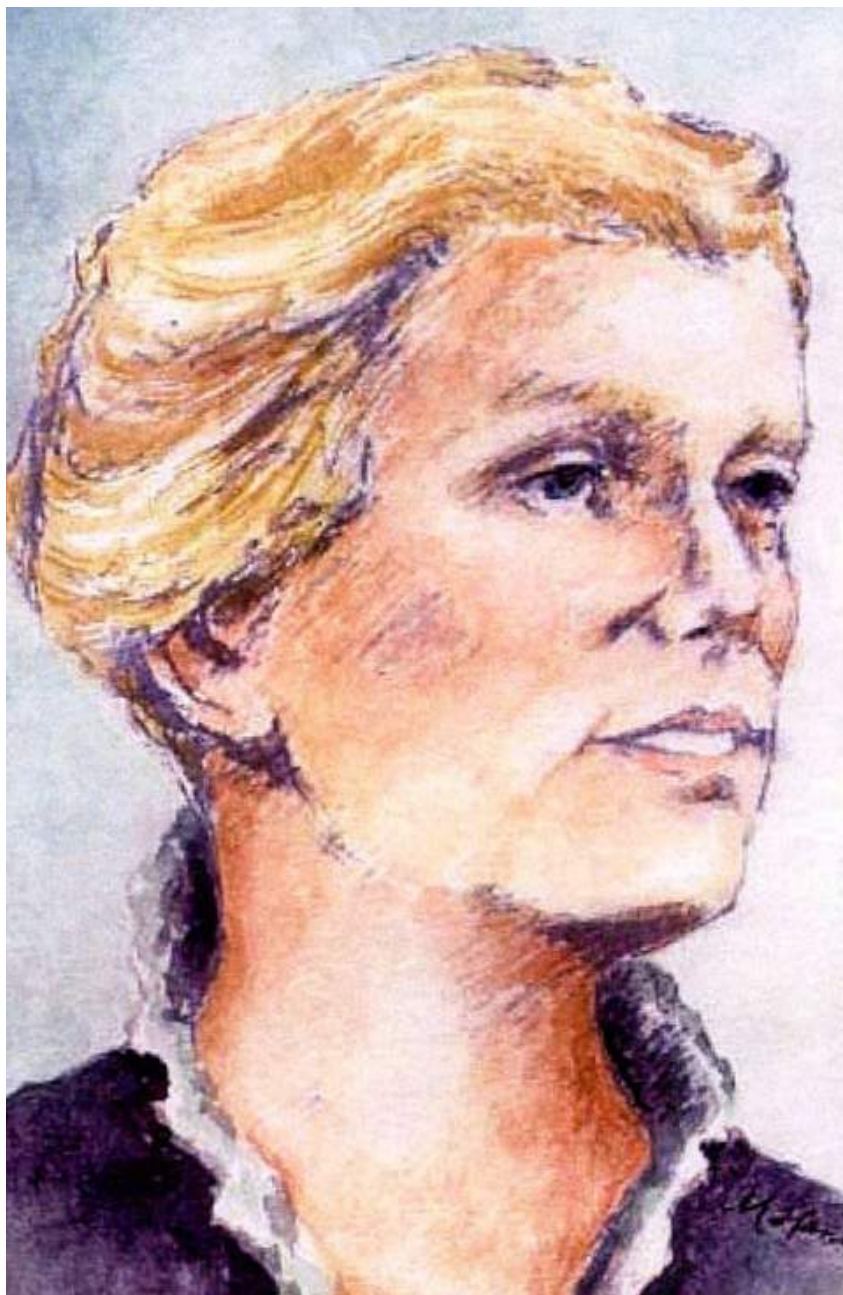




Mercy Education
Educación de la Misericordia

Courageous Action. Selfless Spirit.™
Acción valiente. Espíritu altruista.™

MISSION ACCOUNTABILITY



**SELF-STUDY /
PEER REVIEW
GUIDE
FOR MERCY
EDUCATION
ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS**

Welcome to the Mercy Education Mission Accountability Process



Greetings!

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

The purpose of the mission accountability process is twofold. First, it 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 Mercy Education 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 growth 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Regina Ward, RSM".

