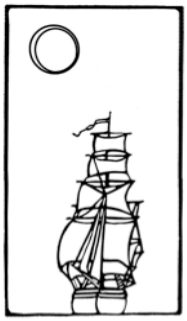

The MAST Journal

The Journal of the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology

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Directions for the Conference for Mercy Higher Education

Sisters of Mercy Hermanas de la Misericordia

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Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Friends of Mercy,

There has been a harmonious relationship between the Conference for Mercy Higher Education and Mercy Association of Scripture and Theology for decades. In fact, one of the inspirations for the founding of MAST, the organization, in 1986 was the fact that within professional academic organizations, including Conference for Mercy Higher Education, there was no specific forum for Mercy theologians to meet. That was remedied by the gathering of MAST founding members in June 1987 at Gywnedd –Mercy College. Some Mercy Sisters who remain active in the Conference for Mercy Higher Education were also inaugural members of MAST. What we share in common today—whether in a Mercy college or university, or as a Mercy theologian—is the Mercy charism of education. It's the impulse of Catherine McAuley to instruct women (and today men) in understanding a God who is merciful and train them for their professional work with a commitment to be merciful and just in family, work, church and world.

When the Conference for Mercy Higher Education was established in 2006, *The MAST Journal* was proud to publish its 16 presentations as Papers of the Conference for Mercy Higher Education: Gwynedd-Mercy College, Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania, June 15-17, 2006 in Vol. 16, No. 2.

Two years later, *The MAST Journal* in Vol. 18, No. 2, published seven papers, abstracts for concurrent sessions and descriptions of poster presentations that described more than a dozen pedagogical strategies and classroom practices in Proceedings of the Service-Learning and Civic Engagement Symposium: Conference for Mercy Higher Education, Georgian Court University, Lakewood, New Jersey, June 12-14, 2008.

Most likely the thickest issue of *The MAST Journal* ever published in its thirty-year history is the Proceedings of the CMHE Third Biennial Symposium, June 2-4, 2010, held at Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pennsylvania. The theme was "Becoming a Global Citizen in Mercy." This issue, with seventeen papers, appears in Vol. 20, No. 1. Special thanks was due to Marilee Howard, R.S.M., who did the layout.

These past CMHE-themed issues are available in *The MAST Journal* archive, on-line at www.mastrsm.org.

This present issue, guest-edited by Mary-Paula Cancienne, R.S.M., reflects another decade of collaboration with the Conference for Mercy Higher Education. This issue integrates the contributions of Mercy faculty, college and university administrators, and CMHE leadership. These voices succeed those of decades of Mercy sisters who were among the first wave of women in the U.S. to earn doctorates in their field in the 1950's and 1960's, breaking the gender barrier in academia. They served as inaugural faculty and administrators in Mercy colleges and universities. Their quiet, selfless work and expertise in arts, sciences and educational administration deserve recognition.

What is the vision that unites the conversations, research and writing in all these publications? As Leona Misto, R.S.M., of Salve Regina University said so succinctly in her 2008 Abstract, "Catherine McAuley, drawn by God to continue His work of Mercy, looked outward at the world around her, saw the great need of people suffering from physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional pain and responded with her all. Catherine's Religious Institution is centered on the works of Mercy. Her legacy and her spirituality reflect this."

The editorial board of *The MAST Journal* celebrates this issue as reflective of the charism MAST shares with CMHE and welcomes future collaborative projects.

Yours,

Eloise Rosenblatt

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.
Editor, *The MAST Journal*

Guest Editor Introduction
Mary-Paula Cancienne, RSM, Ph.D.

Just as the work of putting this volume together was being completed, we found ourselves in a global pandemic with the COVID – 19 virus. Needless to say, it is in the fire that our values and identity are most challenged. And, in the midst we are also transformed.

During ordinary times we explore and during extraordinary times, we are forged. In the midst, it is important to have a sense of who we are, our mission and values. This volume is a collaborative effort of *The MAST Journal* and the Conference for Mercy Higher Education. CMHE is thankful to the editorial board of MAST Journal for their support in bringing this volume to fruition. And we are especially grateful to the guiding hand of its editor, Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., Ph.D.

This volume centers on the sacred and essential work of Mercy higher education, and how this work intends and pointedly aims to contribute to a just and merciful world through academic study by our students, who then go out into the world to be Mercy leaders in their chosen fields.

Mercy colleges and universities are sponsored by the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas through the Conference for Mercy Higher Education. We are grateful to the sisters and their communities who began these ministries and for the women and men today who, steeped in the charism, carry on the ministry of Mercy higher education. Yes, only together do we go forward. – The following is a rich example of the dialogue and work that is being done in this important ministry, where the process of learning goes on, all in service of the common good and a sustainable, vibrant, healthy future.

Greg Baker, in "Higher Education at the Intersection of Mercy and Reality," looks at what makes a Mercy college or university distinctly *Mercy*. He does so from his perspective as a mission officer and where his insights and particular approach to the topic demonstrates a rich knowledge and embrace of the charism.

Mary-Paula Cancienne, in "A Tent of Learning: Catholic and Mercy in Higher Education," highlights the relationship of Mercy and Catholic when many on our campuses do not have experience with the Catholic tradition. She explores the metaphor, *Tent of Learning,* as a way to open access to the gifts and resources of Catholic and Mercy.

Timothy Muldoon, in "The Covenant of Mercy Higher Education: A New Moment in Mission," dives deep into the language of "covenant," exploring historical roots in Judaism and argues that covenantal relationships carry us beyond contractual, transactional exchanges. He explores how sponsorship in Mercy higher education is a "covenantal" relationship.

Elizabeth Davis, in "Mercy Higher Education – Transformed and Transforming," breaks open the larger context of a suffering planet and our need to keep our relationship with Earth, with all of its inhabitants and systems, squarely before us in higher education as this impacts everything.

Jayme Hennessy, in "A Pedagogy of Becoming: The Social Imaginary of Mercy," argues for a robust, integrated approach to passing on Mercy that is embedded in course work and all other collegiate activities. She argues against individual, siloed efforts that are not working together over the course of a student's

experience with us. She brings to the foreground our responsibility of working to develop the intellectual and moral character of our students.

Jennifer Reed-Bouley and **Kristin Mattson**, in "Catholic and Mercy Higher Education: Preparing Students for Critical Engagement in the Era of Trump," pointedly address the experience of "Trumpism" in the classroom. Herein, the authors demonstrate how Catholic Social Teaching and the resources of sponsors, including the Sisters of Mercy, are made for the task of critical and necessary engagement in higher education.

Johann Vento, in "Mercy Education: It's not about Me, It's about Us," writes directly to students, sharing what they can expect to experience at a Mercy college or university. Pushing against the "me," she prepares students to be stretched and discomforted. Her emphasis is on "Us."

Theresa Ladrigan-Whelpley, in "Common (?) Values in Mercy, Catholic Higher Education," shares what she gathered across Mercy colleges and universities in terms of the values they aspire to live and to inculcate in their students and community. She demonstrates how there is wide similarity and particular nuance, which speaks to a collective identity, without being an exercise in uniformity.

Mary-Paula Cancienne and **Moya K. Dittmeier**, in "Common Focus Areas for Exploring Characteristics and Values of a Mercy College or University," step back and consider major themes within the Mercy charism and its history, which are now articulated in similar and dissimilar ways in terms of values, virtues, and characteristics across member institutions of the Conference for Mercy Higher Education. This is a tool for reflection and dialogue.

Higher Education at the Intersection of Mercy and Reality

Greg Baker, D.Min.

What about the Mercy tradition makes the classroom environment and the overall campus experience distinct from other Catholic or liberal arts universities? As a mission officer at a Mercy higher educational institution (Mercyhurst University in Erie, PA), I have the important duty of interviewing and orienting faculty and offering an introductory response to this question. As is often the case, students seem to know best how to answer this. During a recent discussion with student leaders about the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, I asked: "If the University's Board of Trustees were to decide that it was time to disaffiliate from the Sisters of Mercy and therefore from our Catholic identity, what would the university gain, and what would be lost?"

While students could not think of much that the university could gain from such a move, what they pointed to as potential losses were profound. Their articulation of what would be missing offers a rich summary of what the university at its best always has and always will offer. They talked about the specific welcoming nature of the college community and feared that this would never be the same without the Mercy charism. They noted that coursework is oriented towards action in the world and service with others. Students observed that the university's Catholic identity has helped them to recognize what the education was ultimately for and has drawn them into important ethical discussions and decisions. Finally, they pointed to the specific purpose that the Catholic, Mercy mission gives to their identity as people who genuinely believe they can make a difference in this world. I contend that what these students realized would be missing if the university abandoned its mission is the essence of the Catholic intellectual Tradition embodied through the charism of Mercy. It is a higher educational environment marked by (1) active hospitality, (2) a pedagogy that engages reality, (3) a humanizing orientation to the common good and (4) a decidedly hopeful realism. I will use the wisdom of the students' four areas to argue that the intersection of Mercy and reality affords a unique flavor and potency to a Mercy higher educational experience.

Students observed that the university's Catholic identity has helped them to recognize what the education was ultimately for and has drawn them into important ethical discussions and decisions.

1. The Experience of Mercy in Active Hospitality

Mercy is foremost an experience, an encounter with an extravagant divine reality whose tenderness and compassion goes far beyond what justice demands. Its theological significance is found less in *ideas* about a merciful God than in concrete *experiences* of receiving Mercy. This is why Mary Sullivan, R.S.M., notes that Jesus and his Mercy offers the "practical rendering of God's charity"—a reality that is encountered.[1]

A student at a Mercy university will often experience aspects of Mercy before they ever hear or read an exposition about it. Mercy is radically inclusive, and students are enthusiastically welcomed regardless of creed, ethnicity, race, age, economic status, ability, sexuality or gender identity. People hold open doors, look each other in the eyes and smile.

Students are noticed and cared for as individuals. When one receives a simple kindness or attentiveness that cannot be repaid, they have glimpsed Mercy. Active, intentional welcoming and hospitality echoes what has been at the center of Pope Francis' writings about education: the human person and her/his dignity is the center of the University's mission. It is the spiritual and anthropological foundation for a humanizing education. Amidst the contemporary demographic and financial challenges that many small to mid-sized liberal arts colleges face, a Mercy university can never reduce its goals to numbers. Rita Panciera, R.S.M. once said to me when I asked her what she prays for as she thinks about the university's future, "First, I hope the university gets enough students to sustain it. Then, once we get the students here, that we really care about them."[2]

Once students know themselves to be part of an actively welcoming community, Mercy education draws students towards contemplating their own lives and the complex world around them.

2. A Pedagogy for Seeing Reality

Once students know themselves to be part of an actively welcoming community, Mercy education draws students towards contemplating their own lives and the complex world around them. A Mercy education helps people to see reality more deeply. It is rooted in the incarnation—God in flesh—which sets the human on the lifelong journey for finding the countless ways in which divine reality and truth is hidden in plain sight. Walter Burghardt, S.J. defines contemplation as "taking a long, loving look at the real."[3] In this sense, I suggest that a Mercy education employs a pedagogy that not only analyzes but also *contemplates* reality. I offer five admonitions below that give an introductory glimpse into the rich ways in which a Mercy pedagogy fosters new ways of engaging reality. A Mercy education for seeing reality begins with and maintains awe, and knows that evidence and facts matter, though it recognizes that reality is not always obvious. As this education deepens, it develops an honesty with the real, trusting that there is a deeper way of holding onto reality

Maintain Awe

It is easy for humans to forget the Mercy that first welcomed them to the journey of life. It is crucial for students to deepen in their capacities to appreciate the stunning, yet often simple ways in which God's life and goodness permeates reality. Contemplating reality first builds a sense of awe and wonder as people take in the fullness of the beauty and complexity that surrounds them. As Pope Francis worries, there seems to be a contemporary degradation of awe.[4] In taking a long, loving look at the real one cannot help but notice beauty in the natural environment, in people and in the profound discoveries and advances made by humans. On my campus, the buildings and grounds are beautiful and dignified and the campus is steeped in fine arts. Mercy does not wish to leave anyone deprived of beauty. The discipline of contemplating reality—even when one is not in an immediately beautiful environment—allows one to maintain the awe that reminds us that life is a gift that comes from a holy mystery far beyond human grasping. Contemplating reality allows people to deeply see the beauty of the world; however, it also allows people to deeply see the brokenness of the world.

Reality is Not Always Obvious

Contemplating reality draws students to critically investigate what is truly at work in the

world around them, especially in its brokenness. A Mercy education invites people to be courageous enough to see the truths of their own complex lives and the truths of complex realities around them. Reality is not so simple, because human institutions, often in the name of power, serve to modify or distort peoples' vistas and perceptions. If some people imagine that a liberal arts education is a free exchange of abstract ideas and ideals, Pope Francis offers an important corrective. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, he asserts that "realities are more important than ideas."[5] He cautions that many institutions and structures (including religion) can serve to mask reality. It is the same reason that Catherine McAuley chose to build the original House of Mercy in a wealthy part of Dublin. She knew that the social structures of her city served to shield the poor and wealthy from one another, robbing both of a full picture of their local realities and possibilities.

Honest reflection on reality also leads to an awareness that life is about more than oneself.

Evidence and Facts Matter

While a college student at a Mercy institution should find her worldview expanded by new ideas and possibilities, she should also experience herself feasting on reality. Sr. Marilyn Lacey brings the power of contemplation to its dailiness and simplicity: "God is not located in some far-off celestial abode but is met in the embrace of daily life; that spirituality is, quite simply, about vulnerability and openness and falling in love with solid ground."[6] Careful skill and analysis are essential. A Mercy education is rooted in liberal arts, and also in evidence, facts and data brought forth from various sciences and fields. So valued was skill and precision in education to Catherine McAuley that she visited and learned techniques from the Kildare Street Society, a place known for its deep anti-Catholicism.[7] Our world and the United States in particular have a dire need for deeper respect for reason, research, evidence, science, experience and dialogue. A pedagogy that engages students in contemplating reality is steeped in hands-on learning and practice. From the earliest days, Mercy education used a system of having older girls serve as "monitresses" who heard younger students recite what they had learned. This demonstrated to students a mentored model of education that leads to learning by doing.[8]

Deepen in Honesty with the Real

A Mercy education will always employ compassionate yet critical self-reflection and social critique, especially through the lenses of social injustices and encounters with otherness. Jon Sobrino, S.J. argues that a spirituality of Mercy develops an "honesty with the real."[9] It is not enough to see what is real through evidence. A deep encounter with reality initiates a cycle of critical self-reflection alongside critical social critique to ask, "What is really happening here and what does it mean?" Students begin to recognize that everyone is wrapped up in complex systemic injustices, and that none of us has entirely clean hands or full exemption from many of the systems in which we participate. Honest reflection shows that things are rarely black and white. Critical thinking demands a Catholic both-and approach that takes in various sides and perspectives and acknowledges that not every important question needs an answer. Honest reflection on reality also leads to an awareness that life is about more than oneself. This process of self-transcendence liberates students from naval gazing and opens endless possibilities for investing oneself for the sake of others. Honest encounter with oneself and the world confronts a student with ethical dilemmas that must be faced. My favorite way to frame this challenge is to

borrow an image from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Mercy pedagogy invites students to nurture tender hearts to reflect on the compassion of Jesus, but also tough minds to apply ethical principles to complex situations.[10]

Trust in a Deeper Way of Holding onto Reality

This rich interplay of action and reflection leads to important observations about how people see reality. In his book *The Universal Christ*, Franciscan Richard Rohr contends that people have two primary ways of seeing. Science offers a practical way of seeing—of seeing things in their particular nature. Meanwhile, religious seeing is a broad way of seeing—of seeing things in their interconnectedness and interdependence; in their wholeness and not merely in their individual parts.[11] When Mercy meets reality, both ways of seeing are always at work: gathering evidence from discrete realities while holding onto reality as a much larger, already graced whole. This religious way of seeing also demands intellectual humility. As Pope Francis says, "I never trust my first inclination or reaction."[12] One is invited to be humble, patient and discerning in their assessments of complex realities.

In short, the church is pleading with universities to educate and inspire social systems to cooperate more effectively for the sake of the earth and its peoples.

3. Humanizing Education for a Common Good

The 2017 document from the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Fraternal Humanism*, celebrates the ways in which various fields of study advance human understanding and improve the conditions of the world, though it argues that not enough progress has been made. The document argues that people have not coalesced around the reasons why they should cooperate in the first place. The social question has become an unavoidable anthropological question. In other words, who is the human and what is humanity becoming amid rapid social and technological advances? The document then calls for a *new humanism* in service of the common good. For this reason, one needs to have "a new trajectory of thinking in order to arrive at a better understanding of the implications of our being one family; interaction among the peoples of the world calls us to embark upon this new trajectory, so that integration can signify solidarity rather than marginalization."[13] In short, the church is pleading with universities to educate and inspire social systems to cooperate more effectively for the sake of the earth and its peoples.

The common good is for education the standard measure of what learning is ultimately for. As I say to each incoming class of freshman during their welcome week, you can get an education that leads to financial stability and a career from any number of academic institutions. But that is not why the Sisters of Mercy founded this university. They want you to gain knowledge and skill and expand your horizons, but ultimately, they want you to find creative and courageous ways to put your skills and knowledge to use for the sake of the greater good, with a special sensitivity for the poor and marginalized.

An emphasis on the common good also helps faculty to recognize how various disciplines intertwine. Philosophical disciplines, arts, natural and social sciences are drawn together in interdisciplinarity and common proactive projects, such as when intelligence studies, hotel/restaurant management and criminal justice departments at my university partnered with local agencies to create an anti-human trafficking coalition. As I say to incoming faculty each fall, our seemingly disparate disciplines unite under a common mission that points us towards concrete projects

that nudge our disciplines to see how they can and must cooperate with other fields, uniting all our efforts under one goal. We strive to orient the knowledge, creativity, gifts and attention of our students towards the common good.

