MISSION ACCOUNTABILITY

SELF-STUDY / PEER REVIEW GUIDE FOR MESA ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
Greetings!

The Mercy Education System of the Americas (MESA) is pleased to offer you this guide as you begin your mission accountability process.

The purpose of the mission accountability process is twofold. First, the process will encourage you to recognize and celebrate the ways in which your school fosters excellence in Mercy Catholic education. In so doing, you are also assuring MESA that your school is rooted in the Gospel through the Catholic faith and the Mercy charism and that it is a place where all students have the opportunity to learn, achieve and feel empowered to take their rightful place as a merciful presence in Church and society. Second, the process will give you an opportunity to reflect on the future of mission at your school and create a plan that addresses any current challenges and considers the changing needs of our time.

This guide supports the self-study process for your school’s Heart of Mercy Committee (you’ll read more about this committee in the following pages). The Heart of Mercy Committee will evaluate their school based on two overarching standards: Mercy Charism and Catholic Identity. “Heart of Mercy”—we chose this name because this committee will probe the depth, or heart, of your school to recognize your Mercy Catholic tradition.

We designed the mission accountability process to be a collaborative activity among a diverse set of stakeholders. We hope that you are creative in seeking input, thoughtful in your brainstorming, intentional about your deliberations and prayerful in your decisions. We look forward to accompanying you.

Sister Regina Ward, RSM
Associate Director for Mercy Mission Integration

Sister Lisa Griffith, RSM
Executive Director, Mercy Education System of the Americas
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*What is a Chapter? A Chapter is a governing body of a religious community. The Sisters of Mercy Chapter traditionally meets every six years.*
The Pathway of MESA Mission Accountability

The following is an overview of the MESA Mission Accountability Self-Study / Peer Review Process.

1. The head of school will convene a Heart of Mercy Committee and appoint a chairperson. (See page 5).
2. The MESA Associate Director for Mercy Mission Integration will meet with the head of school and the chairperson of the Heart of Mercy Committee to review the self-study process in detail.
3. The Heart of Mercy Committee will complete and submit their report - the crux of which is a plan for future integration of Mercy Charism and Catholic Identity - as described on page 6.
4. The MESA Visiting Team will come to the school for a two-day experience. (See sample schedule in appendix.)
5. The MESA Visiting Team will make a report to the school affirming the expression of mission exhibited at the school and the plan the school has for integrating mission in the future. The report will include any recommendations the Visiting Team made while visiting the school.
At the outset of the accountability process, the Head of School should:

1. Convene a Heart of Mercy Committee to steer the process; and
2. Appoint a chairperson.

The committee chairperson is responsible for working with the Heart of Mercy Committee to:

1. Develop a process to engage the committee in their reflection on the two standards, Mercy Charism and Catholic Identity; and
2. Complete and submit the resulting report, which includes a plan for future integration of Mercy Charism and Catholic Identity.

Ideally, the Heart of Mercy Committee is comprised of representatives of the following stakeholders:

   Administration, faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni, members of the board of directors/trustees and benefactors.

Consider membership on this committee as an expression of inclusivity and a testimony of the support of your constituents.
Evaluating Standards for MESA Membership

The Heart of Mercy Committee will evaluate their school and plan for the future based on two overarching standards:

**Mercy Charism and Catholic Identity.**

The evaluation consists of two parts:

1. **Reflection and discussion.** In anticipation of writing the reports, we suggest the Heart of Mercy Committee reflect on and discuss the two standards and their respective criteria (pages 7 and 10) and share their input for questions on the report template (pages 8-9 and 10-11). The committee chairperson will facilitate this reflection process.

2. **A written report.** Using the committee’s discernment and dialogue, the chairperson will complete and submit the final report which includes an evaluation of current practices and a plan for future integration of the two standards.

