness **innovation and new initiatives** in the system itself, a task force would be focused on identifying some of the creative responsibilities, new initiatives possible as one Mercy education system. These are the stepping stones for the system.

Reaffirmed throughout the process, the commitment to a system that “is relational, appreciates our cultural diversity, and honors our local reality” was consistently affirmed. “In continued work to bring one Mercy Education System forward, we will seek to reflect commitment to this vision in all our task force work, gatherings and opportunities for sharing in the design.”

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References to Institute, ILC, ILT, Public Juridic Person, and more raise the need for information and at times, clarification.

In its December 2014 the members of the ILC closed their communication with this statement, “Let us together in a spirit of mutual collaboration, love of Mercy, and hope for the future bring to birth one Mercy education system, belonging to one Institute, marked by fidelity to the charism of one foundress, Catherine McAuley, committed to the gospel and in service to the Church.”

Three statements from the **Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy**, Articles, 5, 6 and 7, show consistency of purpose with the process to one Mercy education system. "As Sisters of Mercy, we sponsor institutions to address our enduring concerns and to witness to Christ’s mission. Within these institutions, we together with co-workers and those we serve, endeavor to model mercy and justice and to promote systemic change according to these ideals.”

"By collaborating with others in the works of Mercy we continually learn from them how to be more merciful."

"We carry out our mission of mercy guided by prayerful consideration of the needs of our time, Catherine McAuley's preferential love for the poor and her special concern for women, the pastoral priorities of the universal and local church and our talents, resources and limitations."

The **Institute Direction Statement**, providing direction for the institute concludes with reference to the impact on ministry. Note the call for conversion, the change which will result from the formation of one Mercy education system.

Animated by the Gospel and Catherine McAuley's passion for the poor, we, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, are impelled to commit our lives and resources to act in solidarity with the economically poor of the world, especially women and children; women seeking fullness of life and equality in church and society; one another as we embrace our multicultural and international reality. This commitment will impel us to develop and act from a multicultural and international perspective; speak with a corporate voice; work for systemic change; practice non-violence; act in harmony and interdependence with all creation; and call ourselves to continual conversion in our lifestyle and ministries.

The Critical Concerns – gathered as the Institute Chapter in 2005, the Sister of Mercy delegates prayed, reflected and affirmed raising up five Critical Concerns for our time. They were Earth, Immigration, Non-Violence, Racism, and Women. In 2011, again in Chapter, the Sister of Mercy delegates affirmed an "intensified" response to these concerns. If one looks at the symbol for these concerns, one sees a sixth element, a fingerprint, and it symbolizes the identity of the congregation in relation to these concerns.

Mercy schools, individually, collectively and ultimately as one Mercy education system, are called upon in their programs and practices to witness fidelity as works of Mercy. If one reflects on the mission statement of one's school one will find the consistency and unity of purpose with the Constitution statements, the Institute Direction Statement and commitment to addressing the critical concerns.

Core Values: To add to the wealth and understanding of expressed beliefs: in 1990, Mercy secondary schools engaged in a collaborative process to name the core values of Mercy education. These were affirmed at the 1990 annual conference - Mercy Core Values: Collaboration, Compassion and Service, Educational Excellence, Concern for Women and Women's Issues, Global (World) Vision and Responsibility, Spiritual Growth and Development.

One can note that these predate the formation of the institute and yet are beautifully aligned with the Direction Statement which would be adopted. Over the next 25 years, in a variety of processes both locally and in collaboration, Mercy schools have sought to name values and beliefs which are at the heart of their ministry. In addition to the five of 1990, these core values can be gleaned from the mission statements of the Mercy schools today: Faith community, Gospel values, Christian, Catholic, Special *concern* for the poor, especially *women* and children, Hospitality, Appreciation for Diversity, Justice Dignity – Self, others, Respect – Self and Others, Integrity, Earth, Leadership.

The naming of the five of 1990 and the inclusion of a variety of expressions over the years reflects the ongoing commitment of Mercy education to the charism and tradition of Mercy. Moreover, they currently reflect commitment to both the whole and to what is local. As the formation of the system moves forward, expressions of the core values remain important both in the expression itself and in the processes used to name them.

To **walk** as a lay Mercy educator is to claim the unique call of this time for Mercy, for the Church. It is to join a long heritage of lay women and men who have led and served in and for Mercy education. It is at this time to accept and claim new leadership and roles to insure Catholic, Mercy secondary and elementary education into the future.

From the December 2014 communication, the affirmation, “it is critically important that we keep in mind the purpose for envisioning one Mercy Education System. As leaders [Sisters of Mercy leaders] we must keep the focus on the future needs of our ministries. While we and our lay colleagues clearly cherish the close relationships that community leadership has maintained with their schools in the past, we know that our lay colleagues are carrying the responsibilities and complexities of leadership in Catholic education and need one another. More and more, our lay colleagues desire a system and degree of accountability that will enable them to better strengthen one another. The future will not depend on what has been historically "ours" but on the mission of Mercy education and what Mercy educational leaders UNITED can now give to the world.”

It is this commitment which will be a consistent reference point for Phase 2.

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Following an October 2014 communication from Sister of Mercy leadership that the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas is on a Journey of Oneness, members have been engaged in prayer, reflection and initial dialogue about what this might and will mean.

The engagement and commitment of the Mercy educational community, lay and religious, engaged as it has been since November 2012 in the journey to one Mercy education system serves as a witness to possibility and hope.

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