Sister Regina Ward, RSM
Associate Director for Mercy
Mission Integration

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Griffith, RSM".

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 Mercy Education Mission Accountability

The following is an overview of the Mercy Education 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 Mercy Education 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 growth plan for future integration of Mercy charism and Catholic identity - as described on page 6.
4. The Mercy Education Visiting Team will come to the school for a two-day experience. (See sample schedule in appendix.)
5. The Mercy Education Visiting Team will make a report to the school affirming the expression of mission exhibited at the school and the growth plan the school has for integrating mission in the future. The report will include any recommendations the Visiting Team made while visiting the school.

Heart of Mercy Committee



At the outset of the accountability process, the head of school should:

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

The Heart of Mercy committee chairperson will work with Mercy Education's Associate Director for Mission Integration (Regina Ward, RSM, rward@sistersofmercy.org) to orient the chairperson and the Heart of Mercy Committee to the process.

1. Meet with Sister Regina to discuss the overall process.
2. Coordinate the time of the first committee meeting so that Sister Regina can participate virtually.

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.
2. Complete and submit the resulting report, which includes a growth plan for future integration of Mercy charism and Catholic identity. *Please plan to submit a preliminary report to Sister Regina and then a final report that addresses any comments from Sister Regina. A date will be established for the submission of each.*

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 Mercy Education Member Schools

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 report, we suggest the Heart of Mercy Committee reflect on and discuss the two standards and their respective criteria (pages 7-8) and share their input for questions on the report template (pages 9-10). The committee chairperson will facilitate this reflection process, which will identify the strengths and challenges of the lived reality of the mission at your school. The reflection and discussion is the most important aspect of the self-study.
- 2. A written report.** Using the committee's discernment and dialogue, the chairperson will complete and submit the final report which includes the strengths and challenges identified in the reflection and discussion as well as a growth plan for future integration of the two standards. The growth plan should address the challenges identified.

Submitting the Report

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

The Mercy Education Visiting Team

- The Visiting Team will be comprised of members of the Mercy Education Office and peers from the Mercy Education 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.

The Two Standards: ***Mercy Charism*** and ***Catholic Identity***



There are two standards that establish the school's identity: Mercy charism and Catholic identity. Although they are two distinct standards, it is difficult to separate them because they complement each other so closely.

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.

Catholic Identity

The school gives evidence of its Mercy Catholic identity in its curricular/extracurricular offerings, prayer and liturgical life, retreats and service opportunities.

Criteria and Questions

On the following pages you will find criteria for both standards as well as questions probing the essence of each criterion in the lived reality of your school culture. Reflection on these questions will help to surface the successes and challenges at your school as you continue to live the mission.

[You can download a print-friendly PDF of pages 7-10 here.](#)



Criteria for the Mercy Catholic Standards

Mercy Charism Criteria

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.
3. Cross-curricular inclusion of the Works of Mercy and the Sisters of Mercy Critical Concerns.
4. Celebrations, rituals and visuals within the school acknowledging our Mercy heritage and values.
5. Encouragement of and participation in the offerings of Mercy Education 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 Mercy Education programs at mercyedu.org/programs.

Catholic Identity Criteria

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. Religious Education programs, service learning programs and service opportunities that are aligned with the religion program and affirm Catholic identity.



Report for the Mercy Catholic Standards

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

I. Write a brief response for each question indicating the highlights of the committee's discussion.

1. How explicitly is the Mercy charism and Catholic identity expressed in your mission statement? Remember, the mission statement is a short testament of your mission. Does it reflect your Mercy Catholic identity?
2. How are specific elements of the mission statement of your school and the directional statements of the Sisters of Mercy (see pages 12-15 in the appendix) witnessed in your school community?
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, board, constituents, etc.) and in your community involvement – for example field trips, celebrations, service?
4. How has your school been stretched as you respond to the Critical Concerns especially in light of recent world, national and local events?
5. How is your school distinguished among other Catholic schools, especially in your geographic area, because of its Mercy tradition?
6. How are the Works of Mercy, Sisters of Mercy Critical Concerns and Catholic Social Teaching incorporated into your curriculum?
7. What visual displays/reminders of your Mercy heritage and Catholic identity are present in your school?
8. How does your Mercy Catholic identity permeate the policies and practices by which your school is governed and administered?
9. Other than the curriculum, in what ways do you incorporate Mercy Catholic values and traditions into your school life? How do these efforts help your faculty and students identify with the mission?
10. What programs do you provide for faith formation of faculty, staff and parents, both new and established members of your school community?
11. How does your school sustain a welcoming environment for students, families and staff of all faith backgrounds?