**Submitting the Report**

The chairperson of the Heart of Mercy Committee should submit the final written report electronically as a PDF file to the MESA Associate Director for Mercy Mission Integration: *Regina Ward, RSM, rward@sistersofmercy.org*

**The MESA Visiting Team**

- The visiting team will be comprised of 3 members - one member of the MESA Office and two peers from MESA schools.
- The team will make an onsite visit to the school of no more than two days. (See sample schedule in appendix.)
- The team will meet with the Heart of Mercy Committee, school administration, faculty, staff, students and other constituent groups as deemed desirable.
- The purpose of the visit is for the team to review the report within the actual context of the school community and to assess how Mercy Charism and Catholic Identity are lived out in word and deed.
A MESA member school possesses and demonstrates the attributes below. The Heart of Mercy Committee should reflect and share examples of how each criterion is being met.

1. Documents (e.g., mission statements, goals, graduate profiles, policies) that clearly align with the charism of the Sisters of Mercy, as described in the accompanying appendix of Mercy documents.
2. Practices that illustrate a commitment to the education of faculty/staff, students, families and board members in the Mercy tradition, including orientation programs for new faculty, staff and board members. Expressions of our Mercy tradition can be found in the history, charism and current documents of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, located in the appendix.
4. Celebrations, rituals and visuals within the school acknowledging our Mercy heritage and values.
5. Encouragement of and participation in the offerings of MESA by leadership, faculty, staff and students--for example, the annual Mercy Education Conference, special interest cohorts, leadership programs for administrators and board chairs and leadership development programs for faculty/staff and students. Find a full listing of MESA programs at mercyedu.org/programs.

Mercy Charism
The school’s identity and practice is firmly rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy and their foundress, Catherine McAuley.
Report for Standard I - **Mercy Charism**

How is it expressed today?

How are you planning for the future?

The Heart of Mercy Committee should reflect on and share input for each question which the chairperson will use to complete the written report.

- For questions 1-9, only a brief response is necessary.
- Question 10 should form the bulk of your report.

1. How explicitly is the Mercy Charism expressed in your mission statement? (Criteria 1)

2. How are the specific elements of the mission statement of your school and the Direction Statement of the Sisters of Mercy witnessed in your school community? (Criteria 1)

3. How are the Works of Mercy and the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy implemented in your school in terms of education (parent groups, faculty/staff, constituents, etc.) and in your community involvement—for example field trips, celebrations, service? (Criteria 2)

4. How is your school distinguished among other Catholic schools, especially in your geographic area, because of its Mercy tradition? (Criteria 2, 3, & 4)

5. How are the Works of Mercy and Critical Concerns incorporated into your curriculum? (Criteria 3)

6. What visual displays of Catherine McAuley and the Mercy heritage are in your school? (Criteria 4)

7. In what specific ways do you incorporate Mercy into your celebrations, rituals and school activities (e.g., liturgies, assemblies, dances, athletics, etc.) to enhance awareness and integration of our faith and Mercy heritage? (Criteria 4)

8. Describe the extent to which your student and faculty retreats are Mercy-centered.
Report for Standard I - Mercy Charism

How is it expressed today?

How are you planning for the future? (continued)

(Criteria 4)

9. Describe some of your celebrations for occasions such as Mercy Day (September 24) and the Sisters of Mercy Foundation Day (December 12)? (Criteria 4)

10. Develop a formal plan for how your school can express its Mercy Charism into the future.

   This plan will address any current challenges at your school as well as take into consideration any changing needs in your school community and/or in our world.

   The plan should include clear goals and measurable objectives when possible.

   The plan should be compatible with your school’s mission and clearly identify how the proposed actions will enhance Mercy Charism at the school.

   The plan should identify any successes and challenges which surfaced in questions 1-9. For each challenge, please provide any relevant context about why it exists and indicate how your proposed plan will address this challenge in the future.
A MESA member school possesses and demonstrates the attributes below. The Heart of Mercy Committee should reflect and share examples of how each criterion is being met.

