

2026-2027

NEW LEADER ORIENTATION PROGRAM



Mercy Education
Educación de la Misericordia

WELCOME

Mercy Education's *New Leader Orientation Program* is a virtual, two-year program for new school administrators and board chairs, offering training and discussion on topics critical to leaders of Mercy Catholic schools.

This brochure details offerings for the 2026-2027 academic year. Most sessions are offered twice; you may choose the time slot that works best for your schedule when you register. You will receive connection instructions and any supporting materials once you register.

For questions and registration information, please contact [Susan Smith, Associate Director for Mercy Education.](#)

[Register Here](#)

Leadership Advice from Catherine McAuley

Don't let crosses vex or tease; try to meet all with peace and ease.
Notice the faults of every day – but often in a playful way.
And when you seriously complain, let it be known to give you pain.
Attend one thing at a time: you've fifteen hours from 6 to 9.
Be mild and sweet in all your ways; now and again bestow some praise.
Avoid all solemn declaration, all serious, close investigation.
Turn what you can into a jest, and with few words dismiss the rest.
Keep Patience ever at your side: you'll need it for a constant guide.
Show fond affection every day, and above all, devoutly pray
that God may bless the charge He's given,
and make of you their guide to Heaven.

*Letter from M. Catherine McAuley to
M. Elizabeth Moore, early December 1838*



Session 1:

Erin DaCosta and Theresa Gannon

In Catherine's Boots: Living the Mercy Legacy Today

Date/Time: Wednesday, October 21, 2026, 11 am or 6 pm ET

As Catholic Mercy educators, we are blessed to stand on Catherine McAuley's shoulders and carry the torch of Mercy forward. While each of us comes to this mission with different experiences, we are united by a shared commitment to living and sharing the Mercy charism.

The presenters will share about their recent pilgrimage through Dublin to the places where Catherine's mission began. Catherine's story is not simply part of our history—it is part of our calling. This presentation will invite all to reflect on what Catherine's legacy means for us today and how we continue to pass it on through our work, our relationships, and our witness to our students.

Meet our Presenters!



Erin DaCosta serves as the Director of Mission & Ministry at Academy of Our Lady of Mercy, Lauralton Hall, and is a proud Mercy Associate. All-girls, Mercy-sponsored education is at the heart of her vocation, and she is deeply committed to forming young women in faith, leadership, and compassionate service. Erin earned her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Stonehill College and went on to complete a Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry at Boston College. She later pursued specialized formation in Catholic and Mercy education, earning a post-master's certificate in Mercy Spirituality from Georgian Court University and a certificate in Catholic School Management from Villanova University. Erin lives in Hamden with her husband and their two young children. In her free time, she enjoys reading, watercolor painting, and serving as a Girl Scout troop leader.



Theresa Gannon, Middle School Director at Waldron Mercy Academy in Merion, Pennsylvania, is a lifelong member of the Mercy Catholic Faith. She has a M. Ed and is certified in the following areas: Reading Specialist, English as a Second Language and Wilson Training. Having spent 40 years as a teacher and administrator in Catholic education, she is dedicated to continuing the Mercy mission through the students before us.



Session 2: Lauren Albright



Mission-Centered Communication Before, During, and After a Crisis

Date/Time: Thursday, December 3, 2026, 11 am or 6 pm

Strong crisis communication begins long before a crisis occurs. This session will explore how school leaders can build communication plans that reflect their school's mission and values and provide a framework for responding when challenges arise. Topics will include crisis preparedness, stakeholder communications, message development, and considerations for keeping the Mercy mission at the center of every message.

Meet our Presenter!

Lauren Albright is the Communications Manager for Mercy Education, where she has led communications strategy and supported Mercy schools around the globe since 2018. Lauren has supported school leaders through a wide range of communications challenges, helping them to communicate with clarity, transparency and fidelity to mission. Before joining Mercy Education, Lauren served in the Institute Communications Office for the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and worked in communications for Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington. She currently co-facilitates the Mercy Education Communications and Marketing Cohort. Lauren holds a bachelor's degree from Marywood University and a master's degree from Penn State University. She lives in Gaithersburg, Maryland, with her husband and two children.