4. Educating for Hopeful Realism

It is vital to engage students with a pedagogy that confronts reality critically and through a lens of social justice, yet a Mercy education does not stop there. Mercy attends to the whole person, especially students' spiritual and emotional well-being, as they prepare to apply their learning through careers and lives of integrity. There is a well-documented vulnerability among college students to anxiety and depression. A recent study notes that while all other instances of mental health challenges have declined among college students, depression and anxiety continue to increase steadily.[14] On my campus we observe a steady climb in the number of students who seek out and depend on counseling, medication and a variety of supports to feel they have any chance at navigating the pressures of college life. I celebrate students' willingness to seek out help, though I mourn their having grown up in such an anxiety-prone culture.

When I engage this generation with topics that matter for their lives and their world—topics like racism, immigration, climate change, or the deeply divisive political climate in the United States—students are like sponges. They know that the world is filled with broken structures and people, and they long to know how they might contribute to building better structures that improve social realities. Students are often anxious about their quickly-changing world, and social critique can easily lead to cynicism and despair. They require Catherine McAuley's relaxing, simple wisdom to "take one day only in hands at a time." As educators we engage students in questioning assumptions and challenging preconceived ideas, but we cannot leave students dejected in the ash heap of all that has been deconstructed. We also help students to form constructive and hopeful plans for moving forward to put their gifts and education to use in bringing Mercy to the world. As campus ministry scholar Fr. James Bacik argues, when working with students we must foster a "hopeful realism" that avoids naïve optimism and cynical pessimism "while finding signs of hope in embracing the realities of life."[15] Just as when Catherine McAuley opened the first House of Mercy on Baggot Street, the Mercy tradition becomes present to broken realities by building structures of proactive human cooperation.

Hope is not merely a feeling. It is necessary for seeing the possibilities of the realities we face. Paulo Freire argues that to, without hope, is abnormal; hopelessness is a distortion, because realities are always changeable: "Reality, however, is not inexorable or unchangeable. It happens to be this just as well as it could be something else. And if we so-called progressive thinkers want it to be something else, we have to struggle."[16] Hope is neither passive nor expectant. It is proactive and creative. A Mercy education invites students to believe that they can successfully struggle against and recreate those realities that do not serve this earth and humanity well. Hope is a rightly ordered disposition for recognizing that realities can always be recreated.

Conclusion

While I have argued that there are distinct emphases and aspects that make for an experience of Mercy higher education, it is noteworthy that traditions like a Mercy education are vulnerable. They require vigilance and intentionality. As theologian Terrence Tilley notes, "A tradition can be lost should a community fail to pass along its practices to its successors."[17] Frances Warde taught that "To instruct is an easy matter, but to educate requires ingenuity, energy, and perseverance without end."[18] Those of us who are

fortunate to work and minister in the tradition of Mercy higher education share a sacred task of carrying forward a tradition that is marked by four movements of experience and awareness:

1. God encounters my reality with an unconditional welcome.
2. I name and wrestle with the realities of beauty and brokenness in the world.
3. I recognize the need to connect my realities to human social realities larger than myself.
4. I deepen in hope that my gifts and my educational experiences will make a difference in recreating realities and extending Mercy to the world around me.

The Mercy tradition opens hopeful, productive possibilities as it engages students' hearts, minds and spirits at the fertile intersection of Mercy and reality.◆

Endnotes

[1] Mary C. Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy: The Life of Catherine McAuley* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012): 170.

[2] Interview with author, August 2016.

[3] Walter Burghardt, "Contemplation: Taking a Long, Loving Look at the Real," in *The Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, ed. by George Traud (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008): 89-98.

[4] Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, trans. by Oonagh Stranksy (New York, Random House, 2016): 61.

[5] Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013: 231-233. It is noteworthy that Francis' claim that "realities are more important than ideas" is foremost a theological claim based on the incarnation. Because God in Jesus becomes a human reality, this frames the human imagination about and quest to encounter God in terms of what can be encountered in realities, not in abstract ideas.

[6] Marilyn Lacey, *This Flowing Toward Me: A Story of God Arriving in Strangers* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2009).

[7] Mary C. Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995): 72. I am indebted to Sheila Carney, R.S.M., for bringing to my attention this and other interesting pieces about Catherine McAuley and education during a keynote address at Mercyhurst University on January 7, 2020.

[8] See Sullivan, 132.

[9] John Sobrino, "Spirituality and the Following of Jesus," in *Mysterium Liberationis*, ed. by Ignacio Ellacuria and John Sobrino (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993): 682.

[10] Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1959 sermon.

[11] Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ* (New York: Convergent, 2019): 7.

[12] Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, 5.

[13] Congregation for Catholic Higher Education, "Educating to fraternal humanism: Building a 'civilization of love' 50 years after *Populorum progressio*" (Vatican, 2017): 11-13.

[14] *American Institute of Stress Report*, October 21, 2019. https://www.stress.org/anxiety-in-college-students-causes-statistics-how-universities-can-help.

[15] The expression "hopeful realism" is used in many of Bacik's writings, including James Bacik, *Pope Francis and Campus Ministry: A Dialogue* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2018).

[16] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998): 69-71.

[17] Terrence Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000): 152.

[18] Frances Warde, 1843, https://mercyedu.org/mercy-education/, accessed 28 February 2020.

A Tent of Learning: Catholic and Mercy in Higher Education

Mary-Paula Cancienne, R.S.M., Ph.D.

Introduction

Colleagues across Mercy colleges and universities, at different levels of responsibility and participation, express deep commitment to Mercy higher education and live this commitment generously in so many ways. Simultaneously, some share their struggle to understand what "Catholic" means and how Catholic and Mercy are related, even for some life-long Catholics. Their questions speak to the heart of our need to understand "Catholic" and "Mercy" as Mercy sponsored institutions of higher education in the United States during challenging times, if not uniquely so, and two decades into the twenty-first century.

Catholic and Mercy, one a major religious tradition, and the other a charism within that tradition, are rich paths that engage the heart and mind, contemplation and action.

Catholic and Mercy, one a major religious tradition, and the other a charism within that tradition, are rich paths that engage the heart and mind, contemplation and action. Thus, with a wide brush, and ever so humbly, let us examine how Catholic and Mercy, together, focus our mission of higher education and the work that we do of teaching, research, and service. First, let us consider the landscape.

The Landscape

There is growing understanding that we are all connected on one planet, as we see in the experiences of a pandemic and in the crisis of global warming. Regarding the religious landscape, Pew Research Center publishes reports indicating that, of our college and university students, fewer are practicing Catholics than there were ten or twenty years ago. There are many reasons and suspected reasons for this shift, but increasingly, students are less routinely and cyclically exposed to the stories, reflections, practices, rituals, writings, art, conversations, teachings, and culture of the Catholic tradition.

Often it is the "religious right" that catches the media spotlight. For example, the far right endorses literal interpretations of religious texts, such as the reading of the creation stories in Genesis, as though they are the equivalent of contemporary science. This fuels distortion of the great religious traditions, as well as an attitude of dismissal by some who see these traditions as archaic, mythic, or no longer relevant. In addition, while not exclusive to the Catholic Church, sexual and financial scandals further erode the credibility of "Catholic."

For centuries the religious house of worship was the center of the community. Catholic religious services were ways to form community, and schools to nurture Catholic imagination and formation of conscience. However, for many congregants, our need to gather and how we gather have shifted over recent decades-- whether for social reasons, religious events, work, and even sports. So much is online either by choice or by necessity. In addition to these changes, some resist a Catholic patriarchal structure and the Church's doctrinal positions on procreation, sex and gender. In general, according to Pew, 26% of the U.S. population are "nones," not belonging to or associated with any particular religious tradition.[1] Of course, this is not the whole picture, but it does reflect changes in how we search for meaning and purpose.

Generally speaking, Catholicism's well-traveled religious paths, its multiple but distinct

ways of describing the spiritual journey, and its ethical counsels on the development of virtues, have become less familiar as a shared spiritual heritage.

In our present landscape, our time, energies, talents and general attention are pulled in many directions. Particular Catholic practices and the relationships and communities, they support, not to mention a worldview that they suggest, do not find as many young receptive participants. In a previous generation, a shared worldview was simply assumed. Many young adults have not been prepared or wired for seeing the world through a traditional religious lens. Nevertheless, faculty of Religious Studies, Theology, Sociology and other disciplines like Philosophy tell stories of students who may have little knowledge or experience of a religious tradition, but who have many questions and desires about engaging the meaning of life . . . the meaning of their lives. They long for conversation related to a spirituality that is rooted in their experience of life and open and hospitable to people of all backgrounds.[2]

Pope Francis has certainly helped to open public space for dialogue about a richer understanding of Catholicism on the world stage by encouraging a more compassionate "encounter" among all peoples, across their differences. His focus on the plight of marginalized people and a suffering planet echoes in many quarters. Francis calls attention to the needs of the poor and of the Earth. He insists that faith in action entails making a response to human and planetary needs. Meaning of faith and human purpose go hand-and-hand. Yet, with so much spotlight on a Catholic leader, we can be left with the perception that "Catholic" primarily begins and ends with an institutional model of church.

However, whether they speak within a religious tradition or outside of it, students continue to express their longing for meaning and purpose in their lives. Board members who serve our institutions often express similar desires. In terms of Catholic and Mercy, we sometimes hear: "What is Catholic?" or "Why Catholic and Mercy?" or "Okay, I get Mercy, it's the Critical Concerns."

Yet, Catholic is more than an institution with a male hierarchy and Christmas carols. The Mercy charism of the Sisters of Mercy, rooted within the Catholic tradition, is more than the Critical Concerns, alone. Indeed, stepping into these deep waters means never settling for superficial answers or even good answers we thought we'd worked through years ago. In fact, the "answers" here are like bends in a river. Just when we think we are going to arrive at our destination, having figured things out, we round a bend and discover there is more to the river than we had charted. This is the nature of the path of Catholic and Mercy.

However, whether they speak within a religious tradition or outside of it, students continue to express their longing for meaning and purpose in their lives.

A Catholic Perspective with a Mercy Sensibility

Change, transition, growth, and creativity are often painful and messy. What we are witnessing on the U.S. Catholic scene can be described as messy. Some of the structures, patterns, and modes of communicating Catholicism's core treasures are being challenged. Parishes get merged. Some social service programs, hospitals, and educational projects get closed. Catholicism's spiritual message does not always take root in today's culture, even though significant efforts are being made to use media in new and creative ways to engage followers and seekers.[3]

Sometimes we mistakenly highlight the tradition's accoutrements over its essentials. Sometimes the legalistic side claims attention rather than its mystical, contemplative, or prophetic dimension. These unseen spiritual dimensions are never isolated from each other. For example, the prophetic dimension that speaks of justice needs the mystical and contemplative dimensions to help temper our souls, and to mature and guide the dangerous work of speaking truth to abusive power. We also need reflection on the ordinary, simple experiences of living to help soften our hearts, slow us down, and take in the experiences within us and around us.

Many at our Catholic Mercy institutions may not be immersed in the culture and imagination of a rich Catholic sensibility or familiar with its literature and practices. Yet, in spite of the issues named above, administration, faculty and staff can inspire and give direction to students' minds and hearts, so they acquire, like an internal compass, a passion for more and for something that is more than "me."

"Toward something more" and "for more than me" sets up a compounding dynamic that is central to the Catholic formative experience. This dynamic can run counter to a consumer culture, give solace and support during times of loss, and help vision a just and merciful way forward in times of great challenge, doubt or fear. In the end, the Catholic path aims toward purpose and the generation of meaning in our lives and our communities over time and through generations. While not static, there is a mixture of sameness, "tradition," as well as novelty and change such that its basic form maintains a coherence to it.

Students, faculty, administrators, board members often give voice to their longing for depth of meaning and purpose. However, they can find it difficult to find where they can engage this dimension of the human person. Where can they be challenged and encouraged to grow personally and as community? This does not mean growth in a closed, insular way, but in a generous manner that is conscious of individuals and the common good.

The great religious traditions are more than psychological systems. They are this, too; at their best they open, and nurture the heart and mind toward a wide horizon while, metaphorically, giving shape and direction to what is often referred to as the "soul" or the heart of the person in ordinary life with all of its highs and lows. The Catholic path, emerging from the Jewish tradition, invites us to see life through the lens of its myths, stories, parables, and other key writings, rituals and practices, and to approach the world with a conscience that is always being formed to see, feel, understand, and to respond creatively, with love and mercy, with more than justice, to the needs of the times. In a way the Catholic Mass, the "summit" of its sacraments, acts as lungs, breathing in so to heal and nurture us, then exhaling, sending us forth into the world to share good news and to do good.

In the end, the Catholic path aims toward purpose and the generation of meaning in our lives and our communities over time and through generations.

Catholic, and Mercy for that matter, are not ends in themselves, but paths and experiences that can lead to a lived "holiness," to use the more traditional language. They are invitations to walk a kind of path, a way of openness and vulnerability wherein we learn about life, loving, and dying.

Catholic Tradition a Transport Vehicle

Catholic biblical tradition, writings, rituals, devotions, its sense of community joining the living and the dead, and its cultural imagination, are like transport vehicles that carry many truths, even if we humans at this stage in evolution can

only lay claim to a small portion of what is reliable. This body of poetic inspiration is not meant for data analysis but for contemplation, like star-filled nights of wonder, as in the creation myths of Genesis. Herein we hear it sing . . . creation is good, very good, and be in awe. They are not just vehicles of meaning, though. They transport us, poetically, into something more, into deeper relationship with life.

John Haught explores who God is through five terms: depth, truth, freedom, beauty, and future.[4] Indeed, life itself tells a story of wonder.[5] A religious or spiritual lens interprets the world, a dynamic universe or multiple universes with some sense of Mystery or "God."

These "transports," metaphors, stories, teachings, and rituals help provide experiences or reflections on our experiences, then carrying us along and through them we see life differently. They can methodically inspire us toward empathy for others, move us to ask ethical questions, and to grow hope from the ground up, not superficial pie-in-the-sky hope, but hope born of moments of realness and compassion. They help carry us through the cycles of our lives, over generations, and give context and form to our memories and stories of self, community, and Earth, our joys and sorrows, victories and defeats.

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition sees in all of creation a moving, dynamic presence of God, even glimmers of God in the works of human hands.

Catholicism can only be explored, not truly defined or explained. You cannot capture Catholic, or Mercy, or Christianity generally, or Judaism, or Islam with a statement, yet these statements offer a kind of shape to our identity and contours to our relationships, even if we push against them, or as we argue over each word choice or grammatical mark in their formulations. They always point to more, and should overflow with meaning and questions, which we can then ponder and wrestle with over and over again.

Indeed, the Christian Catholic tradition must be wrestled with, never reduced to rules or a handful of values. Understanding a religious tradition has to engage the passions surrounding its poetic beauty. Immersion in the path can take us to that place in the human spirit that is mind and more than mind, heart and more than heart, where even the power of symbol retreats into silence and then holds us in perfect stillness. Then, surprisingly, it can open us to a vista on a new ocean, where meaning, purpose and hope trickle in, eventually flooding us over. As we visit the writings of the mystics and the prophets of our tradition, we sit with them. We try to walk with them. These are moments of grace.

The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

Catholic includes the Catholic Intellectual Tradition (CIT), which supports the search for understanding, meaning, and purpose that happens across disciplines and those methods pertinent to them. CIT includes the contributions of learned men and women from centuries past. The Catholic Intellectual Tradition sees in all of creation a moving, dynamic presence of God, even glimmers of God in the works of human hands. Through the CIT we are encouraged to ask how we understand our discipline in relationship to love, or how our discipline is, in some way, challenged to be a manifestation of goodness, beauty, and truth, however grand or humble. How does each discipline contribute to the common good? To a just society? To the flourishing of each and all? To a healthy Earth environment? Here, old questions are raised up and new questions are generated, with all their potential for bringing about beneficial change, especially for those most deprived and marginalized by society. We are

challenged to look toward the future and ask: How are we contributing to this change for the better?

The Catholic tradition includes Catholic Social Thought (CST) where we locate Mercy Critical Concerns as an application of this tradition. Orientation to social action never excludes the contemplative, reflective, and prayerful dimension in Catholic practice. The prophetic demand for mercy and justice also includes a humble awareness of ourselves as flawed human instruments. We each have inherent personal dignity, but we still fall down and make mistakes, personally and collectively, sometimes innocently and other times intentionally, causing injury to one another, which can reverberate for generations. All of our actions and failures to act have consequences. In the context of competing good values or having to choose between the lesser of two evils, we discern what way forward is best at this time and for the future. Hard questions, but the persistent exercise of this moral work makes us thoughtfully and intentionally human and puts flesh on the bones of meaning and purpose.

A Tent of Learning

Reminiscent of the Tent of Meeting referred to in the Hebrew Scriptures, a Catholic sponsored Tent of Learning in Mercy higher education in the first half of the 21st century spreads its cloth wide, as if a beautiful table cloth or altar cloth had been whipped up by a surprising breeze, thrown up into the air, and had come to rest atop its tall, center tent pole, then stretching invitingly towards those outer edge tent pegs, thereby giving the tent its full grandeur.[6] Flexible, open, and grounded, tethered to its spikes in the ground, it welcomes curious minds to its shade, seekers and journeyers to an experience of expansiveness, to learning.

Under this Tent of Learning, infused with the Spirit of Mercy, we encounter openness and vulnerability through encounters of hospitality, kindness, simple joyfulness, and authenticity in the face of reality. Only through experiences of mercy and reflection upon these experiences can we hope to learn Mercy, to grow in Mercy, and be reflections of God's mercy in the world.

More so, hospitality includes a welcome-ness or an *openness to more*, a kind of intellectual humility, which leaves open the possibility of a reality that is more than we can comprehend or even imagine. The Catholic tradition refers to this vast horizon as transcendent reality, that includes aspects we don't yet grasp. This transcendent, mysterious reality gives life to all, sustains all, lives and breathes across every dimension, those we know and those we do not yet recognize. This reality, or "God," or Trinity, or Spirit, or Beloved, or Mystery is not linear.

For Catholics, there is a "heartbeat" to the cosmos; it is alive with the light of a reality whose understanding we can only stretch towards, but which we feel is real none the less. It is recognized in a starlit sky and in the compassionate words of a nursing student to a patient. This sense of more seems reasonable to many. Through this lens of kinship with mystery as experienced in our lives, we discover meaning, never total or complete. More so, to remain relevant and alive, meaning making is always a work in progress.