Report for the Mercy Catholic Standards

12. How is the faith formation and spiritual development of students addressed in your religion classes?
13. How do teachers prepare for their religious education duties? How do religion teachers engage in professional development in Catholic doctrine, theology, spirituality, youth ministry and teaching modalities?
14. In what ways does your school pray as a community? How does a prayerful spirit permeate your school and classrooms? Consider specific examples.
15. In what ways do your faculty and students have the opportunity to compose and share faith-based reflection with the school community? Consider classroom and schoolwide settings. Examples might include responses to service projects, reflections on Gospel readings.
16. Describe the extent to which your student and faculty retreats are Christ-centered and Mercy-centered.
17. Describe the way your service opportunities span direct service, advocacy and ministry opportunities (See appendix page 28).
18. In what specific ways do the Profile of a Graduate and the Mercy Core Values on appendix pages 26-27 describe your school? In what ways do you feel called to grow into these attributes?

II. In your report, describe any successes and challenges you noted in your discussion of questions 1-18. For each challenge, provide any relevant context about why it exists.

III. In your report, develop a *growth plan* for your school: 4 to 5 goals that will help your school address the identified challenges. Please include 2 to 3 measurable objectives that will help you achieve each goal.

Put these goals/objectives in a table format including:

1. When you will begin the objective (3 – 5 year vision)
2. Who is responsible for the objective (position in the school, not the name of the individual)
3. Desired completion date

[An optional template for your growth plan is available here.](#) Please feel free to use a format more in keeping with your strategic plan format.

This growth plan should be compatible with your school's mission and clearly identify how the proposed action will address your challenges and enhance the school's Mercy Catholic identity.

Appendix

[PDF files of the documents contained in the Appendix
can be found here.](#)



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"¹;
- ❖ 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 documents². We welcome all to join us in a “revolution of tenderness.”³ In Catherine McAuley’s spirit of union and charity we voice the call of Jesus, “that all may be one.”

* Modified for Mercy Education Application Guide

¹ *Laudato Si'*

² *Constitutions; 1991 Founding Document; 2005 Direction Statement & Critical Concerns; 2011 Chapter Declaration*

³ Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Art.88

Sisters of
Mercy



Hermanas de la
Misericordia



Sisters of Mercy **CRITICAL CONCERNS**

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.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR JUSTICE WORK AT:

www.sistersofmercy.org

JOIN IN OUR ADVOCACY EFFORTS AND SIGN UP FOR EMAIL
ALERTS ON ANY OR ALL OF THESE CRITICAL CONCERNS.

www.sistersofmercy.org/advocacysignup



Earth

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.



Immigration

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.



Nonviolence

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.



Racism

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.



Women

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.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

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."¹ 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.

¹ Paul VI, *For the Celebration of the Day of Peace* (Rome: January 1, 1972).



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A Guide for Ethical Discernment

June 22, 2015

A GUIDE FOR ETHICAL DISCERNMENT

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 our co-workers and those we serve, endeavor to model mercy and justice and to promote systemic change according to these ideals” (*Constitutions* 5). The moral pluralism of contemporary society increasingly presents challenges to our institutions and to us as sponsors as we endeavor to remain faithful to our Catholic identity and our Mercy tradition. In responding to the needs of those we serve, we are often faced with the competing claims of conflicting goods. These claims invite us to approach our discernment in a disposition of openness that allows us to recognize and respond to the sacred responsibility we share as we make decisions for the future of our Mercy institutions and ministries.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Gospel Values

The Gospels tell us about Jesus, who His friends and family were, what He liked to do, where He liked to go and how He lived His life and made decisions that led ultimately to His death in Jerusalem. When we contemplate the Gospels we see what Jesus valued and called His followers to—compassion, mercy, justice, equality, joy, courage, love, reconciliation and service. What the Gospels say about Jesus also acts as a mirror for interpreting our own lives, behaviors and decision-making process. We look at the person of Jesus to inform our values and how we make decisions based on these values.