1. Explicit statement of Catholic identity in the school’s mission statement and evidence that Catholic faith permeates the policies and practices by which the school is governed.
2. Orientation programs for new faculty, staff and board members about the Catholicity of the school; programs assuring faculty, staff and parent faith formation; and evidence of a welcoming environment for students, families and staff of all faith backgrounds.
3. Religion teachers who are well-prepared and engage in ongoing professional development.
4. Cross-curricular inclusion of Catholic social teaching (see appendix for major themes).
5. Prayer and sacramental practices that are rooted in the Catholic tradition and Christ-centered retreat programs that give evidence of Catholic Identity.
6. Campus ministry programs and service opportunities that are aligned with the religion program and affirm Catholic Identity.
7. For high schools in the United States only: A religion curriculum that is aligned with the USCCB’s Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age.
Report for Standard II - Catholic Identity

How is it expressed today?

How are you planning for the future?

*The Heart of Mercy Committee should reflect on and share input for each question which the chairperson will use to complete the written report.*

- For questions 1-16, only a brief response is necessary.
- Question 17 should form the bulk of your report.

1. How explicitly stated is Catholicism in your school’s mission statement? (Criteria 1)
2. How are Catholic signs and symbols visually displayed in your school? (Criteria 1)
3. How does the Catholic faith permeate the policies and practices by which your school is governed and administered? (Criteria 1)
4. What programs do you provide for faith formation of faculty, staff and parents? (Criteria 2)
5. How do you orient new faculty and staff to the Catholicity of the school? (Criteria 2)
6. How does your school sustain a welcoming environment for students, families and staff of all faith backgrounds? (Criteria 2)
7. How is the faith formation and spiritual development of students addressed in religion classes? (Criteria 3)
8. How well-prepared are teachers for their religion/campus ministry duties? (Criteria 3)
9. How do religion teachers engage in professional development in Catholic doctrine, theology, spirituality, youth ministry and teaching modalities? (Criteria 3)
10. How is Catholic social teaching incorporated into your curriculum? (Criteria 4)
11. In what ways does your school pray as an assembly? (Criteria 5)
12. How does a prayerful spirit permeate your school and classrooms? Please provide specific examples. (Criteria 5)

13. Please provide a summary of your student retreat program. How Christ-centered are student retreats? (Criteria 5)

14. In what ways are the goals of the campus ministry program and service opportunities aligned with the religion program? (Criteria 6)

15. How does the school’s Catholic Identity permeate the culture beyond religion classes and campus ministry activities? (Criteria 6)

16. For high schools in the United States only: Briefly describe how your religion curriculum is aligned with the USCCB’s *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age.* (Criteria 7)

17. Develop a formal plan for how your school can express its Catholic Identity into the future.

   This plan will address any current challenges at your school as well as take into consideration any changing needs in your school community and/or in our world.

   The plan should include clear goals and measurable objectives when possible.

   The plan should be compatible with your school’s mission and clearly identify how the proposed actions will enhance Catholic Identity at the school.

   The plan should identify any successes and challenges which surfaced in questions 1-16. For each challenge, please provide any relevant context about why it exists and indicate how your proposed plan will address this challenge in the future.
Appendix
Chapter 2005 Direction Statement

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; and
- 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 nonviolence;
- act in harmony and interdependence with all creation; and
- call ourselves to continual conversion in our lifestyle and ministries.
Chapter 2011 Declaration

Passionate for the Gospel, witnessing to the legacy of Catherine McAuley, and impelled by our Direction Statement, we, Sisters of Mercy, are growing in consciousness of the interdependence among us and with all creation. The dramatically evolving context of our Church and world shape our efforts to be faithful.