Into this focus on meaning, Catholic tradition stresses the transcendent and the incarnational reality of Jesus. However, under the umbrella of the Christian Tradition, as well as within the Catholic wing of Christianity, people have diverse understandings and beliefs about who Jesus was or is. Contemporary culture sometimes reduces him to little more than a cut-out figure. Within the world of religious seekers, Jesus is revered in every major religion as a great teacher, prophet, healer, peace maker, and holy human being.

Mercy, ever practical, usually begins its interpretation of "God with us" through that incarnational lens, from our lived experiences, especially attentive to the sufferings of others and

of Earth. And, Mercy aspires to make the Mercy of God's comfort real in the midst of suffering, using our hearts and minds and hands.

The practice of discerning the presence of the Spirit of God in our lives, of how the Spirit is "revealed" to us and moves within us is part-and-parcel of Catholic and Mercy tradition. Attentiveness to the movements of the inner life and the art of prayer and contemplation, meditation, reflection and other spiritual or reflective practices are key elements of the spiritual path. These practices fall along a continuum of seeking knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Without space for such time, even daydreaming, many ideas would not have been born. Mercy charism stresses contemplation and action.

All members of our campuses are not Catholic, and some are not religious in any form, but there is the hope that under this Tent of Learning we can model and encourage rich, respectful dialogue across scholarly disciplines and across religious/non-religious paths that then fosters creative projects and new learnings. What can I learn from you, and what do I have to share?

As part of this dialogue, traditional Catholic thought examines the life, teachings, crucified death, and ultimate hope found in the gospel stories of Jesus and his "resurrection," in support of a belief that life, light, truth and goodness overcome death, darkness, lies and evil. It perceives its story as a Paschal Story, one in which we each, and collectively, can find the movements of life, death, and "resurrection" in our own lives. It describes its understanding of God as Trinitarian, what we can name analogously as Transcendent Creativity, Love, and Communion: God, incarnate love, and that spirit of love alive in and for the common good of the community. This divinity infuses all community, human and non-human. In this tradition, the story of Jesus reaches vertically upward for more. At the horizontal cross-point arms open wide, vulnerable, for something more than me. The action of the cross always has a cost.

A Wide Tent Open to Questions

Catholic thought asserts that all of creation is good by the very fact that it exists, and creation demonstrates to us something about the oneness or coherence of reality, even as it is in flux, even as we struggle with the very nature of suffering and injustice in this world on Earth, whether in the likes of natural disasters or moral, intentional evil. It pushes us to ask where is the heart and mind of God as so many suffer? What kind of god is "God"? Is "God" more than a fiction? Is this Mystery we call "God" the whole of creation plus something more? If we are a kind of reflection of something akin to a grand consciousness, then why does human learning take so long? Do we ever really learn? What is a human being to be about? What is society to be about? What is a "good life"? What is love, really? What does it mean to be a "good" person in the midst of life and death, in the midst of evolving events on this planet? What structures, like economic systems, lend themselves to shaping a more just and compassionate society? How do we deal with violence, poverty, and evil? How does this relate to being a nurse, an accountant, a businesswoman, a computer analyst, an artist, a spouse, a parent, a neighbor, a friend, a citizen during these times? Yes, we ask questions.

We engage and argue whether there is a "purpose" to life, to death, to suffering, yet yield to that anthropological need in each of us to make sense of things, to tell a story about our lives, to find meaning and purpose, or else surrender into despair. Under this Tent of Learning, at the very least, we are encouraged to continue to ask those perennial questions of life, and to seek out new ones or old ones with new twists and to do so with a sense of respect for people and for the practice and art of thinking in different disciplines, using different methods, as we engage, appreciate,

integrate, critique each other's ideas and contributions, and build on them, as well. However, all ideas are not equal. We work to refine ideas and how they are lived in practical ways. We challenge our thoughts and ideas with the best of reason and through faith. We praise reason and we leave room for something we call "faith," but which has many other names as well. We do this particularly as Mercy, as a community of learners, where learning Mercy is part-and-parcel of our journey.

"Catholic" must be a wide tent for which Mercy contributes a generous design and spirit, a charism, a flavor or gift that in higher education calls us to offer welcome and invitation to the path of learning.

Spirit of Mercy

Under this welcoming Tent of Learning we share our questions and our search for wisdom. Wisdom is characterized by gentleness, humility, unselfishness, and peace-making as the Letter of James in the New Testament reminds us.

> Who is the wise and understanding among you: Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in our hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthy, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace. (James 3:13-18).[7]

So, we can ask who is standing at the entrance of the tent? Who is the one before us? What will they need? Where are they going? How can we welcome them? What can we all learn from this new seeker?

Mercy colleges and universities aim to educate the whole person, meeting students where they are and working with them over several years to help them achieve their educational, career goals. We offer an educational experience profoundly oriented by who we are as Catholic and Mercy- sponsored institutions. Our identity focuses how we go about our work, our vocation. Our institutions have a mission. It is our intention that our mission will influence courses and activities so that students are influenced by a Mercy Spirit. We intend that our students carry this experience into their particular fields of study and their chosen fields of work. We want them to have skills for growing spiritually and integrating a spirit of Mercy into their daily lives.

Catherine McAuley hoped in a future she could not see in the mid- 1800's, but she set a direction for her life toward that sense of more, knowing the sky was large and the Earth was not flat.

When students complete their time with us it is our hope that they go forward with competency in their chosen field, with compassion for those who are different from them and concern for those who are less fortunate, and watchful for the care of the Earth. We hope they have grown in their ability to engage moral dilemmas with discerning minds and hearts, and for a commitment to fairness in a spirit of merciful justice. In addition, we want them to have a stronger sense of the inner world, to that "still small voice" within, to that sense of more and to the more than me . . . to a certain strength and tenderness found in the very heart of Mercy.

Catherine McAuley hoped in a future she could not see in the mid- 1800's, but she set a direction for her life toward that sense of more, knowing the sky was large and the Earth was not flat. She worked creatively and sacrificially for a future in which she would not live, but one where poor women and children would have their dignity

recognized and respected. Catherine took steps to realize her dream, working for a future inspired by her faith and her sharp focus on a purpose greater than herself: the necessity of providing education to poor women and children if they were to have a real future. The work of education included those of the Sisters who were to teach and nurse, as well as training and guidance for those who provided spiritual and pastoral care for people in the towns and villages.

Her confidence in God, others, and herself grew steadily over the years. She had joys and sorrows, including the deaths of many relatives and early followers. She had a deep commitment to prayer and reflection and to conversations with advisors. She had an Irish woman's love of reading, expressed in her note taking on spiritual authors and sharing those reflections with her early followers. She believed God called her to live a life of loving, of meaning and of purpose, in a way that lifted others up.

Conclusion

Catherine's influence after her short ten years as foundress of the Sisters of Mercy continues to reverberate today in the hearts, minds, and efforts of her 21st century colleagues in Mercy higher education. But these times are particularly challenging, and change can happen rapidly. Our clarity in understanding the purpose of Mercy-inspired higher education is critical to these good works going forward. The spirit of Catherine McAuley inspires us to providing an education that nurtures the development of strong minds, tender hearts, creativity, and collaborative determination that can help shape actions for good. Being a Mercy-sponsored higher educational institution that is within the Catholic tradition should give energy to how we proceed during good days and difficult ones. Indeed, it is because contemporary pressures mount that what we do and how we do it matters so much. Our direction and the questions that we ask are important because our students are important.

It is a hope that we who are engaged in the mission of Mercy higher education experience the depth of who we are as Mercy. Together we explore how the best of the Catholic tradition and the Mercy charism can shape the critical, even sacred vocation of higher education in our institutions at a time of extreme challenge, change, and opportunity. ◆

Endnotes

[1] Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace." October 17, 2019. Accessed February 15, 2020, https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/.[2] Example: "Nuns and Nones," online conversations between nuns and young adults on spirituality, purpose, meaning, and contemporary issues: https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/09/04/what-can-nuns-and-nones-learn-one-another.

[3] See website founded by Bishop Robert Barron: https://www.wordonfire.org/.

[4] John F. Haught, *What is God: How to Think About the Divine* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).

[5] See Carlo Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, trans. Simon Carnell and Erica Segre (New York: Riverhead Books, 2014).

[6] Regarding Tent of Meeting, see Exodus 33:7-11.

[7] James 3: 13-18.

The Covenant of Mercy Higher Education: A New Moment in History

Timothy Muldoon, Ph.D.

For the past number of months, the Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE) has been in a discernment process about the kind of relationships that will promote the mission of Mercy higher education across the seventeen institutions sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy.[1] That discernment process has involved a number of factors such as civil and canon law, financial and demographic data, and the presence of Sisters at each college or university. The guiding questions for this process have been, "What will insure that the mission of the Sisters of Mercy continues to animate each college or university, and how can CMHE promote cooperation among these institutions for the common good?"

Faced with the challenges of sustaining their sponsored ministries…the Sisters are discerning new models of cooperation that recognize the graces of both religious and lay partners.

The term which has emerged as a focal point for discernment is *covenant*. This essay will explore why this term has emerged and explore the implications for why it invites reflection on the kinds of relationships that the Sisters of Mercy seek to promote on their sponsored campuses. It will seek to answer the following questions:

1. Why do the Sisters of Mercy desire that there be a covenant that holds together the seventeen Mercy-sponsored institutions of higher learning in the United States?

2. What does the word "covenant" connote that is different from a contract or other legal arrangement between institutions?

3. How will a covenant of Mercy colleges and universities promote the mission of the Sisters of Mercy?

1. Why a covenant?

Over the past three decades the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas have planned a reorganization of their ministries, consolidating 25 regional communities into six, with the ultimate aim of having one Institute community with one leadership team overseeing all its ministries.[2] This reorganization, now called the Journey to Oneness, is in part a response to the declining number of Sisters, as well as the recognition that there are fewer who are capable of sustaining a long-term leadership of schools, colleges, and hospitals. Just as important, though, is the recognition that a smaller bureaucracy within the congregation will insure an agile focus on its animating mission of manifesting God's mercy to the world. Faced with the challenges of sustaining their sponsored ministries, or gracefully and justly relinquishing them, the Sisters are discerning new models of cooperation that recognize the graces of both religious and lay partners.

In order to sustain their sponsored ministries—ministries which have seen generations of selfless service by Sisters and which have promoted countless goods over the decades—the Sisters have asked CMHE to foster communal discernment of a covenant among the Mercy colleges and universities in the United States. Throughout this process, CMHE has focused on how it might offer an opportunity for faculty and staff of Mercy colleges and universities to develop greater ownership of their shared mission. The decline in the presence of

Sisters on campuses has meant that promotion of Mercy mission can no longer be their sole responsibility. Neither is it feasible to relegate mission supervision to a single Sister of Mercy Mission officer, even on those campuses where a Sister currently fills that role. Today, all members of the community must work together to understand, reflect on, share, and work conscientiously to promote that mission. Even if a Sister be the catalyst for promulgating understanding of the mission in her role as a mission officer, the more critical, long-term, sustainable project is fostering common understanding of mission.

To put it differently, CMHE has the opportunity of presenting the Journey to Oneness as an invitation to the thousands of people who comprise Mercy colleges and universities to deepen their understanding of the Mercy mission, in order that each campus be a place where people at every level of the institution's operations share more mindfully in that mission.

The Sisters of Mercy and CMHE are undertaking conversations that will have significant impact in the coming decades…

The invitation to members of Mercy college and university communities to enter into a covenantal relationship across campuses is nothing short of a new way to envision the promise of higher education. The Sisters of Mercy and CMHE are undertaking conversations that will have significant impact in the coming decades, and which are already providing models that other religiously sponsored colleges and universities are beginning to follow.

In order to answer the question "Why a covenant?" we must first acknowledge developments in Catholic higher education in recent decades. Most salient for our purposes in this essay is the change among Catholic colleges from what Melanie Morey and John Piderit call "custodial" institutions in the mid-twentieth century to the complex, diverse communities that characterize the vast majority today.[3] They use the term "custodial" to refer to the expectations that midcentury Catholic families had of the religious congregations who sponsored colleges: the families hoped that the Sisters (or monks, or brothers, or whoever was the sponsoring congregation) would raise their children to responsible adulthood and a citizenship rooted in the transmission of Catholic faith and morals. While a small number of Catholic colleges today maintain that model, most have developed new models of living out their mission. The development has been driven by a number of factors—economic change (including especially the advent of the GI Bill); changing demographics of students; decline in the number of sponsoring religious on campus; hyper-specialization and fragmentation of academic disciplines; changing cultural mores; changes within the Catholic Church; and others. Analysis of these changes is beyond the scope of this essay, but there are a number of recent publications which have addressed them.[4]

For our purposes, let us simply observe that today, most Catholic colleges have had to navigate difficult, complex questions of sustaining a robust Catholic mission amidst significant financial, demographic, and other practical challenges. Moreover, most of them have had to dedicate financial and personal resources to the training and hiring of leaders who will steer the college's mission in the face of these challenges. In very many cases, those leaders are lay people who lack the kind of deep, lifelong formation that members of a religious congregation undergo.

Formation and Acculturation

In short, the most significant challenge for Catholic higher education—and for Mercy higher education in particular—is formation. Formation is the word that members of religious

congregations, or graduates of seminaries, know intimately. It represents the process by which a person grows in relationship with other members of the community, rooted in shared texts, shared experiences, shared prayer, and the discernment of shared goals. Every member of the Sisters of Mercy, for example, undertakes a process of learning from older, more experienced Sisters, drawing deeply from not only the broad and deep traditions of Catholic theology and spirituality, but also the more specific lessons from the remarkable lives of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters who built the network of Mercy throughout the country and throughout the world. Over at least a seven-year period, a woman meets with a spiritual director to develop a life rooted in prayer; she attends discernment retreats; has live-in experiences with the religious community; begins ministry work; engages in theological studies; learns about religious vows as she continues her ministerial assignments; and ultimately takes vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and service to the poor, sick, and ignorant. It is difficult to overestimate the existential significance such a process can have on a person and her sense of vocation in the world.

Most of the professionals who work at Mercy colleges and universities are unable to undertake such an extensive formation after they have made significant life decisions, like getting married or dedicating themselves to a professional career. Rather than see this truth as a liability, however, let us consider it as an opportunity, one that is rooted in the most hopeful trajectory of development within the Church in its recent history.

I am referring to the emergence of an authentic and robust theology of the lay vocation. This vocation involves an understanding rooted in faith that God continues to act in history through ordinary women and men who seek to sanctify their work by offering it wholeheartedly to God. Over the past century and a half, the roots of this hopeful development have begun to germinate and flower. The mission movements of the nineteenth century, drawing new peoples into the shared faith of the Church; the emergence of lay apostolates like the Catholic Worker, Young Christian Workers, Focolare, and many others; the theologies of the likes of St. John Henry Newman, Yves Congar, and Jean Daniélou; the writings of the bishops of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), especially *Gaudium et Spes* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*; the growing influence of lay women's work and voices in the Church, from leadership in parishes and schools to leading and teaching in colleges and seminaries—all these are signs of a renewal in the lay faithful appropriating the fruits of their baptismal vocation to build a world in which God delights. Moreover, since Vatican II (and indeed even in the decades which preceded it), the Church has reflected on its relationship to people of other faith traditions (or none) and articulated a hopeful model of cooperation that has attracted non-Catholics to the mission of Catholic higher education.

The opportunity before us today is to harvest these developments for the sake of inviting women and men, Catholics and many others, to a shared project of education. Decades ago, student formation in a Catholic college meant a relatively homogeneous experience across campuses, with immersion in a common core curriculum influenced by the cultural patrimony of the medieval (that is, Catholic) university, curated by members of the sponsoring congregation. There was scarcely any kind of faculty, administrative, or staff formation, save the usual influences of the various professional guilds and the protocols of the broader university culture (many of which, it is not insignificant to note, were rooted in the medieval university).

Having been formed in and having taught in an Honors Program that was the child of that cultural patrimony, I am loath to relinquish it or consign it only to history. Still, today, with

students from all corners of the world and with faculty and staff whose rich experiences help us to re-read that tradition anew, we are in a new position to explore that tradition critically and to bring it into conversation with the pressing questions of our day. These include the migration of peoples; new xenophobias; our relationship to technology; care for the earth; and many others. Moreover, we have the opportunity to learn from new curators of knowledge, particularly those whose contributions were less well-known decades ago—significantly, women and people of color. And perhaps most importantly—since the lasting community who carry a college or university's mission are the faculty, staff, and administration—we have the opportunity to develop new ideas, new systems of cooperation, new programs, and new policies that form the adults who spend their labor in service to the institution's mission.

The question, then, is how to adapt formation in Mercy mission for the professionals who will carry their colleges and universities forward in the coming decades. Our challenge is to develop relationships, practices, policies, and ultimately institutions committed to the shared work of Mercy in education—to invite cooperation for the shared process of growth among what the medievals called the *universitas magistrorum et scholarum*—the "university of teachers and scholars"— or perhaps better, "the teachers and students committed to constant learning,[5]" which in the Mercy context means constantly seeking better ways to reach those on the margins.

What is a Covenant?

The word *covenant* evokes the rich biblical history of relationships between God and people. It is a central theme in the Old Testament (Hebrew *berit*), which points to the generous love that God has for Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants, drawing them into a particular, intimate relationship (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2; 26:18). Fidelity (or infidelity) to the covenant with God is the thread which ties together the ancient stories of Israel, culminating in the beautiful language of the prophetic and wisdom literature. The development of Israel's self-understanding in relation to God is evident in the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

Some seven centuries later, the author of the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews would point to these same words to describe salvation history in the light of Christ. The New Testament (or "new covenant," Greek *he kaine diatheke*) emerges among both the evangelists and the other writers as an organic development within God's relationship with people. Just as ancient covenants were sealed in blood, making the participants share a kind of kinship, so too does Christ's blood seal the new covenant. The Eucharistic blood is, according to the Synoptic gospels, the sign of the new covenant (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20), poured out as Christ's self-offering for the sake of redeeming humanity.