Catholic Social Teaching

Central to the Church’s social teaching is the commitment to justice. Justice demands the protection of the life and dignity of every human person, not merely as an individual but as a participant in a network of private and public relationships. This protection manifests itself in special concern for the poor and vulnerable and upholds the right of all people to productive work. We are called to view one another as members of the same human family with the same rights and responsibilities as together we seek the common good.

Contemporary Catholic Moral Teaching

In addition to the Church’s social teaching, Catholic morality is guided by scripture, tradition, the *sensus fidei* and the teaching of the Church.

Developed over time these guiding principles must be understood in their proper context. Decisions need to be made in light of a body of Church teachings that stand in relation to one another and hold differing weights of importance. Those engaged in moral decision-making need to be aware of the variety of levels of authority within the Church and the role of the local bishop in the interpretation of Church doctrine. When issues are perceived differently and a decision must be made, tradition has always held sacred the appeal to an informed conscience.

Mercy Documents

As Sisters of Mercy we have important documents that guide our life and ministry and inform decision-making within our institutions. These documents include the *Institute Constitutions*, the *Institute Direction Statement* and other statements approved by Institute Chapters, especially the statement of our Critical Concerns. These statements focus on our commitment to women and children, the economically poor, the environment, nonviolence, immigration issues and anti-racism.



PROCESS FOR ETHICAL DISCERNMENT

1. After prayerful reflection, identify the question and clarify the authority of the decision-making group.

Clarify the role of the gathered group prior to beginning the actual decision-making phase of the discernment. Are they advisory or decision-makers?

2. Determine the relevant stakeholder groups and their respective view(s). Ensure that if there are multiple views they are made known to the decision-making group.

3. Identify and gather the needed information and data.

Assess how stakeholders (for example, faculty, students, family members, employees, parishioners, etc.) are positively and negatively affected by the issue at hand.

4. Identify the benefits and burdens, as well as unintended consequences of the decision. At this juncture, consider how those who are poor, vulnerable or otherwise entrusted to our care will be affected by the decision—particularly the primary stakeholders.

5. Determine key moral commitments and values, as well as conflicts among them.

For example, Mercy schools are committed to the education of students in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy. Consider conflicts that may arise when deciding to increase tuition. Who would be affected by this?

6. Establish rationalities and priorities among commitments and value.

For example, increase funding to enhance campus ministry vs. school athletics.

7. Examine the major options and evaluate the positive and negative consequences of these options on the identified priorities.

Develop options that express the priorities in light of the Foundational Principles.

Explore the practical implications of the decision.

Investigate the foreseeable repercussions from the decision that is being made.

Ensure the dignity of each person affected by the decision.

8. Gain consensus on the decision.

Evaluate whether there is a consensus. Ethical discernment does not require an absolute consensus, although it does need to examine whether or not there exists any significant opposition to the proposed course of action.

9. Conduct an evaluation of the decision-making process that resulted in the specific course of action. Determine if there are any systemic issues brought to light that need to be examined further.

Throughout this process of discernment, all involved need to follow the directives of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Crisis Communication Plan where appropriate.

Reference: CHE Values Based Decision Making Process, 2006



www.sistersofmercy.org



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 does our school's **Mission Statement** 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

CORE VALUES

The Hallmarks of a Mercy Education



Compelled By Mercy

Mercy students, in the spirit of our founder Catherine McAuley, are steadfastly determined to take Mercy into an interconnected world. Our shared sense of social consciousness is fortified by universal empathy and a conviction that all are worthy of God's mercy. This deep awareness and compassion move us to take principled action and serve the needs of others.



Educational Courage

Mercy students welcome the challenge of pursuing their full potential in a culture of excellence, critical thinking and curiosity. Their multifaceted journey builds character while it builds essential skills. Our holistic program expects engagement, a thirst for knowledge and personal responsibility, while preparing students to thrive for a lifetime.



