



Mission: The Foundation of Decision-Making

Reflective Exercises for Use Before, During and After Times of Crisis¹

May 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has touched every aspect of our lives, and its impact on our world continues still to unfold. Knowing how many timely and critical decisions have challenged Mercy schools, MESA offers the following to help decision-makers reflect on the choices they have made and look toward the future with hope.

Part I

Quick List of Questions to Use Regarding Action or Response

These questions may be of service to school leaders for any moments that call for decision-making, including times of crisis.

1. Whose voices are at the table of decision-making? Whose are not?
2. What values are expressed in our particular response/action?
3. How does this response/action reflect our mission?
4. Who will benefit from this decision? Who will pay or lose some benefit or value?
5. Who will carry the work of this decision?
6. How do our school's *Mission Statement* and MESA's documents: [*Catholic Identity in the Mercy Tradition*](#) and [*A Guide for Ethical Discernment*](#) influence our decision?
7. Given present constraints and opportunities, is there a way to more deeply align our action/response with our mission?

Part II

Considering the impact of a crisis like COVID-19, school leaders are invited to assess crisis-driven decisions, both real-time and post-crisis. This self-reflection highlights where decisions embrace the Mercy mission, goals and values, as well as where there is disjointedness, thus inviting clarity and intentionality for moving forward. How we move through difficult times speaks volumes about who we are as people of Mercy.

Consider the following for reflection and dialogue. As part of the process, please refer to Part I of this document.

¹ Inspired by Mary Paula Cancienne, RSM, "[Mission Questions to Consider During Any Decision Discernment – and During a Crisis/Post Crisis for Institutions of Mercy](#)," Conference of Mercy Higher Education (2020).

During the Crisis

- ❖ Describe features of the crisis/situation for you and your school.
- ❖ What is most difficult? What is most challenging in terms of being a Mercy school and wanting to respond as such?
- ❖ What is surprising you in a good way, and what is surprising you in a disturbing way, about where you find yourself and the school?
- ❖ Are you getting reliable information that informs the decision-making processes?
- ❖ What are you learning about the processes that your school follows to gather information, make decisions, and support follow-through? What works/does not work?
- ❖ Are there points when Mercy values seem to be secondary to the need to get on with things?
- ❖ What helps to keep a process moving, while being attentive to values your school names as important to being Mercy? What impedes this happening?
- ❖ Is there any inherent experience where you feel you are especially aware of the “grace of God?”
- ❖ What are you learning about yourself and your school’s community during this experience?
- ❖ When brainstorming, possible responses are raised that ultimately lead to decisions. How are Mercy values and ethical concerns routinely raised and vetted professionally during these processes? By what criteria?
- ❖ If your school’s sustainability requires cutbacks or layoffs, how will the process speak of Mercy—of respect, appreciation, and solidarity? Are there alternative possibilities? Who is involved in these decisions?
- ❖ Are financial decisions based solely on business considerations or from a mission standpoint as well?

Recovery/Post Crisis

- ❖ What do you wish you and your school would have done differently during the crisis?
- ❖ If this were to occur again, or something similar, how do you hope you and your school will be better prepared to confront the needs as a Mercy school?
- ❖ Where and how were Mercy values engaged in your decision processes and follow-through? Give examples.
- ❖ Do you think that your community reflected who you say you are and wish to be known by in your broader community?
- ❖ What do your analyses suggest will be the consequences for your school as a result of this event?

Looking Forward from the Crisis

- ❖ How will this experience or crisis change “business as usual” in terms of board work, administration, academics, extracurricular activities, alumni relations, local community and partnerships, and collaboration with Mercy schools throughout MESA?
- ❖ How are you being called to move forward, to let go of the need to hold on to what was, and to be poised to face the future as exposed by this crisis?
- ❖ How can and should Mercy values and goals infuse and guide this ever-evolving ministry of Mercy into the future? How can you connect your constituents and donors to this new vision?

“We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about, our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back.” - Catherine McAuley