Covenant suggests depth in relationship. It is more than a contract, which is a *quid pro quo* legal arrangement. Contracts are important ways that parties enter into a conditional relationship, and certainly have a long and important history, especially as regards the relationship between laborer and employer. Indeed, in the recent past there have been important questions raised about the contractual relationships that exists on Catholic campuses, including questions about unionization of staff and of graduate students.[6] Certainly since Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, frequently cited as the origin of the modern tradition of Catholic social teaching, Catholic ethicists have underscored the importance of contracts as a cornerstone of a just social order. Justice in contractual relationships is

a *sine qua non* of right relationship in any workplace.

A contractual relationship between members of a college or university community, however important, is insufficient for the broad and deep task of promoting the mission of Mercy education. Most fundamentally, what distinguishes a covenant, at least in the biblical sense, is that it represents a fully free action of the will to enter into new relationship with the other. That the Israelite authors could ascribe to God a willingness to be on par with sinful humanity is a remarkable theological development when seen against the backdrop of other ancient stories, suggesting (at the very least) their sense that God acted out of a keen desire to lift up human beings to a new dignity, a new hope. Similarly (and for the Christian, even more profoundly), the story of the Incarnation represents a new covenant, by which God's willingness to "take the form of a slave" (Phil 2:7) offers people a new freedom, unencumbered by the wages of sin (Rom 6:23). Covenant is never about tit-for-tat; it is about freedom in a shared mission.

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The Sisters of Mercy invite the people who comprise Mercy higher education to share in the founding mission of the congregation, as lived out in the context of higher education:

> Mercy college and university trustees, presidents, faculty and staff endeavor to witness to the mission of Christ and to the enduring concerns of the Sisters of Mercy through a commitment to service in Mercy higher education.[7]

The cornerstone of that mission is service in the name of Christ, bearing witness to the apostolic mandate that Christ originally gave to the disciples and, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, to the entire church. More specifically, it is an invitation to share in the particular characteristics of Mercy—that charism of service to all people, doing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. In the congregation's Constitutions, Mother Catherine McAuley articulated her vision of that charism:

> Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who desire to follow Him, has in all ages excited the faithful to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor and in them they find the person of our Divine Lord.[8]

In higher education, the "principal path" of Mercy means applying a love for the poor to the analysis, understanding, and change of the social structures which hinder people's rise out of poverty. If poverty is the condition of lacking fish, mercy is first the work of giving people fish. Mercy higher education goes further: It is both teaching people how to fish, but also studying the higher-order questions which probe why people lack fish in the first place. Are there environmental reasons why there is a dearth of fish in a water source? Are there systemic barriers to poor people who want to fish? Is the lack of access to fishing rooted in racism or other demographic inequities? Are women in households able to access the means by which they might provide fish to their families? These and other questions are the corollaries of a commitment to live Mercy.

How does a covenant of Mercy colleges and universities promote the mission of the Sisters of Mercy?

It should be evident from the above questions why a commitment to Mercy over time gave rise to centers of learning. For many years, the Sisters themselves taught and administered academies, schools, colleges, and universities, forming young people intellectually, socially, and spiritually for service of the common good, and of the poor. Today, those who will carry on that task of formation are increasingly lay women and men—including a growing number of Mercy Associates who voluntarily undergo formative experiences.

The Journey to Oneness, while an experience that involves growing pains as well as the relinquishing of treasured relationships and even institutions, nevertheless represents an important developmental *kairos*. It is an opportunity to ensure that the legacy of Mercy persist through the cooperation of Sisters and lay collaborators. The covenant, I have argued, represents a moment in this development not dissimilar from the establishment of the Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy: it articulates a shared vision and the responsibilities that various people have in promoting it.

Today, higher education is incredibly complex, a far cry from the custodial institutions which populated the American landscape (at least in the Northeast and Midwest) for generations. Demographic change (including the shift of the Catholic population to the South and West); economic realities; the oversight of accrediting agencies as well as state and federal agencies; the proliferation of professions and their various credentialing—these and many other factors make Mercy higher education, and indeed all efforts at higher education, the shared task of many professionals with very disparate skills. Navigating these waters while remaining laser-focused on the mission of Mercy will require that everyone involved understand not only their role, but how the various roles work together. Mother Catherine McAuley once used an image that is helpful here: Like a compass stakes out a center, so too does commitment to ongoing formation in the principal path of Mercy to ensure that the frenetic activities that constitute a college campus hold together to promote the good, true, and beautiful. ◆

Endnotes

[1] Throughout this essay, the collective noun "Sisters of Mercy" will refer to the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (sistersofmercy.org).

[2] See https://www.sistersofmercy.org/resources/journey-of-oneness-a-path-forward/journey-of-oneness/ (Accessed 30 January 2020).

[3] Melanie Morey and John Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

[4] In addition to Morey and Piderit, see Philip Gleason, *Contending With Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Martin Tripole, S.J., ed., *Jesuit 21: Conference Proceedings on the Future of Jesuit Higher Education* (Philadelphia: St. Joseph's University Press, 2000); George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Unbelief* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[5] The word *universitas*, used famously in King Saint Louis IX's description of the emerging University of Paris, is rooted in the Latin verb *vertere*, "to turn," which I take in context to refer to a kind of turning toward the truth together (or "conversion," which comes from the same root)—a good description of an authentic community ("one together").

[6] See the ACCU statement on the recent court decision on unionization on Catholic campuses: https://www.accunet.org/Portals/70/Docs/Program%20Files%20%26%20Statements/Duquesne-decision-1-28-20.pdf (30 January 2020), as well as the DC Court of Appeals opinion at https://www.accunet.org/Portals/70/Docs/Program%20Files%20%26%20Statements/Duquesne%20Opinion.pdf.

[7] Conference for Mercy Higher Education, "Mercy Higher Education Covenant," draft of January 2020.

[8] Constitutions, chapter 3 article 1.

Mercy Higher Education: Transforming and Transformed

Elizabeth M. Davis, R.S.M.

> Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.
> She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
> Prov 31:25-26

These words from the last chapter of the Book of Proverbs show the capable woman as the ideal description of wisdom. In the most unlikely books of the Hebrew Bible and Christian Old Testament (Proverbs, Wisdom, Sirach, Job and Baruch), Woman Wisdom (*Hokmah*) appears, often without notice, as one who is beside God as a master worker and is daily God's delight (Prov 8:30). This one who is co-creator with the creating God is a prophet who "cries out in the street; in the squares, she raises her voice. At the busiest corner, she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates, she speaks" (Prov 1:20-21). She walks "in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice" (Prov 8:20). And, in every generation, she "passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets" (Ws 7:27). This personification of wisdom, a woman who confidently speaks her truth, could equally be an image of Mercy higher education in this third decade of the twenty-first century!

Fidelity to the mission of Mercy higher education means speaking with a prophetic voice in response to the cries of Earth and the most vulnerable people.

Like Wisdom, Mercy higher education is an unlikely presence in the world of higher education in general and among Mercy ministries globally. It is one more way in which people energized by the Mercy spirit are co-creators with God every single day. Fidelity to the mission of Mercy higher education means speaking with a prophetic voice in response to the cries of Earth and the most vulnerable people. It means walking in the way of righteousness and in the paths of justice. Community lived in Mercy higher education in collaboration with many people and organizations widens the circles of Mercy, welcoming and nurturing friends of God and prophets.

Such an expectation of Mercy higher education calls for the deep transformation of institutions holding this precious mandate. An awareness that every dimension of the life of the institution must be part of this transformation, leadership in finding creative and diverse ways to enable the transformation and holding accountable every person in the institution for the new direction are key steps in ensuring that the transformation happens. However, before these critical steps can be taken, there is a need to appreciate the complexities of the changing world within which Mercy higher education ministers today.

In 1841, in a letter to Frances Warde, Catherine McAuley wrote, "This is your life, joys and sorrow mingled, one succeeding the other." Her words could have been written for this twenty-first century.

The sorrows of this time are many. Democratic forms of governance are being challenged and indeed undermined as elected leaders behave autocratically, further victimizing vulnerable people and ruthlessly plundering Earth at high cost to its health. Joan Chittister, O.S.B., says of the United States what many could say of their own democratic countries:

> We insult and mock and rage at everyone and everything and call it the democratic process while we watch government become less and less

> credible, less and less "democratic" by the day. Civility, once a trademark of a congressional system, is now a distant memory. Frustration, depression, anger and enmity live on where rational debate and public respect are meant to hold the country together at its highest level. At the same time, our biggest mocker — The Mocker-in-Chief himself — scolds people who call him out, too, for their lack of gentility without so much as the grace to blush.[1]

The Roman Catholic Church, like other churches and faith traditions, is rapidly losing its credibility and moral influence. Efforts to end sexual abuse of children and minors by clergy, little attention to the place of women in the church, limited ministry to the most marginalized populations and a failure to attend to the voices of indigenous peoples around the globe, all remain domains of legitimate criticism of the Church.

The democratic crisis and the ecclesial crisis are accompanied by an environmental crisis, manifested by extreme weather events globally, increased rather than decreased unsustainable practices, and a growing number of climate refugees. At the time of the writing of this article, fires are devastating human life, plant life, animals and land in Australia. The impact on biodiversity is overwhelming. Australia's Federal Environment Department reports that bushfires have burned more than 80% of the known habitat of forty-nine species, and 50% of the habitat of sixty-five other species. Scientists also say the fires have probably already made some species extinct. This tragic situation can be linked to extremely high temperatures, a direct result of climate change.

In 2019, at the release of the report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, the Chair of IPBES noted, "The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide." [2]

And there is a social crisis which is evident in increased social and economic inequality, growing intolerance of immigrants and refugees, threats posed by globalization, and a loss of confidence in almost all human institutions. Yes, the sorrows of the times are many.

But great hope lies in knowing that the joys are many as well. Perhaps the greatest of these joys today is the emerging understanding of the sacred communion of all creation, rooted in the new cosmology and in an enlivened sense of deep incarnation. The cosmos embraces all creation, the entire universe, every dimension of time and space (spiritual and material) – the galaxies, stars, planets, black holes, ecosystems, animals, plants, humans, molecules and time. The creation of the cosmos is God's first work of mercy and the first moment of God's incarnation. In Elizabeth Johnson's words, "Deep incarnation is the radical divine reach in Christ through human flesh all the way down into the living web of organic life." [3] Today, after many centuries, science and religion are coming back together to help strengthen the understanding of the cosmos and cosmology and the implications of such understanding for creating a better world.

Perhaps the greatest of these joys today is the emerging understanding of the sacred communion of all creation, rooted in the new cosmology and in an enlivened sense of deep incarnation.

In creating a better world, many people – the young and the old – are working passionately for social and ecological justice. In 2015, Malala Yousafzai challenged the world, "World leaders need to be serious and think of the world as one country, as a land of all people, where every person deserves equality, equal rights, no matter whether they are black or white, man or woman,

rich or poor."[4] In November 2018, Greta Thunberg, speaking about the climate emergency, pleaded, "What we do or don't do right now will affect my entire life and the lives of my children and grandchildren. What we do or don't do right now, me and my generation can't undo in the future. . . And yes, we do need hope, of course we do. But the one thing we need more than hope is action. Once we start to act, hope is everywhere." [5]

And an old man, Pope Francis, gave the world the poignancy and the passion of *Laudato Si'* and introduced the phrase "integral ecology." [6] In this influential encyclical, he outlined three dimensions of integral ecology: (i) relationships at the atomic and molecular level, between plants and animals, and among species in ecological networks and systems; (ii) the profound interconnectedness of environmental, economic, political, social, cultural and ethical issues; and (iii) the vision to think about comprehensive solutions to what is both an environmental and human crisis.

Pope Francis then led the Roman Catholic Church in its first Synod on integral ecology, *Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*. The preparatory document for the Synod, whose intent was to shape "a Church with an indigenous and Amazonian face," [7] states:

> The entire People of God, along with their bishops, priests, religious men and women, and religious and lay missionaries, are called to enter this new ecclesial journey with an open heart. All are called to live together with their communities and to commit themselves to the defense of their lives, loving them and their cultures. Indigenous missionaries, as well as those who come from outside, should cultivate a spirituality of contemplation and thankfulness, opening their hearts and seeing the Amazonian and indigenous peoples with the eyes of God."[8]

The Mercy world has responded to the cry of Earth and the cry of the Poor in the engagement of Sisters, Associates and partners in Mercy in many diverse ministries at the local level. Globally, through the leadership of Mercy International Association, this Mercy family, present in forty-four countries, participated in global contemplation through the Mercy International Reflection Process (MIRP) during the Year of Mercy in 2016. The MIRP summary report, entitled "What Has Been Discovered ~ What Has Been Revealed," further challenged the Mercy family to strengthen and enhance Mercy Global Presence. The resulting new vision statement for Mercy International Association, written in eight languages, reads:

Through the work of the Association and through the longings and efforts of the entire Mercy family, we will strive for the globalization of compassion and the recognition of God's mercy as present and active in our world.

> Deeply rooted in the Gospel and the legacy of Catherine McAuley, Mercy International Association seeks to gather the inspiration and energies of the Sisters of Mercy, our associates, colleagues and partners worldwide toward the creation of a Mercy Global Presence. Standing with the displaced, we will model a world of welcome and inclusion. Actively engaged in the protection of our Common Home, we will witness to the sacredness of all creation. Through the work of the Association and through the longings and efforts of the entire Mercy family, we will strive for the globalization of compassion and the recognition of God's mercy as present and active in our world. This vision keeps alive the Founding Spirit of Catherine among people of the World most in need of God's compassion and Mercy. [9]

Flowing from this initiative, Mercy International Association is once again engaging

the Mercy family in global contemplation, this time a sixteen-month journey focused on Mercy Global Presence and energized by artwork, reflection, stories and prayer of theologians, artists, grassroots ministers, global thinkers, scientists, other distinct voices and champions. The intent of the process and the contemplation is an energizing journey – a journey into new thinking, new language, new images, new theology, new spirituality, new passion and new ways of ministry in response to the cry of Earth and the cry of the Poor.

World's Woes and Mercy Higher Education

What have these joys and sorrows to do with Mercy higher education? One answer can be found in the opening words of the Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes*: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

Another answer can be found in the statement on the goal of Mercy higher education approved by the CMHE Board and Canonical Sponsor in 2010:

> Graduates of Mercy institutions are informed and shaped intellectually, socially and spiritually through a faith-inspired education. The academic study of the liberal arts and sciences and mastery of the professional disciplines enable Mercy graduates to be responsible leaders in their communities and professions. They appreciate and are informed by a Christian commitment to mercy and justice in the world.[10]

Another answer can be found in the IPBES Summary Report noted above: "Through 'transformative change', nature can still be conserved, restored and used sustainably – this is also key to meeting most other global goals. By transformative change, we mean a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values." [11]

And yet another answer can be found in the growing awareness that learning happens in ways never before articulated. The rapid digitization of the world (social media, mobile phone networks and smart phones; faster, smaller and cheaper computers; e-learning, changes to the Web, etc.) is challenging everyone to more deeply understand communication, connection, authenticity and even reality. Marc Prensky has coined the phrase "digital wisdom" as "a two-fold concept, referring both to wisdom arising from the use of digital technology to access cognitive power beyond our innate capacity and to wisdom in the prudent use of technology to enhance our capabilities." [12]

To navigate this digital world, social awareness and emotional intelligence are two important human skills. Being able to emotionally connect with others, empathetically relate to difficult situations and have the nuance to navigate complex social issues is essential in maintaining peace and stability into the future. Four of the eight foundational elements for mission integration and institutional identity for Mercy institutions of higher education are indicative of this new understanding of how learning happens: (i) space, art, environment, and symbolism, (ii) inclusive worship/ritual and reflection, (iii) engagement in community and celebrations, and (iv) Catholic social teaching/critical concerns in action. [13]

Never before has there been such desperate need for people "informed and shaped intellectually, socially and spiritually through a faith-inspired education," people who are "responsible leaders in their communities and professions," people who "appreciate and are informed by a Christian commitment to mercy and justice in the world." Whether the higher education is for teachers or counselors, physicians or nurses, engineers or lawyers, political scientists or theologians, information technologists or

ethicists, business leaders or social activists, Mercy higher education institutions must be about informing and shaping such leaders to enable the transformation of the world.

Mercy Education—A New Voice for a Fractured World

Woman Wisdom found her voice when the people of Judah, after a time of exile and loss of all that gave them their identity, needed new images, a new voice and a new way of living their role as the chosen people of God. Institutes of Mercy higher education were established to respond to the needs of the times. Today Mercy higher education has the privilege of being in a ministry which can bring a new voice into a fractured world among hurting peoples. Its stated mission of forming leaders brings with it the responsibility to be this new voice. It can do so only if, in order to help transform the society, it itself becomes transformed. Its chosen name of "Mercy" means that a failure to accept this challenge is not an option.

Woman Wisdom, in every generation, "passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets" (Ws 7:27). May all who are part of the ministry that is Mercy higher education, no matter what their specific role or function, know with certainty that they are holy souls, that they are friends of God, that they are prophets. May they find confidence and comfort in the words of Catherine McAuley whose spirit of Mercy they carry into the world, words spoken to Frances Warde, the founder of the Mercy congregation in the United States, "May God preserve and bless you and grant you all the graces and precious gifts reserved for this holy time." ◆

Endnotes

[1] Joan Chittister, O.S.B., "It's time for our biases to grow: Decorum in differences must be reclaimed," Column, "From Where I Stand," *National Catholic Reporter* (04 December 2019).

[2] Robert Watson, Comments at release of *IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, Paris, May 2019, accessed at https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/.

[3] Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018).

[4] Malala Yousafzai, *The Oslo Education Summit, 09* July 2015 accessed at https://blog.malala.org/video-transcript-malalas-speech-at-the-oslo-education-summit-2015-facc051348a7.

[5] Greta Thunberg, "The disarming case to act right now on climate change," TEDx Stockholm November 2018, accessed at https://www.ted.com/talks/greta_thunberg_the_disarming_case_to_act_right_now_on_climate_change.