Inspired By Faith

Mercy students become living models of faith and forceful advocates for Gospel values. Grounded in our Catholic identity in the Mercy tradition, we welcome all faiths and are strengthened and shaped by these relationships. As we pursue a personal relationship with God, we strenuously follow Jesus Christ's example of social justice, love and service.



Principled Leadership

Mercy students are poised to lead with their unique gifts. Prepared with an ethical and moral compass, we put Mercy values into action and work assertively for what is right. We're equipped to make difficult choices, learn from our mistakes and develop high emotional intelligence. As an international community, we're confident in our ability to make a positive difference and push for systemic change.



A Voice For Dignity and Respect

Mercy students honor the intrinsic value of the individual and recognize God's presence in each person. We embrace a global vision and value differences of opinion, and are unafraid to confront hostile or hurtful attitudes. By standing up for those who can't, we go beyond acceptance to help make sure everyone feels recognized and heard.



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PROFILE OF THE GRADUATE

A Journey of Student Development

CORE VALUE • STUDENT ATTRIBUTES



Compelled By Mercy

Compassion. Having concern for the needs of all, including those outside our immediate circle.

Empathy. Putting yourself in someone else's shoes to understand their feelings and perspectives.

Responsibility to Serve. Fulfilling the duty to not just care about other, but to take action on their behalf.



Educational Courage

Curiosity. Being open to other ways of seeing the world and exploring new ideas.

Personal Accountability. Staying disciplined in decision-making, proactive in correcting mistakes and self-motivated in our studies.

Critical Thinking. Gathering and objectively evaluating and analyzing information through reflection and reason.



Inspired By Faith

Spirituality. Developing a personal relationship with a loving, merciful God, expressed in service and respecting other faiths.

Modeling of Jesus Christ & Catherine McAuley. Living life with abundant love, compassion, generosity and hospitality, demonstrating the strength of infinite mercy.

Ethical & Moral. Following a personal code based on Gospel values that guides action and choices.



Principled Leadership

Integrity. Standing up for or doing what's right, including when it's difficult or unpopular.

Lifelong Learning. Always learning something new, gaining skills and wanting to know more, in all walks of life.

Emotional Intelligence. Recognizing and welcoming emotions within ourselves and others to build resilience and healthy relationships.



A Voice For Dignity and Respect

Grace. Allowing others to be fully human without judgment, while honoring what is God-like within each person.

Advocate. Being a forceful defender, supporter and sometimes spokesperson for the values and people we hold dear.

Inclusivity. Going beyond tolerance to embrace diversity, while accepting and serving with open arms.



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Student Service in Mercy Schools



Definitions

- Direct service is defined as service to alleviate the pain or concern of others and/or the Earth.
- Advocacy is defined as working for systemic change that involves speaking to people of influence, such as civic leaders, to help correct the root causes of the social issues that cause people and/or the Earth to suffer.
- Ministry is defined as actions in service of the spiritual life of the recipients. This can be accomplished through significant leadership in preparing and offering prayer and worship opportunities (such as liturgies and retreats) and/or service experiences that provide opportunities for transformation and growth through serving others.



Mercy Education 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 Mercy Education 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. Mercy Education 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	Mercy Education 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.
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	Mercy Education 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 Mercy Education Visiting Team meets
- 2:00 Meet with administration and Heart of Mercy Committee
- 3:00 Mercy Education Visiting Team departs.

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

Sample Prayers for Heart of Mercy Committee Meetings

[Available here for download.](#) These prayers, created by Ned Berghausen, were shared by Mercy Academy (Louisville, Kentucky). You are welcome to edit as needed for use by your Heart of Mercy Committee.

Heart of Mercy Committee Opening Prayer



In the Quaker tradition, with which Catherine McAuley was familiar and for which she held great respect, a group of supportive individuals are invited to be part of a "Clearness Committee" when a member or members of the group are discerning an important decision. As we gather as a Heart of Mercy committee to discern the ongoing mission and Catholic identity of Mercy Academy, let follow this pattern of prayer and pray for the coming of God's Holy Spirit.

Call to Prayer

Leader: Let us pray together...