We are scandalized by the increase in the impoverishment of peoples, the pervasive denial of basic human rights, the degradation of Earth and increased violence and racism in all their forms. We mourn the continued oppression of women in Church and society, unjust immigration laws and the lack of solidarity among peoples and nations. Even as we acknowledge our complicity, we contemplate the gift of God’s Mercy and we ask:

*God of Mercy, of Wisdom and Mystery, where do we need to be led now to come to both a deeper response to our Critical Concerns and a radical embrace of our identity?*

Having listened deeply to the God who speaks in each of us and in this Chapter, we are led:

- To deepen and make evident our Gospel-based spirituality through passion for service and vibrant community life;
- To unmask and address the underlying causes of our Critical Concerns and the interconnections among them;
- To liberate and redistribute our human and financial resources across the Institute and develop creative solutions to unmet needs acting in solidarity with impoverished people;
- To act in ways which contribute to a sustainable future for our Institute, the Church and Earth.

Yearning for integrity of word and deed, we commit, with urgency, to these acts.
Recommitment 2017*

Called to New Consciousness

God of Mercy, Wisdom and Mystery, who do you desire us to be now for one another and for our suffering world in order to continue our transformation toward greater integrity of word and deed?

The Sixth Institute Chapter has come to believe that the God of Mercy, Wisdom and Mystery is calling us, as Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, an international and intercultural community, to deepen our relationships with God and one another, and to intensify our work in communion with others who seek a more just and inclusive world. We recognize a yearning for oneness in all of creation, in all peoples and within our Institute. Our suffering world calls us to speak and act with integrity and clear intention.

Critical Concerns

We hear a demand to embrace anew our Critical Concerns through the lens of nonviolence, and

♦ to grow in our personal practice of nonviolence and peacemaking, actively collaborate with communities and organizations that foster peace and nonviolence and work to change violent systems and structures;
♦ to work zealously toward the sustainability of all life by caring for Earth’s ecosystems, addressing global climate change, advocating for the fundamental right to clean water and committing ourselves to an “integral ecological conversion”;
♦ to continue our commitment to eliminate personal, communal and institutional racism while working to dismantle structures, policies and processes that oppress;
♦ to advocate for the intrinsic value of women’s lives and to promote equality of women in Church and society;
♦ to act in solidarity with migrants, immigrants, refugees and victims of human trafficking, seeking with them a more just and inclusive world.
Calls to Respond

We hear the cry of our suffering world. The impoverishment of peoples, the devastation of Earth, and oppressive social norms and systems call us in this moment to act:

- to become better educated and to participate in engaged dialogue on gender identity and sexual orientation;
- to continue to assure that financial decisions are consistent with our mission and our needs;
- to intensify efforts to align our investments with our values and, especially now, to pursue education and action against practices of extractive industries that are destroying people, communities and Earth.

In order to respond to the urgent needs of our day, this Sixth Institute Chapter commits us to a renewed exploration and fuller expression of our communal documents. We welcome all to join us in a “revolution of tenderness.” In Catherine McAuley’s spirit of union and charity we voice the call of Jesus, “that all may be one.”

* Modified for MFSA Mission Accountability Guide

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1 London 64
2 Constitutions; 1855 Founding Document; 2005 Direction Statement & Critical Concerns; 2015 Chapter Declaration
3 Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, Art. 60
The Sisters of Mercy were founded out of a deep concern for persons who are poor. Today, that commitment is focused in five “critical concerns” that we address through prayer; attention to personal, communal and institutional choices; education; advocacy with legislators and other government leaders; and corporate engagement.
We believe in the need to work toward the sustainability of life and support movements and legislation that secure the fundamental right to water for everyone, and that address climate change. That leads us to examine our own behaviors and policies and to adopt more environmentally sustainable practices. We also advocate against hydrofracking; against mining that impacts indigenous and impoverished communities; for regulations that protect land, air and water; and for national and international agreements that mitigate climate change and ensure support for those most vulnerable to its effects.

**Earth**

We reverence the dignity of each person and believe everyone has the right to a decent home, livelihood, education and healthcare. In the United States we work for just and humane immigration laws, a reduction in deportations that tear families apart, and an end to the detention bed quota. We look at the root causes of immigration, including U.S. policies that contribute to the economic and social conditions that push people to flee their countries, and the global impact of migration through our reality as an international community of women religious.