[6] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, §10 and Chapter 4, 2015, accessed at Vatican website: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

[7] *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for Integral Ecology*, §116, Working Document for the Pan-Amazon Synod, accessed at www.sinodoamazonico.va.

[8] *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for Integral Ecology*, §15, Preparatory Document for the Pan-Amazon Synod, accessed at www.sinodoamazonico.va.

[9] "Vision Statement," Mercy International Association, accessed at https://www.mercyworld.org/about/vision-strategy/.

[10] Conference for Mercy Higher Education, "Our Catholic Identity and Mercy Charism," Statement approved by the CMHE Board April 20, 2010, and by the Canonical Sponsor Council April 26, 2010, accessed at http://mercyhighered.org/our-mission/.

[11] *IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, Paris, May 2019, accessed at https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/.

[12] Marc R. Prensky, *From Digital Natives to Digital Wisdom: Hopeful Essays for 21st Century Learning* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2012): 202.

[13] Conference for Mercy Higher Education, *Eight Foundational Elements for Mission Integration and Institutional Identity*, accessed at http://mercyhighered.org/mission-integration-core-areas/

A Pedagogy of Becoming: The Social Imaginary of Learning

Jayme Hennessy, R.S.M., Ph.D.

At the heart of the Salve Regina Campus stands a sculpture of Catherine McAuley that reminds us of her story: How one woman, motivated by love and mercy, lifted vulnerable women and children out of poverty in 19th century Dublin, Ireland. We are reminded that she welcomed other women to join her in this work of mercy, and that they, in turn, expanded this vision as they cared for the immigrants who fled the hunger and the poverty of their homelands. Standing on the campus, the sculpture reminds us that this vision and work of mercy that Catherine McAuley began in her day bridges time to frame the mission and transformative aims of the University community as it invites us to become persons of mercy: Persons who are willing to answer despair with hope, persons who are willing to embrace brokenness with tenderness, persons who are transformed by a sense of mercy and justice to envision how the world "ought to be."

Inviting persons to mature in their moral character and capacity for compassionate mercy requires an education of a student's sense of ethics as well as the education of a student's intellect. Such an education involves the holistic formation of a person within a community that models mercy, that critically engages the world "as it is" while laying out the possibilities of how the world "could be." This project requires an academic community that cultivates knowledge, skills and competencies within a moral framework that orients students to seek the common good as they prepare for professions after graduation.

Reflecting on the task of educating moral imagination and character for mercy, I focus on two aspects of this holistic and dynamic process of how mercy may be "caught" and taught. First, I examine the role of Mercy colleges and universities in creating a culture for inviting and supporting the moral growth of students by creating a social imaginary characterized by compassionate mercy. Second, I examine how a pedagogy of community and a pedagogy of transformation both shape moral character and prompt the critical thinking needed to envision and act towards a more just and merciful world.

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Mercy Colleges and Universities as a Type of "Social Imaginary"

Mercy colleges and universities are more than institutions of higher education that grant degrees. They are academic communities motivated by a moral vision of mercy, educating students to live the potential of their vocation as persons created in the image of the God who perfects all creation in and through love. I want to highlight the moral framework or vision of these communities and consider how to harmonize the formative experiences and curriculum of these communities with that vision. Thus, I propose we use the concept of a "social imaginary." The concept of social imaginary acknowledges the creative process, shared by ordinary persons, who collectively establish a social world with moral norms and shared expectations that shape ideals and motivate action. The concept is associated with the philosopher

Charles Taylor and his analysis of the emergence of the secular society in Western civilization.

Describing the social imaginary, Taylor writes that it shaped by "…the ways in which [persons] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations." [1] Taylor sees this as a concrete social reality, one that is "…often not expressed in theoretical terms, it is carried in images, stories, legends, etc." [2] Moreover, this is a normative reality that establishes more than a "sense of how things usually go…" as it is "interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go…"[3] Taylor's description of the social imaginary prompts us to recognize the moral vision and moral commitments that animate the particular social worlds that are created through mutual collaboration. Applying this concept to institutions of higher education brings into focus the framework or horizon of meaning that harmonizes that dynamic interaction of students, staff, faculty, and administration that constitute the academic community and its project of transmitting and cultivating knowledge and wisdom.

If we think of Mercy colleges and universities as a type of social imaginary, a social world imbued with a particular meaning then the story, mercy, and vision of Catherine McAuley would serve as a moral paradigm or horizon for these institutions of Higher Education. Her example of faith, compassionate mercy, the integration of contemplation and action, as well as her ability to engage the world as it is and envision and work for how "it ought to go" provides us with patterns of meaning and mercy that shape the deeper normative notions and images that distinguish the identity and affirm the mission of Mercy colleges and universities.

Becoming a Person of Mercy: Normative Notions and Images

How does this notion of "social imaginary" become a catch-phrase for understanding what the mercy charism means? First, reflecting on the patterns of mercy in Catherine's life we see that her faith motivated her to engage her world through the image of mercy revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus. Her moral imagination saw beyond a "sense of how things usually go" and envisioned new social patterns animated by a spirit of mercy. When she built the House of Mercy on Baggot Street, she welcomed poverty-stricken women and children into a gentrified section of Dublin and created a social space that bridged the class boundaries of that time and place. Advised to enter the convent, to preserve her vision of ministry, she fostered a direct-service model of religious life. It integrated contemplation and action. Her "walking sisters" carried out their work outside the cloister. They entered the homes of the sick to provide care and encouragement. In each of these examples, mercy moved Catherine McAuley to engage the suffering in front of her, to envision how things could be, and to create new relations and models of mercy.

Her [C. McAuley] moral imagination saw beyond a "sense of how things usually go" and envisioned new social patterns animated by a spirit of mercy.

Today, the story of Catherine McAuley provides Mercy colleges and universities with images of the transformative power of mercy as it aims to uphold the dignity of persons. This transformative work of mercy is normative. It provides a framework that helps persons to discern who I am called to become and what I am called to do. In essence, the patterns of mercy that characterized Catherine McAuley's life and vision have a normative value that can serve as both a moral

inspiration and as a measure for evaluating the goals, relations, the culture, and the internal/external relations that characterize the institution. As inspiration, her story provides evidence that mercy can change lives and history.

Second, the concept of the social imaginary helps to recognize the moral vision, motivation, and moral expectations that have imbued the institutions of higher education founded and staffed by members of the religious order of the Sisters of Mercy. The founders of these Mercy institutions committed their lives to the charism of mercy and were shaped by their faith, spiritual training, and a lived reality of mercy that they embodied in their work in the classroom and administration. Without idealizing these past experiences, I think it's realistic to say that regardless of the course or the discipline, the Sister of Mercy professor would have imbued the course with perspectives and insights shaped by her commitment to mercy. It's also realistic to recall that generations of Sister-Professors would have modeled the reality of merciful presence in the course of their interactions with students.

The challenge for Mission Integration is to interpret for lay persons the ideology and images presented in the vision and work of Catherine McAuley and preserved in the ministries of the Sisters of Mercy.

Today, these institutions founded by the Sisters are now staffed principally by lay persons who have not experienced the same social reality of mercy known by these women religious. I think it's important to consider how this transition may affect the culture and vision of compassionate mercy at Mercy colleges and universities, as the number of Sisters of Mercy on campus continues to decline.

The diminished presence of Sisters of Mercy at Mercy colleges and Universities, leads to the third point. Charles Taylor noted that the social imaginary consists of ordinary persons who identify with shared norms, expectations, and practices that are animated by images, stories, and legends. The ideas that bind the social world are concrete rather than theoretical. Mercy is a concrete response to the concrete realities of suffering and injustice in our world. Many of the members of these institutions identify with the values and vision of their Mercy institutions. The challenge for Mission Integration is to interpret for lay persons the ideology and images presented in the vision and work of Catherine McAuley and preserved in the ministries of the Sisters of Mercy. It's now students, faculty, staff, and administration who are entrusted with continuing the vision of mercy at these colleges and universities. Mission Integration programs lay out opportunities for the college or university community to grow in commitment to the moral vision of Mercy and to collaborate in sustaining a culture of compassionate mercy at their institutions.

Becoming a Person of Mercy: Educating Character

The invitation to become a person of mercy is not sufficient in itself, for mercy is a character trait or virtue shaped by a dynamic process that involves practice, wisdom, and habits of thought. Basically, it is a project of educating a student's character--a project that involves choice, orientation to ask the right questions, development of conscience and ethical maturation.

Anyone who is involved in higher education has witnessed how consumerist attitudes continue to misshape the meaning and end of higher education directing it to serve, solely, the marketplace. I would offer that the concept of social imaginary allows us to examine the ways in which higher education resists or cooperates with

the prevailing consumerist ideology and its withering effects on social values like cooperation and the common good. With regard to Mercy colleges and universities, I have noted how the concept of a social imaginary emphasizes that there is a framework of moral norms and shared expectations at the heart of these communities—that should resist all efforts to flatten their significance in order to serve the marketplace. To resist the flattening of these values is to resist the flattening of our understanding of human dignity—who our students are and how they are capable of envisioning and striving for a more just world.

Resisting the flattening of these values involves a holistic approach to educating the character of students who have chosen to study at Mercy colleges and universities. A holistic approach to character education for becoming persons of mercy, involves harmonizing different aspects of the community life around the value of mercy. These aspects include the curricular and co-curricular programs, as well as the culture of mercy expressed in the relations and spiritual life of the community. Reflecting on the process of educating moral character, I focus on how mercy is "caught" and taught through the pedagogy of community and the pedagogy of transformation.

Theories of moral development remind us that our students are working towards moral maturity and autonomy at this time in their lives. They benefit from character education and moral guidance.

The Pedagogy of Community: How Mercy May Be "Caught"

The education of character is a concrete process that involves learning from those who model the value, in this case, mercy, in their own lives. Thus, we literally see what mercy looks like in the real world and catch a sense of what it means to practice mercy. I think that the concept of a social imaginary brings into focus the formative role that a community plays in providing a setting for moral development-- a world patterned by mercy, where mercy is modeled and expressed in the relations within the community and the ways in which the college or university relates to the larger surrounding community. Service projects, charitable projects, how members of the community care for students and each other, the issues the community cares about--all of these everyday activities point to a sense of mercy. I realize that this all sounds utopic, but it also signifies that there are ideals worth striving for, even if they are realized imperfectly.

This ideal but realizable vision of the role of the college or university culture in educating moral character is addressed in The Pedagogy of Compassion at the Heart of Higher Education [4] edited by Paul Gibbs. Compassion is a virtue or disposition closely related to mercy, and the insights developed in these essays are transferable to Mercy colleges and universities. The collection offers a multicultural perspective on the project of educating moral character with a breadth that ranges from the formative effect of student activities to the role of administration in shaping a compassionate environment on campus.

Included in Gibbs' collection is the essay "Becoming a Campus of Compassion," by Nancy Billias. She focuses on the intentional cultivation of a "climate" of compassion at St. Joseph's University in West Hartford, Connecticut, -a Mercy institution. The project involved integrating the moral vision of the Charter for Compassion into the life and teaching of the University through intentional programming that encouraged compassionate responses to the experiences of suffering both within the University community and in the larger community surrounding the

University. In addition to developing courses to influence the development of character through co-curricular programming, the effort involved faculty workshops to develop course strategies to encourage compassionate moral thinking and development. This effort illustrates the interaction between ways in which mercy is "caught" with the ways the mercy is taught.

The Pedagogy of Transformation

The students who come to our campuses evidence various degrees of moral maturity and autonomy. Theories of moral development remind us that our students are working towards moral maturity and autonomy at this time in their lives. They benefit from character education and moral guidance. We recognize that these emerging adults face challenges that range from learning to tolerate the annoying habits of a roommate to taking responsibility for virtuous or vicious sexual activity. Colleges and universities have the unique opportunity of providing sustained moral guidance to students over the course of four years, of helping them to develop their character and identity within a framework of selected moral values. Thus, a pedagogy of transformation involves prompting students to develop a critical consciousness about their own implicit biases, expand their social consciousness, and assume responsibility for their moral development.

A pedagogy of transformation involves harmonizing co-curricular and curricular projects involved with the education of a student's character, thus integrating, more closely, the work of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. Together, these two branches of a college or university, are charged with supporting the transformation and moral development of students through their particular approaches outside and within the academic classroom. Outside the academic classroom, this project is addressed by the professionals of Student Affairs who develop programming [5] and provide mentoring [6] to support the moral maturation of students.

Further reflection on the contributions of Student Affairs to the project of transformative pedagogy is important and merits further discussion. Given my background as an academic, I focus attention on student transformation and character education in the classroom and address course content and the habit of critical thinking.

We want to develop our students' ability to undertake a critical analysis of social structures and gauge whether these structures lead to the flourishing or degradation of persons.

The recovery of character education in higher education points to the consequences of minimizing moral education in the curriculum— a loss of the ability to think deeply and critically about social and personal issues. Perrin Cohen, Melissa McDaniels and Donna M. Qualters, in their article "AIR Model: A Teaching Tool For Cultivating Reflective Ethical Inquiry," observe that "few undergraduates have fully developed the to reflect upon ambiguous and multifaceted issues they face in their classrooms, workplaces, and personal lives."[7] These authors prompt us to recognize that mastering the vocabulary, concepts, and reasoning that ensure success in a student's chosen profession should not come at the expense of what is needed for a student to develop character and humanity. We want to develop our students' ability to undertake a critical analysis of social structures and gauge whether these structures lead to the flourishing or degradation of persons. We want our students to know how to use their social, political, and economic power to judge and act for what is good.

Some educators think that morality and ethics belong in departments of philosophy, religion or

theological studies, since these disciplines address existential questions that include concepts of the good, God, human nature, justice, and the meaning of life. It is true that the tradition of Catholic Social Teachings presents students with vocabulary, concepts, and methods of reasoning for reflecting on who they are, for knowing that they are called to love God, and that to love their neighbor means to act for the flourishing of those who suffer poverty and injustice.

Courses in Catholic Social Teaching may be complemented with service learning and community engagement courses. These courses may succeed in helping students to better understand the impact of the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy, and encourage critical analysis of social realities, while supporting the social justice work of community organizations. However, these approaches have their limitations. The introduction to ethics and moral reasoning may be limited to a few introductory level classes, and community engagement projects are not required of all students. Educating students' character involves sustained exposure to moral concepts and ongoing development of students' moral perspective. These needs are best met through an integrated program of character education that supports moral education across disciplines and over the course of the four years. Simply put, a pedagogy of transformation is an interdisciplinary project that takes place across the curriculum. It is not simply encouraging faculty across the disciplines to assume this task of moral education in their own courses.

Educating students' character involves sustained exposure to moral concepts and ongoing development of students' moral perspective.

Change is not easy, and faculty at colleges and universities may be quite comfortable with compartmentalized disciplines that attend to their own fields of expertise. But I'd propose that this compartmentalization retards what the Catholic Intellectual Tradition recognizes as the unity of knowledge and the power of knowledge. Every discipline has a set of moral questions that may touch on existential issues as well as the ways in which power may be used in that discipline or profession.

For example, Keith Douglass Warner, O.F.M. and David S. Caudil propose that professional training in the fields of science and technology "…requires an understanding of the role of values in the practice of science—how they appear in purportedly value-free science, and how the actual practice of science shapes values and has social consequences."[88] Mark W. Roche, a former Dean at Notre Dame, points to how all courses offer implicit moral education with faculty modelling the intellectual virtues of discipline, humility, hospitality, compassion and courage. [9] While enthusiastic about this type of moral education, Roche acknowledges that members of the faculty will be reticent to take up explicit moral education in the classroom, given their lack of training for these conversations.

The challenge of encouraging faculty, who are not moral theologians or philosophers, to participate in this interdisciplinary project is addressed by Cohen and Qualters of Northeastern University in their AIR program: "Awareness of ethical issues, Investigation of those issues, and Responding to those issues." [10] The program provides training for faculty members to integrate ethical reflection in their courses, thus helping students become more competent and confident in moral reasoning and developing their character. These are but three examples of how an integrative approach to character education and moral reasoning is unfolding across academic communities.

Mercy colleges and universities, as a type of social imaginary, present a world that models and calls forth mercy. Mercy was the shared norm and

expectation that was imbued across the curriculum through the teaching of the Sisters who vowed their commitment to serve the poor. Today, an integrative approach to educating character is a pedagogy oriented towards the transformation of both the professor and student, who through their experience of ethical reflection across disciplines can both mature into their calling to become persons of mercy. Returning to the sculpture of Catherine McAuley that begins this reflection, I hope that where our first-year students may have found an image that reminded them of a story that unfolded in the past, our graduating seniors will find in Catherine's sculpture a vision that inspires them for the future, as they walk across the commencement stage and into the world. ◆

Endnotes

[1] Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007): 171-172.
[2] Ibid. 171-172.
[3] Ibid., 172.
[4] Paul Gibbs, ed., *The Pedagogy of Compassion at the Heart of Higher Education* (Springer International Publishing, 2017), E-book.
[5] Molly McElroy, "Educating for Character: Teaching Values in the College Environment," https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/tvc/vol24/iss1/3 January 8, 2020.
McElroy describes the importance of entering into the gaps of student moral experience and wisdom by providing the programming and guidance that supports students as they transition from heeding the external authority of parent
[6] Margaret A. Healy, James M. Lancaster, Debora L. Liddell, and Dafina Lazarus Stewart, "The Role of the Campus Professional as a Moral Mentor," *New Directions for Student Services 2012* (139): 83–92. See also Lanacaster, Lidell, and Stewart in "The Role of the Campus Professional as Moral Mentor," who examine the importance of moral mentoring; they note how the professionals in Student Affairs facilitate moral growth through spiritual and values-based guidance in both informal and structured engagements with students.
[7] Perrin Cohen, Melissa McDaniels, Donna M. Qualters, "AIR Model: A Teaching Tool For Cultivating Reflective Ethical Inquiry," College Teaching, (Vol. 53, no. 3, Summer 2005): 121.
[8] Keith Douglass Warner, OFM and David S. Caudill, "Science, Technology, and Catholic Identity in the Education of Professionals." *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, (Vol. 16, no. 2, March 2013): 240.
[9] Mark W. Roche, "Should Faculty Members Teach Virtues and Values? That is The Wrong Question." https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/should-faculty-members-teach-virtues-and-values-wrong-question January 9, 2020.
[10] Cohen, McDaniels, Qualters, "AIR Model," p. 121.