All: God of light, from whom all good gifts come, descend upon us with life-giving fire. Send your Spirit into our hearts with the power of a mighty wind. By the flame of your wisdom, open the horizons of our minds. Empower us to call forth the depth of commitment and love which is the legacy of Mercy.

Leader: God of fire, Dios de vida, you have given us the flame of Mercy to kindle and rekindle throughout our journey together.

All: Come, Lord Jesus, send us your Spirit; renew the face of the earth. Come, Lord Jesus, send us your Spirit; renew the face of the earth.

[Light the Sisters of Mercy's candle.]

Reading

The spirit of obedience impels us to search together for God's will in fidelity to our mission. Responsible obedience requires that we inform our minds and prepare our hearts for dialogue, share our insights and respect freedom of conscience. In this search, we listen to one another in love and accept conversion to God's will. When the Holy Spirit gives us the wisdom and courage to live this way, we are able to embrace the cross in whatever shape it presents itself in our lives (Catherine McAuley, *Constitutions* 28).

1



Heart of Mercy Committee Prayer – Mercy Charism

Introduction

Many people embrace the virtue of mercy in their lives, generously extending compassion and forgiveness to others. Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Associates, Mercy Volunteer Corps members, and faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, board members and other members of Mercy Academy choose to join a community of people who are named Mercy, people who inspire and encourage one another to deepen their lives in Mercy. Like Catherine McAuley, they recognize God's Mercy in their own lives and commit to sharing that Mercy with others.

Call to Prayer

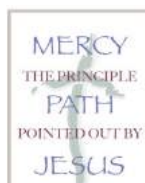
Leader: Creator God, may we delight in the wonders of your ever-renewing world

All: Rejoicing always in your indwelling presence in all things!

[Light the Sisters of Mercy's candle.]

Reading

Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following Him, has in all ages of the Church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor, as in them they regarded the person of our Divine Master, who has said, "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me." (Catherine McAuley, *Rule and Constitutions of the Religious Sisters of Mercy*).



Prayer Service - Reflection Upon Catholic Identity in Education



Adapted from a Prayer Service for Catholic Identity in Health Care by SR. PATRICIA A. TALONE, RSM, Ph.D.

LEADER

As we gather in prayer, we reflect upon what it means to proclaim that we are a Catholic education ministry. Catholic education today stands at a juncture between an increasingly secular, nonreligious culture and the continuing call to fidelity to our own traditions, history, and Gospel values. We are often challenged by those within and beyond Catholic education who ask, "Are you what you say you are?" Jesus, whose ministry we continue, also faced such questions. Let's listen to the words of Matthew's Gospel:

READER

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven . . ."

Matthew 16:13-17

RELECTION

(silent reflection; if there is time, share the fruits of your reflection with one another)

- How is our academy perceived in our local community? By our students and parents? In our archdiocese and in our state?
- How would I describe our academy if Jesus asked me, "Who do you say you are?"
- How is our Catholic identity evident to those who enter our building(s)?
- How is our Catholic identity evident to students and community



Heart of Mercy Committee Prayer – The Eucharist and the Cross

Introduction

In Catherine McAuley's spirituality, the sacrament of the Eucharist was of primary importance. She described the Eucharist as a "fountain of joy, peace, consolation, and grace to all who lovingly approach it, in the spirit of faith, humility, and reverence." (Familiar Instructions, 79). As we continue our conversation about our academy's Catholic Identity today, let us consider our relationship to the Holy Eucharist and the Cross of Christ.

Call to Prayer

Leader: Let our prayer rise before you, God of all peoples and nations.

All: May your grace fill the world. Sanctify the work of our hands. Bring forth the reign of your justice and mercy. [Light the Sisters of Mercy candle.]

Reading

Catherine wrote: "Our lives should be a continual preparation for [Holy Communion's] reception, and all our actions performed with so pure an intention as to serve to fit us ... for the coming of our divine Guest." (Familiar Instructions, 70)

Catherine viewed receiving Jesus in the sacred mystery of the Eucharist as the highest act of worship. The celebration of the Eucharist a





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8403 Colesville Road, Suite 400 | Silver Spring, MD 20910
301.273.9775 | mercyledu@sistersofmercy.org