**Immigration**

We work for peace through prayer, education, and personal and communal practices of nonviolence. We support nuclear disarmament, reduction of arms, and the use of dialogue instead of armed conflict. We work to prevent domestic violence and abuse of women and children, stop human trafficking and reduce violence in our communities. That leads us to advocate for commonsense gun violence prevention legislation, an end to the death penalty, an end to the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, and dialogue with Syria and Iran.

**Nonviolence**

We believe racism is an evil affecting us all. We work to mobilize sisters and associates in recognizing and dismantling institutional racism in order to become an anti-racist multicultural community. We advocate for upholding the voting rights of marginalized Americans and for a fair criminal justice system, and point out racism wherever it exists.

**Racism**

We believe that women’s education, health and spirituality need special attention. We continue this mission in our schools, colleges, health-care institutions and spirituality centers. We advocate for equal pay, for services for domestic violence victims, and for the rights of girls and women in especially repressive societies.

**Women**
The Church’s social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. The depth and richness of this tradition can be understood best through a direct reading of these documents. In these brief reflections, we highlight several of the key themes that are at the heart of our Catholic social tradition.

**LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. Human life is threatened by cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. The intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks is always wrong. Catholic teaching calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means. We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

**CALL TO FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND PARTICIPATION**

The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Marriage and family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

**RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.
OPTION FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE
A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

THE DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS
The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God’s creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

SOLIDARITY
We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that “if you want peace, work for justice.” The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

CARE FOR GOD’S CREATION
We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

This summary should only be a starting point for those interested in Catholic social teaching. Text for this card is drawn from Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions (English: Pub. No. 7-085; Spanish: Pub. No. 5-803) and Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility (2003). A full understanding can only be achieved by reading the papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents that make up this rich tradition. For a copy of the complete texts and other social teaching documents, visit us at www.USCCB.org.

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1 Paul VI, For the Celebration of the Day of Peace
(Rome: January 1, 1972).
MESA Visiting Team Sample Schedule

The following sample schedule is a general guide that the head of school and/or Heart of Mercy Committee Chair can use when planning for the MESA Visiting Team. The sample schedule includes a list of the various persons and groups with whom the team will anticipate engagement. It is expected that the sample schedule will be modified to meet the needs and schedules of those involved at the school. The MESA Associate Director of Mission Integration (Regina Ward, RSM, rward@sistersofmercy.org) will contact the Heart of Mercy Committee Chair to plan the schedule prior to the visit.

DAY 1

8:10 Meet with administration and Heart of Mercy Committee Chair
8:30 Meet with Heart of Mercy Committee
9:00 Tour of school
9:45 MESA Visiting Team meeting
10:30* Meet with a sampling of religion teachers across the grades. Each teacher should bring two students from their grade level.
   Pre-K/Kindergarten: early introduction to faith formation
   2nd or 3rd grade: preparation for the sacraments
   Middle School
   Campus minister, chaplain and/or director of religious education
10:30* Meet with student leadership representatives (sampling of students whom the school determines as student leaders) accompanied by a teacher/moderator.
11:30 Meet with faculty and students involved with service organizations and mission trips
12:00 Lunch
12:30 MESA Visiting Team meeting
1:00 Meet with a representation of multiple grade level teachers (different from teachers at 10:30 session)
2:00 Meet with 15 students chosen by the school
2:45      Meet with head of school’s administrative team/council
4:00      Meet with board members
4:45      Meet with any Sisters of Mercy in the area

DAY 2

8:15      Meet with parents chosen by the school
9:00      Administrative staff meeting
10:00     Meet with anyone the administration or Heart of Mercy Committee suggests.
10:30     Visit classes and be available to anyone who would like to meet with the team.
12:00     Lunch
1:00      MESA Visiting Team meets
2:00      Meet with administration and Heart of Mercy Committee
3:00      MESA Visiting Team departs.

*Two meeting spaces will be needed for these time slots.*