Catholic and Mercy Higher Education: Preparing Students for Critical Engagement in the Era of Trump

Jennifer Reed-Bouley, Ph.D. and Kristin Mattson, Ph.D.

The politics of Trumpism has engendered new norms for public discourse, which affect teaching and learning.[1] Mirroring society at large, exclusionary rhetoric-- including racist and anti-immigrant views-- is increasingly finding its way into the classroom. This paper isolates distinct resources which Catholic liberal arts colleges can draw upon to address the harmful effects of Trumpism on campus, particularly in the classroom. We argue that in addition to the tools provided by a strong liberal arts tradition, Catholic universities can draw from Catholic Social Teaching and the specific resources of religioUS sponsors such as the Sisters of Mercy to prepare students for critical engagement in the post-Trump community.

The effects of Trumpism, with its language of exclusion, hyper-partisanship and disregard for fact, are felt in all aspects of the college community.

Trumpism on College Campuses in a Time of Demographic Change

The 2016 election took place in a time of dramatic economic and demographic change in the US and was, at least in part, a reaction to that change. Much has been written about the rise of Trumpism and the ways in which the declining fortunes of the white working class, independent of (but coincident with) the rapidly increasing diversity of the U.S. "opened the door to a populist leader who (drew) the definition of who "the people" are in a way that mobilize(d) resentment and license(d) disenfranchisement."[2] Trumpism easily found precedent for its exclUSive definition of "American" in America's highly racialized political history. The rootedness of Trumpism in U.S. history is important for our purposes here because, while Trump's campaign and election amplified and accelerated the exclusionary tendencies in American political discourse, they did not introduce them. Trumpism's effects on political discourse, both on campus and in the larger community, were felt well before President Trump was elected. By advancing this strand of American political ideology in a time of rapid demographic change and economic transformation, Trumpism has effected major changes in policy and political culture in a surprisingly short period of time.[3]

Trumpism's exclusionary rhetoric has shifted the boundaries of acceptable limits of political speech, on campus and in the larger community. Colleges are being forced to wade into debates about free speech on campus. They struggle to find a balance between respect for students' First Amendment rights and protection of the increasingly diverse student body. And while these debates are raging visibly on U.S. campuses (about such things as how to handle controversial speakers or how fully to develop and empower a bias reporting policy), faculty are struggling to deal with the effects of this abrupt cultural shift in their individual classrooms.

Liberal Arts Education and the Response to Trumpism

The effects of Trumpism, with its language of exclusion, hyper-partisanship and disregard for fact, are felt in all aspects of the college community. Importantly though, while the university is by no means immune from the destructive effects of Trumpism, founding principles of higher education also make colleges

and universities (at least potentially) inhospitable hosts to the illiberal ideals of Trumpism. Our argument here is that higher education (and particularly Catholic higher education), when built from a robust liberal arts curriculum which promotes reflection, critical engagement, and inclusivity, has the potential to disrupt the exclusionary language and practice of Trumpism on campus. A carefully crafted liberal arts curriculum, "through both content and pedagogy, will stimulate students to think and argue for themselves, rather than defer to tradition and authority." [4] By building critical reasoning skills, a historical and comparative context and an ethical framework, liberal arts education provides the perfect antidote, in the quad and in the classroom, for the emotional, hyper-partisan, exclusivity of Trumpism.

It is not just the liberal arts curriculum, but also the liberal arts pedagogy (or Socratic pedagogy) that promises to prepare students for critical engagement in the age of Trump. In preparing for engagement, how students learn is as important as what students learn. As Roosevelt Montas explains in his article in the Chronicle of Higher Education*, Democracy's Disappearance*, "To 'educate' is to nurture an individual into a particular community. We must recognize plainly that all education is education for citizenship. What we teach, how we teach it, and whom we teach it to necessarily describe a vision of society and of the types of individuals we want to prepare for that society. Values don't merely infiltrate education from the outside, as ideological add-ons, but are constitutive of the very practice of teaching."[5] The Socratic method is essential because we cannot teach the skills of democratic citizenship in an authoritarian classroom or an exclusive classroom (no matter the content of the curriculum). Socratic method brings all into a conversation in which we are trained to interrogate our assumptions and fully entertain the perspectives of others as we consider the issue or problem at hand.

Inclusive Freedom and Agreement on Value

In her book, *Free Speech on Campus*, Sigal Ben-Porath begins to develop a guide for effectively employing the Socratic method in the diversity of higher education today. She asserts that as elite colleges and universities have opened their doors to an increasingly diverse student body and embraced a social mission of providing access to economic and professional success, inclusion became essential to the mission of higher education. In other words, the success of higher education presupposes a commitment to inclusion. While this commitment is clear, universities have struggled with how to combine the commitment to this value with the university's commitment to freedom of inquiry and freedom of speech. How can we have a classroom that embraces free speech and yet requires agreement on the value of inclusion? Attempts to resolve this tension have produced the diametric (and not completely satisfactory) solutions of speech codes and totally unlimited speech.[6]

Inclusive Freedom in the classroom directs instructors to be attentive to the structuring of the conversation (before engaging in it).

In place of these extremes, Ben-Porath poses the ideal of Inclusive Freedom. Inclusive Freedom in the classroom directs instructors to be attentive to the structuring of the conversation (before engaging in it). Posing a student right to freedom from dignitary harm, Sigal Ben-Porath states that an inclusive classroom should be structured to promote free speech and open discourse while also making clear that certain value agreements are not subject to interrogation. Articulating these areas of value agreement and protecting students from dignitary harm "does not mean developing a set of stringent

and detailed PC guidelines about what should not be said." Rather, a classroom informed by Inclusive Freedom "recognizes and grapples with power differentials and the need for equity (and promotes the) importance of free speech, not in a neutral way but with attention to the context and effect of words."[7]

It is important to note that while liberal arts education builds from a set of shared values, contemporary political discourse often leads colleges and universities to downplay (or deny) these fundamental agreements to avoid charges of liberal bias. It used to be the case that that there was no controversy about values upon which efficient and equitable functioning of the university depended—equality, inclusivity, respect for scientific fact. But now, these values have become politicized in the era of Trumpism. While Socratic pedagogy and robust liberal arts curriculum may help to articulate and normalize the acknowledgment of these shared values, it may also be helpful to state these areas of value agreement more directly. We argue here that at Catholic colleges and universities, Catholic social teaching can be utilized to highlight the areas of value agreement, setting the framework to engage in critical conversations.

The missions that undergird Catholic higher education are embedded in deep narratives with profound meaning and meaningfulness.

Catholic and Mercy Framework for Dialogue and Inclusion

Not only have Catholic universities upheld the value of the humanities as a way to promote a robUSt civic life, but Catholic universities also regularly articulate distinctive commitments that can protect and promote the common good by attending to the flourishing of those groups targeted by contemporary rhetoric and action. As Ben-Porath writes, "Democratic practices should be interpreted in light of the unique and evolving mission that . . . institutions serve and of the population that uses their services."[8] The missions that undergird Catholic higher education are embedded in deep narratives with profound meaning and meaningfulness. These commitments can be articulated in university life in ways that illustrate shared values and provide justification for particular methods of teaching and learning.

In this second part of the paper, we want to show how applying some of the principles of the Catholic social tradition, particularly as interpreted through the charism of Mercy,[9] offers a way Catholic, Mercy universities can ground their commitment to teaching students the habits of mind and character that will help them resist Trumpist biases. The goal is to encourage them to contribute to building a more socially just democracy. These principles teach students the shared values and fundamental agreements necessary for both a robust democracy and liberal arts education.

Applying the Catholic social tradition to the issues of our day is a key strategy that can contribute to educating students' hearts or character. Scholars have suggested that the Catholic social tradition should be scaffolded throughout curricula, and have provided models and rubrics for assessing such work. The final evaluation is who our students become after graduation—how do they use their education to benefit society, enact justice and diminish human suffering? Nonetheless, it can be difficult for faculty across the disciplines to find ways to integrate the Catholic social tradition into their courses without compromising disciplinary learning.[10] Therefore, we focus here on an under-analyzed strategy that can complement explicit attention to applying the Catholic social tradition to issues. This strategy involves faculty shaping norms for classroom dialogue and choosing course resources informed by the Catholic social

tradition-- specifically through principles found throughout the corpus of the documentary tradition.[11]

Human Dignity, Common Good and Option for the Poor

It has been argued that the distinctively Catholic view of the human person is the bedrock upon which Catholic universities' uniqueness is built.[12] This positive theological anthropology is developed within principles found throughout the Catholic social tradition. Because of space constraints, we want to focus on three principles-- human dignity, common good, and option for the poor. These principles can be employed to protect students' dignity and freedom in the classroom, while facilitating the kind of reasoned analysis that will contribute to students' abilities to contribute constructively to political life outside the classroom.

It has been argued that the distinctively Catholic view of the human person is the bedrock upon which Catholic universities' uniqueness is built.

Each of the principles discussed briefly here rests on an extensive bibliography concerning the term's history and use in various papal and conciliar documents, its scriptural background, and its use by various Catholic authors and organizations. Here we briefly sketch the basic contours of the principles, using the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' definitions.[13]

We draw upon our content analysis of the Mission, Vision and Values statements of the seventeen Mercy universities in the United States, as well as reflections on the Mercy charism. We see how the Mercy charism influences interpretation and application of the principles. Then we suggest some potential ways each principle can inform classroom norms for dialogue as well as faculty's choice of resources and assignments.

Human Dignity

The principle of the life and dignity of the human person is widely understood as the foundation of Catholic social teaching. It includes the belief that because we are created in God's image and likeness, our worth directly reflects God's infinite worth. Our dignity derives from our standing as children of God, not our specific or particular capabilities. Human life deserves society's protection. Our sin does not diminish or eradicate our fundamental worth, which is intrinsic to us. Even if society does not recognize a person's dignity, the person's worth is unchanged. Therefore, even those who are persecuted or excluded on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and other aspects of their identities retain their inviolable worth as children of a loving God.

Although the Catholic tradition reflects upon the implications of sin for individuals, communities, and societies, it still insists that reality is intelligible using the faculty of human reason.[14] Persons may disagree about the causes of, and remedies to, social injustice; but because the Catholic worldview affirms that reality is intelligible, we can agree upon a set of facts based upon empirical analysis. The human capacity for reason makes possible rigorous debate that can be based upon argumentation, not prejudice.

Venerable Catherine McAuley referred to human dignity in describing compassion as a way to teach. She wrote, "Compassion should be our animating principle when undertaking the instruction with children and adults, for they are made in God's image."[15] Compassion towards students and the rest of society constitutes a primary value that can be applied to teaching. The virtue of compassion, as a way of affirming

human dignity, can inform how we teach, but does not imply lowering grading or other standards. According to the Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy, "We witness to Mercy when we reverence the dignity of each person"[16] The Mission, Vision and Values statements of ten of the seventeen Mercy universities refer to the dignity of the person in terms of the transformation students experience as a result of their university education.

How can the principle of human dignity provide a lens into, and articulation of, norms for classroom dialogue? Here is one example from our context at College of Saint Mary (CSM): All CSM faculty are encouraged to post, discuss with students, and adhere to a standard "Open Discourse Policy." The policy explicitly references the worth of each student's viewpoints, regardless of the degree to which they conform to the views of the rest of the class. It states, "In the spirit of intellectual inquiry, College of Saint Mary is committed to the exchange of diverse ideas and viewpoints. In this environment, honest discourse is valued; demeaning remarks are not tolerated. Each member of the campus community is encouraged to recognize the basis of her or his own assumptions and perspectives, acknowledge the assumptions and perspectives of others, and promote understanding and respectful dissent." The principle of human dignity, upon which the Policy is based, points to the value of inclusion and the benefits of diverse perspectives and identities. It challenges faculty to establish norms that teach students how to engage in rigoroUS dialogue that challenges ideas rather than the worth of particular people and groups.

In this environment, honest discourse is valued; demeaning remarks are not tolerated.

Regard for human dignity may also lead to policies and practices that demonstrate to students that their worth persists regardless of viewpoint, and that their dignity should lead them to provide, to the best of their abilities, complete warrants for their claims. Faculty can affirm the importance of disagreement (with the faculty member and with other students) because disagreement can demonstrate that the alternate position is worthy of careful consideration and that the person who holds it is capable of rational dialogue and defense of an opposing position. The liberal arts skill of critical thinking complements these commitments, because it teaches students that not all positions are equally valid and that facts must be marshalled to support claims.

Another, related way that a faculty member in any discipline can apply the principle of human dignity to teaching and learning is in the faculty's choice of assigned resources for students to study (including how to critique and contextualize each resource). Classic texts that celebrate human resilience and worth, as well as those that disclose humanity's historic and current depravity and failure to protect human dignity, and those that examine various perspectives and diverse viewpoints, would contribute to students' appreciation for human dignity in any academic discipline.[17]

Common Good

Mercy higher education is understood to be transformational in two senses: The first sense refers to students' perceptions of themselves. Many are first generation college students and do not necessarily arrive at universities with the self-understanding that they can be successful and influence society. Promotion of the students' human dignity requires teaching them that they can be influential agents in society. The second transformation occurs in each student's actual ability to encourage and enact social change towards justice, which matches the responsibilities of students to the common good.[18] These two dimensions of transformation (bringing together human dignity and common good) are expressed

in Catherine's famous dictum: "No work of charity can be more productive of good to society than the careful education of women . . . . since their example and advice will always possess influence . . . . "[19]

The principle of common good complements and extends Catholicism's positive anthropology. The principle of common good affirms that human beings are inevitably social and require communities and society to protect and uplift each individual's intrinsic worth. The individual can only be as healthy as the community in which she lives. As *Gaudium et Spes* states, "The fact that human beings are social by nature indicates that the betterment of the person and the improvement of society depend on each other…humanity by its very nature stands completely in need of life in society."[20] Therefore, the individual and her surrounding community should not be pitted against one another; rather, we must attend to the wellbeing (or "good") of both.

Such a community of learning could go a long way towards helping students understand that the role of education is not only personal benefit but also social benefit.

Catherine McAuley placed a high premium on the instructor's person as a factor that could facilitate the common good in the classroom. In her Rule, she quotes Saint Ignatius on the instructor's example as a key to facilitating learning. Catherine highlighted the role of the instructor with regard to her demeanor, words and faith. According to Mary Sullivan, R.S.M., the preeminent historian of Catherine McAuley, "The challenge these words [regarding the instructor as exemplar] present to Mercy educators may not have fully dawned upon us. We are to *be* and *do* what we *teach*. If we wish to teach mercifulness, we must speak and act mercifully towards others."[21] The Mission, Vision and Values statements of twelve of the seventeen Mercy universities express a goal of students transforming society in ways that effect the common good.

How can the principle of the common good be applied to teaching and learning? It is incumbent upon faculty to create a community in a classroom where the goals of learning are not solely individual or built upon the reward system of individual grades. Though individuals' contributions are essential to their learning, helping students to see themselves as part of an ongoing conversation in a community, where everyone can contribute to the shared project of learning, demands development of humility-- where those who find the material easy to understand can assist those who do not. Such a community of learning could go a long way towards helping students understand that the role of education is not only personal benefit but also social benefit.

Course resources and assignments can easily raise questions about the common good, and provide an imaginative vision for what "the good" looks like in various contexts. Contributing to human liberation is not confined to those in the social sciences, theology and philosophy. Catholic universities can graduate liberation accountants, health professionals, and others who see that their particular expertise can contribute to reweaving and shaping the common good.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

The third principle we want to address is option for the poor and vulnerable. As we have seen in the discussion of common good, the health and suffering of individuals and their communities affect one another. "The deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community."[22] With a rich tradition in the Hebrew Scriptures, the life of Jesus, and Christian history, the Catholic tradition underscores the

responsibility--or "option"-- for the poor and vulnerable in contemporary life. Highlighted particularly by Latin American liberation theologians and then extended by feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, disability and other theologians, this principle focuses on the obligations that both individuals and societies hold toward those who are most vulnerable, particularly the economically poor.

We focus here only on the epistemological dimension of the option for the poor, which includes (insofar as it is possible) evaluating situations, events, and history from the perspectives of those who have suffered most and those whose stories have been overshadowed. Attaining a more balanced analysis of issues requires amplifying attention to the perspectives of those whose agency has historically and/or presently been silenced or muted. Catherine McAuley exemplified the option for the poor before this theme was articulated as a major tenet of Catholic social thought. Catherine's main concern was the education of those who were materially poor, particularly women and girls who suffered greatly during her lifetime in Ireland. As we have seen above, this value can be applied to the way faculty structure classroom dialogue and to their choice of resources. In her discussion paper on characteristics of universities sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M. refers to this the way that Mercy higher education expressed the option for the poor in the following way: "[T]hrough action and education, promotion of compassion and justice towards those with less, especially women and children."[23] In the Mission, Vision and Values statements of Mercy universities, the option for the poor refers mainly to the work of graduates who engage in service and effect social justice rather than to the students the university recruits for admission. Though we know that many Mercy universities focus on attracting first generation and other students who would be considered to be marginalized, this aim is only articulated in one mission statement. However, six universities refer to "hospitality" as a primary value, and they link hospitality to diversity and inclusion of those groups to whom universities have not traditionally been hospitable.

How does the principle of option for the poor influence classroom teaching? Option for the poor presupposes the understanding that some groups and individuals possess more power historically and presently in the canon and in the classroom. In facilitating course dialogue, option for the poor implies that fairness does not demand providing equal time for all perspectives. More time and analysis should be given to the perceptions and experiences of those who are historically and presently undervalued and marginalized. Faculty can elevate and amplify these voices while respecting the fact that those who are numerical minorities or otherwise marginalized have no obligation to represent and speak for their group. As faculty wrote in the journal of the American Association of University Professors, "Some would ask professors to assign both sides equal validity in the service of neutrality. However, that approach *does* take sides; it privileges a narrowly defined version of civility over compassion or empathy for those with something significant to lose."[24] Moreover, empirical studies attest to the increased learning that can occur for all groups when a diversity of voices are included.[25] Creating a classroom where historically disadvantaged and underrepresented groups such as first generation

More time and analysis should be given to the perceptions and experiences of those who are historically and presently undervalued and marginalized.

students, economically poor students, students of color, and non-Catholic students feel comfortable to participate requires great skill in facilitating hospitality.