Session 3: Dr. Anne Knapke



Steward Leadership in Mercy Education: Advancing Catholic School Mission in an Era of Lay Leadership

Date/Time: Thursday, January 28, 2027, 11 am or 6 pm ET

Catholic schools continue to face significant challenges as they transition from religious to lay leadership, especially in preserving mission integrity, Catholic identity, and long-term sustainability. Insights from Mercy schools and Mercy Education will illustrate how first-generation lay leaders embody Mercy charism, practice relational and participatory leadership, and align strategic and financial decisions with mission values. Steward leadership emerges as a framework that advances both tradition and innovation, embedding mission in governance, promoting ethical decision-making, and strengthening school culture. Leadership formation and mission-driven planning will play a vital role in sustaining Catholic schools for generations to come.

Meet our Presenter!

Dr. Anne Knapke serves as Head of School at Gwynedd-Mercy Academy Elementary in Ambler, Pennsylvania, a PreK–8 community of 391 students and 63 faculty and staff. She is honored to serve as the first lay leader since the academy's founding in 1861. In 2025, Anne completed her doctoral studies on steward leadership and the evolving role of lay leaders in Catholic education through a phenomenological lens of Mercy Education. Previously, she was Principal of St. Pius X Catholic School in Greensboro, North Carolina, where she began her vocation in Catholic education. Guided by Mercy charism, she leads with fidelity, integrity, and a mission-driven spirit.



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Session 4: Sister Pat Talone, RSM



Ethical Decision-Making

Date/Time: Tuesday, February 23 at 11 am ET or Wednesday, February 24 at 6 pm ET

The presentation explores the WHY of making ethical decisions – aligning what we do with who we say we are. It provides a model of and clear steps for making key ethical decisions, particularly in an educational setting. Furthermore, it shows how Catholic teaching and Mercy values assist in what can often be a challenging process. Participants are encouraged to reflect before the meeting and come with at least one experience of ethical import from their own professional lives.

Meet our Presenter!

Sister Patricia Talone, RSM, Ph.D., is a consultant, lecturer and writer in the areas of mission, ethics and formation. From 2003-2016, Sister Patricia was Vice President for Mission Services at the Catholic Health Association of the United States. Having taught at every level from grade three through graduate school, Sister Patricia brings a broad educational background. She holds a Ph.D. in theological ethics from Marquette University, an M.A. in Religious Studies from St. Charles Seminary, and a B.A. in Humanities from Gwynedd-Mercy College. In 1996, she spent a semester as a visiting fellow at Georgetown University's Kennedy School of Ethics.



Session 5: Dr. Mario Brunetta



Mercy Catholic Education is Transformational Education

Date/Time: Wednesday, April 14, 2027, 11 am or 6 pm

We will explore how a Mercy Education is not merely transactional, but transformational for the students we teach and form. Using the notion of Catholic "sensibilities," we consider the key elements of the rich tradition of Catholic Social Teaching through the lens of the charism and leadership direction of the Sisters of Mercy and how these impact leadership in our schools.

Meet our Presenter!

Dr. Mario Brunetta is Vice President for Mission Integration at the headquarters of Trinity Health, the one of the largest Catholic health care systems in the United States. Mario has also served as an Ecclesiastical Judge and canon law consultant for various dioceses and Catholic religious orders in the United States since 2003. He is an experienced mission leader, accomplished educator and effective and dynamic communicator with extensive practical experience in administration, canon law, theology and pastoral care. His academic credentials include a doctorate in Canon Law, an M.A. in Religious Studies, a Masters of Divinity, and an M.A. in Public Health.





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

MISSION STATEMENT

Mercy Education System of the Americas unites and supports Catholic schools embracing the charism of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Rooted in the Gospel and inspired by Catherine McAuley, Mercy Education nurtures educational communities to develop highly competent, deeply compassionate leaders ready to serve a vulnerable world.

mercyedu.org