In choice of resources, too, faculty can practice the option for the poor. We provide an example from the discipline of theology, which has historically been dominated by white European men. College of St. Mary's theology program sets a goal that every course includes at least 25% of its resources either authored by or focusing on women's perspectives and the same percentage for resources either authored by or focusing on the perspectives of people of color. These percentages should be higher than 25 percent, because the extent to which we include these voices teaches students about the value we place on them. Requiring a greater percentage of such authorship and focus demonstrates to students that women and people of color should function as equals in theological discourse. We are determined to increase representation, so that these voices and perspectives become the majority in our classes.

Conclusion

The Catholic social tradition and the Mercy charism--as expressed by Venerable Catherine McAuley, interpreted and developed by the Sisters of Mercy, and reflected in the Mission, Vision, and Values statements of Mercy universities--provide a rich trove of resources to apply to classroom teaching in our challenging time. These resources afford a strong foundation for our work of protecting students' dignity and freedom in the classroom by offering language, imaginative vision, and appreciation of our longstanding commitments to democratic values.◆

Endnotes

[1] We want to be clear that Donald Trump and Trumpism are not the same thing. Trump has connected with the rhetoric of Trumpism—which aligns him with a long history of exclusionary movements and rhetoric.

[2] Robert Lieberman, Suzanne Mettler, Thomas B. Pepinsky, Kenneth M. Roberts, Richard Valelly, "Trumpism and American Democracy: History, Comparison, and the Predicament of Liberal Democracy in the United States." August 29, 2017. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3028990#maincontent accessed March 1, 2020: 18.

[3] Lieberman et al.: 17.

[4] Martha C. Nussbaum. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs The Humanities.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010): 48.

[5] Roosevelt Montas, "Democracy's Disappearance: Our students don't understand what it is, so how will they defend it?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/Democracy-s-Disappearance/241303 accessed March 1, 2020.

[6] See, for example, E. Chemerinsky and H. Gillman. *Free Speech on Campus*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); Nadine Strossen, *Hate: Why We Should Resist it with Free Speech, Not Censorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Fredrick Lawrence. "The Contours of Free Expression on Campus: Free Speech, Academic Freedom and Civility," *Liberal Education 103* (2): 14; Kamden Strunk, "Free Speech for Some, Civility for Others," *Inside Higher Ed* (September 21, 2018) https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2018/09/21/colleges-and-politicians-promote-free-speech-some-insist-civility-others-opinion, accessed March 1, 2020.

[7] Sigal R. Ben-Porath, *Free Speech on Campus*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017): 102.

[8] Ben-Porath, 115.

[9] While a charism cannot be claimed as the exclusive domain of a particular religious community, and much overlap exists, "charisms are stabilizing forces for religious congregations. They define and shape each congregation's mission, and they focus the mission on activities that become institutionalized in ministries." Retrieval of a charism in light of the signs of the times can also "effect . . . renewal and change." Susan M. Sanders, "Charisms, Congregational Sponsors, and Catholic Higher Education," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* (29/1, 2010): 6.

[10] Tara Hudson, Heather Mack, Jennifer Reed-Bouley, and Margarita Rose, "Assessing Student Learning about the Catholic Social Tradition: A Validated Rubric," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* (37:1, 2018): 127-150.

[11] This is not to claim that the principles of CST are the only facet of the Catholic tradition. We can also look,

for example, to the lived witness of holy women, men and organizations informed by the Catholic sacramental and moral imaginations, and other dimensions of the tradition.

[12] See, for example, Karen E. Eifler and Thomas M. Landy, eds. *Becoming Beholders: Cultivating Sacramental Imagination And Actions In College Classrooms*. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014).

[13] http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm, accessed 2-18-20.

[14] Margaret Farley, "Wisdom, Dignity and Justice: Higher Education as a Work of Mercy," *MAST Journal* (16/2, 2006): 3-8.

[15]https://www.jarofquotes.com/view.php?id=compassion-should-be-our-animating-principle-when-undertaking-instruction-with-children-adults-since-they-are-made-in-gods-image-catherine-mcauley, accessed January 31, 2020.

[16] *Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas*. Silver Spring, MD: Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 1992, paragraph 8. Cited in Linda Schifino, "For a Just and Merciful World: Bringing Mercy to Light in the Teaching of Social Movements," *Carlow Proceedings* (2011): 31.The full text connects human dignity with hospitality: "We strive to witness to Mercy when we reverence the dignity of each person, create a spirit of hospitality, and pursue integrity of word and deed in our lives. Recognizing our own human weakness, we know that only through God's mercy can we be merciful."

[17] See Michael Buckley, *The Catholic University as Promise and Project: Reflections in a Jesuit Idiom* (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 1999). As Margaret Farley writes, "Yet, higher education is surely that realm of society where primary challenges to failures and distortions of thought ought to be taken seriously." Margaret Farley, "Wisdom, Dignity, and Justice," *MAST Journal*.

[18] Timothy Muldoon, "The Theology of the Mercy University," Talk given on October 1, 2014, https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.138/dpk.3b7.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Theology-of-the-Mercy-University-Tim-Muldoon.pdf, accessed 2-18-20.

[19] Catherine McAuley, quoted in Mary Sullivan, "Catherine McAuley and the Characteristics of Mercy Higher Education," *MAST Journal* (16/2, 2006): 21.

[20] Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*, par. 25.

[21] Sullivan, 23.

[22] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, par. 88.

[23] Maryanne Stevens, "Mercy Higher Education: Culture and Characteristics," Discussion Paper, December 2004. Provided by author. The other three characteristics she identifies are the following: Regard for the dignity of the person; academic excellence and lifelong learning, and education of the whole person "body, mind, and spirit."

[24] Lara Schwartz and Daniel Ritter, "Civil Discourse in the Classroom: Simple Approaches to Tough Conversations," *AAUP* Winter 2019. https://www.aaup.org/article/civil-discourse-classroom#.XkwZ02hKgRk, accessed 2-18-20.

[25] Juan C. Garibay, "Understanding the Educational Benefits of Diversity," https://equity.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/DiversityintheClassroom2014Web.pdf, accessed 2-18-20.

Mercy Education: It's not about Me, It's about Us

Johann M. Vento, Ph.D.

I address these comments to our newest students – to you freshman and transfer students who are just beginning your time at a Mercy college or university.[1] Congratulations! You are embarking on a transformational adventure! You have chosen to align your educational path with a school sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy and to work and grow along with other students, faculty, and staff who are committed to the Mercy charism. Mercy is a deep and wide concept that we can spend our lives unpacking, but I hope with my comments here to get at something of the heart of mercy and the way we strive to live it out in our Mercy-sponsored colleges and universities.

Since the death last year of the illustrious American novelist Toni Morrison, a quote of hers has been circulating around social media. Maybe you've seen it. She says:

> I tell my students, "When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game." [2]

Here, Morrison points to the responsibility that those of us who have had access to education and training have to those who haven't. It is similar to that line from the Gospel of Luke, frequently quoted at graduations, where Jesus says, "To whom much is given, much will be required" (Lk 12:48).

But my favorite part of that quote is that last line of Morrison's: "This is not just a grab-bag candy game." This whole business of the life of the mind, of becoming conversant in the histories, languages, philosophies, theologies, and great works of art and literature that help us understand and participate in our world, and of learning specific skills and practices that will equip us to make a living and to make a life – this whole wonderful business that keeps us busy in a college or university – is not just about reaching in and taking out something for myself – **it's not about "me" it is about us**. I invite all of you – as you seize the opportunity to study, as you claim for ourselves the intellectual and spiritual riches that come from nurturing the life of the mind and of being formed in your chosen profession – to remember that all this is not an individual pursuit. I can't just grab all this for myself so that my life goes well for me. There is a fundamental lie at the heart of that kind of individualism.

But when I talk about well-being, thriving, and flourishing, I'm talking about the realization of the **deepest** desires of our hearts for peace, for wholeness, for healing.

Your well-being, your thriving and flourishing is completely and utterly dependent on the possibility of well-being and flourishing for all others, especially those without freedom, without power, those suffering from violence, exclusion, and poverty.

You might be thinking, there are lots of examples of people in our culture who seem to do just fine with an individualist approach – who accumulate popularity, status, celebrity, wealth, and prestige by taking what they can get, who give a little here and there to meet the demands of the appearance of charity, and who appear successful to us. And you are right. We do see that around us all the time.

But when I talk about well-being, thriving, and flourishing, I'm talking about the realization of the **deepest** desires of our hearts for peace, for

wholeness, for healing. Which, by the way, we don't have to reach out for and grab, but which reside, naturally, at the core of each of us and is there for us to realize and manifest when we acknowledge the fundamental truth of our constitutional connectedness to each other human being, to all living beings, and to the earth itself. This connectedness **constitutes** us – it makes us who we are. **It is not about "me," but about us.**

Christianity calls this "the peace that surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). Buddhism calls this the Buddha-nature within each person. Hindu traditions call this "advaita" – non-dualism. Islamic Sufi traditions call this sharing in the oneness of being. All of these great religious traditions strain against the limitations of human language to point to the deep underlying relatedness that makes who we are as persons – my growth and realization of all my human potential – what makes me *me* and you *you* **is about Us, not about Me**.

This connectedness **constitutes** us – it makes us who we are. **It is not about "me," but about us.**

In your studies over the next several years you are going to hear a lot about service. It is one of the hallmarks of a Mercy college or university, along with compassion, justice, faith, and integrity. These are all aspects of that big, deep, and impossible to completely pin down or exhaust word: Mercy. You are going to learn about Catherine McAuley, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, and the long tradition of the Sisters of service to the sick and uneducated. You are going to learn about, and be encouraged to emulate, the Sisters' ongoing concern for nonviolence, just and humane immigration policy, for challenging and eradicating racism and sexism, and of their dedication to the sustainability of our natural environment. You are going to learn about the religious roots of the concept of mercy, its central role in the Christian understanding of God and God's relationship to us in Jesus Christ, its central role in all of the great religious traditions. You are going to hear about all of this. But the one word that I bet you will hear most often in relation to mercy is service.

We talk about service a lot at Mercy schools. And we do it a lot. We have been consistently recognized among other schools for the number of service hours the "members of We" rack up. I'm proud of that – and I celebrate anything that points to what wonderful, transformational places our Mercy colleges and universities are. I don't want to be misunderstood with regard to what follows.

So here is my confession: I'm a little worried about this word "service." I think we may use it so much we wear it out, or more accurately, miss something important about its meaning. The word service, or phrases we hear all the time like "giving back" or "paying it forward" can sound sometimes as if, I'm this discreet individual with some time, talent, energy – and I'm going to give some of that to an "other" --to someone over there – because it's a "nice" thing to do, because I'll feel good about myself afterward, because I'll "make a difference," or maybe because it's a service learning graduation requirement. By the way – those things are all true and all good reasons to "do service." It's all good!

But when we talk about "service" on that level, we are in danger of missing that deeper understanding of our inter-relatedness. Of that fundamental insight that each person is made up of relationships – that what makes me who I am is community, that we are not discreet individuals who can go it alone – even if we want to – even if we dedicate our lives to that pursuit, as many do.

When I "do service" I am not engaging in some nice added-on thing, that checks a box of what a decent person is supposed to do.

When we serve others, we accompany others in their pains and in their joys. When we practice

compassion, we work for justice, that is, we free others and empower others, as Toni Morrison calls us to do. We are nurturing and manifesting that fundamental truth that our own capacity to realize the deepest desires of our hearts, our one and only chance of becoming the "me" that I'm called to become – is inseparable from the chance that the weakest, the most threatened, the most vulnerable among us have.

So, let's keep doing it. Let's keep racking up those service hours. But let's not call it service. Let's call it love. Let's have the courage to call it love. Because that helps us to remember that that word Mercy you are going to hear so much about in the coming years – **is all about us and not me.**

Thank you.◆

Endnotes

[1] This text is adapted from a Convocation Address delivered on August 29, 2019 at Georgian Court University in Lakewood, New Jersey by Johann M. Vento, Ph.D., Professor of Religious Studies and Theology.

[2] Read more: https://www.oprah.com/omagazine/toni-morrison-talks-love/all#ixzz5wrm3tPMb

MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

MAST, The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, met for the first time in June 1987 at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Called together by Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. and Mary Ann Getty, twenty Mercy theologians and Scripture scholars from fourteen regional communities formally established the organization to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Sisters of Mercy and associates. The stated purpose of the organization is to promote studies and research in Scripture, theology and related fields; to support its members in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching and administration; and to provide a means for members to address issues within the context of their related disciplines. This work is meant to serve women, the Church, and the Institute.

MAST has been meeting annually since then, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Julia Upton, R.S.M., currently serves as MAST'S Executive Director. **The Annual Meeting will be held at Mercy Heritage Center in Belmont, N.C., from June 11-13, 2021.**

Members act as theologians in the Church and carry on theological work in their respective disciplines and ministries. They also seek to be of service to the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas by providing a forum for ongoing theological education.

For information on becoming a member and being added to MAST's mailing list, contact the association's Executive Director, Julia Upton, R.S.M. by e-mail at uptonj@stjohns.edu or by mail at St. Mary of the Angels Convent, 600 Convent Rd., Syosset, NY 11791-3863.

Dues can be paid by check, payable to MAST and sent to association Treasurer, Katherine Doyle, R.S.M., Holy Spirit Convent, 3920 West Land Park Drive, Sacramento, CA 95822-1123. E-mail is mkdoyle@mercywmw.org.

Since 1991, The MAST Journal has been published three times a year. Members of the organization serve on the journal's editorial board on a rotating basis, and several members have, over the years, taken on responsibility to edit individual issues. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., currently serves in that capacity.

Common(?)Values in Mercy, Catholic Higher Education

Theresa Ladrigan-Whelpley, Ph.D.

What does it mean to be a Mercy, Catholic institution of higher education in the 21st century? For much of our history, the question of religious identity and mission in Mercy, Catholic higher education has been answered in a practical, immediate, and often unselfconscious way: The Sisters. The Sisters of Mercy served as the founding members, principal administrators, faculty and staff of our colleges and universities and they were the means by which the Catholic identity and Mercy charism visibly animated the teaching, research, community, and culture of these sponsored institutions. However, the living embodiment of Mercy has a different composition at our institutions today. With an ever-growing diversity of colleagues and partners in mission, how will the Catholic tradition and Mercy charism shape the governing priorities of our colleges and universities into the 21st century? In this essay, I will explore the dynamics of continuity and change in the work of tradition, consider the question of common values in Mercy, Catholic higher education, and examine how these values find expression across our colleges and universities today.

With an ever-growing diversity of colleagues and partners in mission, how will the Catholic tradition and Mercy charism shape the governing priorities of our colleges and universities into the 21st century?

Tradition: Continuity and Change

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? (*Isaiah 43:19*)

Yves Congar, O.P., Roman Catholic theologian and author of a seminal work on tradition, *Tradition and Traditions*, astutely notes: "Jesus himself wrote nothing; he did not give his apostles the mission to leave writings, but to preach. They were to preach and to transmit the message and reality of the Gospel."[1] Within the Roman Catholic tradition encounters with the event and person of Jesus Christ are certainly understood to be mediated through the writings of the earliest followers of Jesus, that is, the Christian Scriptures, as well as the writings which the earliest Christians themselves recognized as revelatory, the Hebrew Scriptures. And the Roman Catholic tradition affirms that select extrabiblical Christian narratives, prayers, rituals, customs, and practices, are also revelatory. However, as the repertoire of classics[2] within the Roman Catholic tradition continues to grow throughout time and history, debates rage regarding the true contents of the canon of tradition, as well as the extent to which the Christian canons (both biblical and extrabiblical) are open to interpretation, and if so, by whom.[3] While it is important that we remain creatively connected with the deposits of tradition from the earliest apostolic communities, the mere repetition of early Church teachings and practices does not constitute faithfulness to the tradition as a whole. Rather, as New Testament scholar Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., so carefully notes, the importance of the early apostolic tradition "lies in its foundational and mediational character, not in its chronological priority or qualitative superiority to subsequent experiences of revelation."[4] She goes on to argue: "It is not the case that the importance of apostolic tradition derives from its being the fullest, truest, and best expression of Christian revelation…the logic of this position would entail the assertion that subsequent Christian experience has been a

continuous diminution of the original event tending toward its eventual 'petering out.' "[5] Rather, the diverse, contrasting, contesting communities that give life within the Christian tradition today testify to the way in which the roots of the tradition have bequeathed a capacity for ongoing generativity within new and diverse contexts.[6]

Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, in his book *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology*, argues that tradition most "generally and characteristically" operates as an embedded, embodied, practiced argument. "A living tradition is a historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely… about the goods which constitute that tradition."[7] MacIntyre goes on: "So when an institution, a university, say – is the bearer of a tradition of practice or practices, its common life will be…in a centrally important way, constituted by a continuous argument as to what a university is and ought to be."[8]

As the partners in a project to promote the practice of Mercy in Catholic higher education, we are prompted to ask how the Mercy, Catholic tradition authentically changes and innovates.

Theologian Terrence Tilley engages this understanding of the ongoing argument of a living tradition further in his reflection: "Traditions are not reified 'things' that can be known apart from practice, any more than languages are 'things' that can be known apart from linguistic performance and competence." He goes on: "Continuity in tradition cannot be guaranteed by rules, by rules for following rules, or by anything other than carrying on and carrying out the tradition itself by participating in the practice or practices that constitute the tradition."[9] Tradition, even a tradition as universal as the Roman Catholic tradition, is lived out and developed by particular people in particular places, contexts, and cultures. To fail to acknowledge and make room for diverse localized practice within the Roman Catholic tradition is to compromise its capacity to make meaning across time and space. When a particular instantiation of a tradition resists the embodiment of that tradition in and through diverse cultural, political, social, and gendered contexts and communities, tradition can become a matter of imperial repetition, rather than dynamic generation.

As the partners in a project to promote the practice of Mercy in Catholic higher education, we are prompted to ask how the Mercy, Catholic tradition authentically changes and innovates. Is there anything in the tradition itself that grounds and governs interpretations and innovations so as to confirm a family resemblance and the realization of ideal meaning across interpretations and innovations? Yves Congar, O.P. answers yes:

> In order to make the paradosis —the transmission— effective and authentic, this or that form in which the transmission occurred in the past, but which would nowadays be an obstacle to its reality, must eventually be revised and renewed. This is why every reform requires not only an analysis of the situation and its demands, but basic resources of a very pure kind in the form of knowledge of the indefensible content of the Christian realities which are to be handed on.[10]

For Congar, authentic innovation within tradition requires an understanding of the ideal meaning of the "indefensible content of the Christian realities" which is expressed in multiple forms and reforms, diverse formulations and reformulations, but without which it would cease to be itself. We can ask ourselves what are these essential elements for the Mercy, Catholic tradition that serve to govern our future development? What are the elements of the

tradition, the common values, without which Mercy, Catholic higher education would cease to be itself?

Common (as in Essential) Characteristics of Mercy, Catholic Higher Education

> *Our hearts can always be in the same place centered in God, for whom alone we go forward, or stay back.–Catherine McAuley*[11]

Catherine McAuley, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, in responding to an inquiry by Fr. Gerald Doyle on what was required to become a Sister of Mercy, replied with the following: "What seems generally requisite besides an ardent desire to be united to God and serve the poor is…"[12] Before delineating any further criteria, Catherine noted that the charismatic essentials of a vocation of Mercy are the related desires of union with God and service to the poor.

In my earlier research on lay expressions of the Mercy charism, I interviewed many Mercy Associates and Companions (lay persons affiliated with the Sisters of Mercy) who reflected upon these essentials of the Mercy charism. One Mercy Companion I interviewed confirmed: "The commitment to God and the commitment to the poor are central to the Mercy charism. If these commitments are lacking, it wouldn't be Mercy."[13] Union with God and service to the poor have remained essential marks of the Mercy charism and these marks have found expression through ever expanding communities and contexts over 175 years. For example, the four core values articulated by the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy today as its mission and echo these essential marks in a renewed framework:

> Our daily lives as Sisters of Mercy are rooted in four core values inspired by the life of our foundress Catherine McAuley:
>
> **Spirituality:** The example of Jesus leads us; the Gospel guides us and Catherine McAuley's spirit enlivens us.
>
> **Community:** Living in community deepens our relationship with God, strengthens us for mission, and continually inspires us in our call to serve others.
>
> **Service:** We see Jesus in the most marginalized people and take a vow of service to perform works of Mercy that alleviate suffering.
>
> **Social Justice and Our Critical Concerns:** We work passionately to eliminate poverty, the widespread denial of human rights, the degradation of earth, the increase in violence and racism, the continued oppression of women, the abuse of children, the mistreatment of immigrants and the lack of solidarity among people and nations.[14]

How are these essentials of the Mercy charism finding dynamic expression in the work of Mercy, Catholic higher education today?

Values Stated by the Conference of Mercy Higher Education

The Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE) was established in 2002 to preserve and develop "the core Catholic identity and mission of Mercy higher education in accord with the spirit, mission, and heritage of the Sisters of Mercy."[15] In 2004, the Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE) sponsored the development of a framing document: "Mercy Higher Education: Culture and Characteristics." This white paper authored by Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M. argued that the essential elements of the Mercy charism ought to be manifest in four characteristics across Mercy, Catholic colleges and universities: 1) regard for the dignity of the person, 2) academic excellence and life-long learning, 3) education of the whole person: body, mind, and spirit, and 4) the promotion of compassion and justice towards those with less, especially women and children, through action and education.[16]

Though these characteristics highlight in a significant way a commitment to service and to

the poor, Mary Sullivan, R.S.M. in an essay in MAST in 2006 entitled: "Catherine McAuley and the Characteristics of Mercy Higher Education" noted the absence of any explicit religious foundation or referent in these four characteristics. While affirming that the four characteristics reflected an understanding of human dignity and the human person that is sourced in the divine, Sullivan proposed three additional characteristics central to Mercy, Catholic higher education: 5) religious learning and spiritual development, 6) education in and commitment to mercifulness, as revealed in the Mercy of God made manifest in Jesus Christ, and 7) the strenuous effort to give good example, personally and corporately.[17] These additions seek to make explicit the relationship with God at the heart of the Mercy charism as well as the ways in which practices of mercy are sourced in experiences of God's mercy.

Common(?) Values Across Mercy, Catholic Colleges and Universities

Presently there are seventeen-member institutions of the Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE) in the United States. All but two of these colleges or universities have explicitly articulated core institutional values with accompanying explanations and reflections.[18] To what extent are the core values of Mercy, Catholic higher education institutions held in common? How do the institutional values articulated by CMHE schools engage the characteristics of Mercy, Catholic higher education advanced by Stevens and Sullivan? In order to pursue these questions, I cataloged and mapped the presentation of the core institutional values of CMHE institutions into a values matrix.

*(See **Appendix**). Mercy Core Institutional Values as Expressed by CMHE Institutions.*

It is important to note that not all CMHE schools articulate all characteristics or values. The most common values articulated across CMHE schools today are compassion and hospitality, with the value of service following as a close second. Academic excellence is the third most prevalent core value, and then a range of other values follows with each school articulating different core values according to localized points of emphasis. When we consider the core values articulated by CMHE schools alongside the characteristics of Mercy, Catholic higher education articulated by Stevens and Sullivan, we do see significant overlap. Most notably, there is shared reference to compassion, hospitality, service, "the promotion of compassion and justice towards those with less," and a "service to the poor." However, though the values articulated by CMHE schools reflect common commitments to compassion, hospitality, and service, the underlying religious grounding for these commitments is often not explicit. Sullivan's characteristics of religious learning and spiritual development, as well as the value of mercifulness in practice as understood through Jesus Christ, finds limited articulation in the expression of Mercy values across CMHE schools today.

In her 1838 letter to her companion, Frances Warde, Catherine McAuley urged accommodation in ministry in accord with local practice: "Every place has its own particular ideas and feelings which must be yielded to when possible."[19] However, as Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M. notes, Mercy, Catholic colleges and universities will "have a better chance of sustaining their Mercy legacy as well as their Catholic identity if the organizational structure and concommitment accountabilities are appropriated and implemented by all institutions."[20] And yet, the Mercy, Catholic tradition is a living argument, incarnate in each context and community, each college and university in dynamically expressive ways. How is union with God and service to the poor understood and engaged across our Mercy, Catholic colleges and universities today? Might the religious framework common to Catherine

McAuley and her companions be finding new forms of expression today? As Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., notes, "The vital question is not 'Who founded us?' but 'Who have we become by the grace of God?'"[21]

Common (as in Ordinary) Work of Mercy, Catholic Higher Education

I say that we are wound, with mercy round and round. – Gerard Manley Hopkins [22]

So far, we have engaged this study of common values in Mercy, Catholic higher education through an understanding of the dynamic work of tradition, exploring the ways in which Mercy, Catholic values are rooted in common foundations and made manifest in diverse and ever unfolding ways across CMHE institutions. But "common" has another application relevant to the work of Mercy, Catholic higher education today that is illuminating to our study and the rising question of religious identity. Might a common mark of Mercy, Catholic higher education today be the way in which our institutions seek to live out their Mercy, Catholic values through the commons, that is through the ordinary work and practices of each institution? The Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, underlines that mercy and love "must be pursued chiefly in the ordinary circumstances of life."[23] And Catherine McAuley certainly was a practitioner of mercy in ordinary time. As Brenda Dolphin, R.S.M. reflects: "Catherine's letters are full of anecdotes of ordinary everyday happenings; concern for somebody who is sick, rejoicing at someone's success, sharing titbits of information and advice, commenting on someone's behavior, delighting over a gift, and being devastated at the news of illness or a death."[24] In the original Rule and Constitutions, Catherine McAuley urges her community to take to heart the ways in which the extraordinary is made manifest in the ordinary. In Chapter 5 "On the Perfection of the Ordinary Action," Catherine McAuley counsels: "The perfection of the religious soul depends, not so much on doing extraordinary actions, as on doing extraordinarily well the ordinary actions and exercises of each day."[25]

In attending to the notion of common as grounded in the activities of ordinary life and practice, we are prompted towards a deeper engagement of the seventh characteristic of Mercy, Catholic higher education proposed by Mary Sullivan, R.S.M.: "The strenuous effort to give good example, personally and corporately," and to raise up this characteristic as central to the work of Mercy, Catholic higher education today. Sullivan expands on the significance of this characteristic: "An educational institution cannot be faithful to the essential Mercy values and practices coming from Catherine McAuley without seriously attempting to be faithful to her primary pedagogical principle and method: her belief that 'the first means to render us most useful to others is to give good example.' "[26] The common characteristics of Mercy, Catholic higher education might not be found in a uniform list of shared cross-institutional values, but in the ways in which a constellation of Mercy values are made manifest in the day-in and day-out activities and commitments of each institution.

> For our Mercy, Catholic values to be common, they must be integrated into the practices of our institutions…

Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M. urges in CMHE's white paper on "Mercy Higher Education: Culture and Characteristics" that "the imprint of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy will endure into the future only if the prevailing values of the Mercy charism are written into the documents of the institution and the institution is committed to the alignment of Mercy values with demonstratable behaviors and policies and the

integration of these values into decision making."[27] For our Mercy, Catholic values to be common, they must be integrated into the practices of our institutions, their living traditions, pedagogy, community engagement, strategic planning processes, tenure and promotion processes, performance review processes, business plans, relationship and leadership structures. In the poem that we have come to know as "attend to one thing at a time, you've fifteen hours from six to nine,"[28] we are reminded by Catherine McAuley that it is in the locus of our daily commitments, large and small, that we live out our Mercy, Catholic values.

The Mission Officer's Council of the Conference for Mercy Higher Education has recently developed a renewed framework for the work of mission integration across Mercy, Catholic Higher Education. In it they have outlined eight core areas of mission integration: curricular development and integration; hiring, orientation and onboarding; ongoing formation for mission; space art, environment, and symbolism; inclusive worship/ritual and reflection; engagement in community and celebrations; sponsorship, CMHE and ecclesial relations; and Catholic Social Teaching/critical concerns in action. In outlining these core areas of mission integration, CMHE mission officers did not seek to formulate common core values across Mercy, Catholic higher education, but to advance common domains of practice through which our institutions might more fully live out the Mercy, Catholic values articulated on our campuses.

In an initiative led by Mary-Paula Cancienne, R.S.M. and Moya Dittmeier, the Conference for Mercy Higher Education has also developed a resource for member institutions. It affirms the "ordinary" characteristics of the Mercy Way across six focal areas: mission, collaboration, hospitality, compassion into action, holistic approaches, and call for vision.[30] This articulation of the Mercy Way further affirms that the work of Mercy, Catholic higher education in the 21st century may be authentically 'traditioned' by a growing diversity of colleagues through the ordinary, common life and practices of our institutions.◆

Endnotes

[1] Yves Congar, O.P., *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A.N. Woodrow (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1964): 102.

[2] Here I am calling upon theologian David Tracy's work on the relationship between tradition and truth in his notion of religious classics and cultural classics more generally. "There exists a qualitative difference between a classic and a period piece…a classic, by definition, will always be in need of further interpretation in view of its need for renewed application to a particular situation…a classic…has the power to transform the horizon of the interpreter and thereby disclose new meaning and experiential possibilities." [David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: New Directions, 1960): 115].

[3] For a thoughtful proposal on one method of engaging in the interpretation of the extrabiblical tradition, see John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): Following the spirit of the four medieval senses of scriptural interpretation (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical), Thiel proposes four senses for interpreting extrabiblical tradition: literal, development-in-continuity, dramatic development, and incipient development. "Multiple senses of tradition would presuppose a flexibility to its meaning that the very notion of tradition as it has developed in Catholic belief often seems to deny….although Catholic sensibilities resist…fundamentalism when encountering the Word in scripture they have often been inclined toward an ecclesiastical fundamentalism defined by the literalism of tradition" [12].

[4] Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., *The Revelatory Text, Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999): 76.

[5] Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 75.

[6] As Congar notes: "the Scriptures do not surrender their meaning by the bare text; they surrender it to a mind that is living and living in the conditions of the Covenant. This mind, or living subject is…. the Church, God's People, the Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit" [Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, 91]. Furthermore, Colleen Mallon notes that the

Roman Catholic Church, in order to be faithful to the dynamism of the tradition, must continue to cultivate the capacity to bridge the contexts of contemporary culture and the early church: "To acknowledge that there are no innocent traditions is to affirm equally that there are no innocent returns to the sources of the tradition. *Ressourcement* demands a critical community of witnesses and service that remains utterly catholic in its capacity to sustain the hard work of *dialogical communion*" [Colleen Mary Mallon, O.P, "Tradition and Continuity: Rethinking the Practice of Christian Remembering," *Horizons* 36, no. 1 (2009): 70-71].

[7] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology* (Notre Dame University of Notre Dame Press, 1981): 207. It is important to note that MacIntyre's framing of tradition as an extended argument does not seek to advance a purely rationalized understanding of tradition; rather, MacIntyre's use of argument here is meant to frame tradition as an extended, embodied practice: "The history of a practice in our time is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the large and longer history of the tradition through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us" [207].

[8] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 207.

[9] Terrence W. Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000): 45, 121.

[10] Yves Congar, O.P., "Renewal of the Spirit and Reform of the Institution," in *Ongoing Reform of the Church*, ed. Alois Muller and Norbert Greinacher (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972): 48.

[11] Catherine McAuley, "To Sister M. de Sales White," Bermondsey (20 December 1840), in Mary Sullivan, R.S.M., ed., *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818-1841* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2004): 332.

[12] Sullivan, *Correspondence*, p. 77.

[13] Companion 2, personal interview by author, 11 October 2011.

[14] "Mission and Values," Sisters of Mercy, available at: www.sistersofmercy.org/about-us/mission-values/ accessed 1 February 2020.

[15] "Mission Statement," Conference for Mercy Higher Education, available at mercyhighered.org/who-we-are/, accessed 20 February 2020.

[16] Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., Ph.D., "Mercy Higher Education: Culture and Characteristics," White Paper for Discussion, *Conference for Mercy Higher Education* (Winter 2004): 1-19.

[17] Mary Sullivan, R.S.M., Ph.D., "Catherine McAuley and the Characteristics of Mercy Higher Education," *The MAST Journal* 24, no. 2 (2006): 18-26.

[18] According to my research, Salve Regina University and the University of Detroit Mercy are the two CMHE schools that have not explicitly articulated core institutional values. University of Detroit Mercy has named four core characteristics, these being Mercy, Jesuit, Catholic, and Urban, but I understand these to be more institutional marks than core values.

[19] Sullivan, *Correspondence*, p.168.

[20] Stevens, "Mercy Higher Education: Culture and Characteristics," 7.

[21] Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context*, Vol. 1. *Religious Life in a New Millennium* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000): 288.

[22] Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Mary Mother of Divine Grace Compared to the Air we Breathe," *Poems* (1918), no 37.

[23] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,* promulgated by Paul VI, December 7, 1965 in *The Basic Sixteen Documents Vatican Council II, Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations: A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language*, ed., Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996): n. 38.

[24] Brenda Dolphin, R.S.M., "Is There Anything More Extraordinary than the Ordinary?" *Mercy E-News: The Online Newsletter of the Mercy International Association* (18 December 2015), available at: www.mercyworld.org/newsroom/brenda-dolphin-rsm-is-there-anything-more-extraordinary-than-the-ordinary-1381/, accessed 20 January 2020.

[25] Chapter 5: "Of the Perfection of Ordinary Actions," *Rule and Constitutions of the Religious Sisters of Mercy* by Mary Sullivan, R.S.M., ed., *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995): 300-302.

[26] Sullivan, "Catherine McAuley and the Characteristics of Mercy Higher Education," 25-26.

[27] Stevens, "Mercy Higher Education: Culture and Characteristics," p.7.

[28] Sullivan, *Correspondence*, p.170.

[29] "Mission Integration Core Areas," Conference for Mercy Higher Education, available at: mercyhighered.org/mission-integration-core-areas/, accessed 20 February 2020.

[30] "Some Common Focus Areas of a Catholic Mercy College / University: Ordinary Characteristics in the Fullest Sense," Conference for Mercy Higher Education, available at: mercyhighered.org/mercy-way/ , accessed 15 March 2020.

Appendix

Appendix: Mercy Core Institutional Values as Expressed by CMHE Institutions

Mercy Institution	*Mercy*	*Justice*	*Dignity / Respect*	*Service*	*Compassion/ Hospitality*	*Inclusive/ Diverse / Community*	*Integrity*	*Academic Excellence*	*Spirituality/ Religious Tradition*	*Lifelong Learning / Whole Person*
Carlow University[1]	Mercy			Service	Hospitality			Discovery	Sacredness of Creation	
College of Saint Mary[2]			Dignity	Service	Compassion	Inclusivity	Integrity	Excellence		
Georgian Court University[3]		Justice	Respect	Service	Compassion		Integrity			
Gwynedd Mercy University[4]		Social Justice in a Diverse World	Respect for the Dignity of Each Person	Service to Society			Integrity in Word and Deed			
Maria College[5]		Justice		Service	Hospitality	Diversity		Scholarship		
Mercy College of Health Sciences[6]					Compassion		Integrity	Excellence, Knowledge	Reverence	
Mercy College of Ohio[7]		Justice	Human Dignity	Service	Compassion			Excellence	Sacredness of Life	
Mercyhurst University[8]		Socially Merciful		Ambassadors of Service	Compassionately Hospitable	Globally Responsible		Intellectually Creative	Reflectively Aware	
Misericordia University[9]	Mercy	Justice		Service	Hospitality					
Mount Aloysius College[10]	Mercy	Justice		Service	Hospitality					
Mount Mercy University[11]		Justice	Pursuit of Truth and Dignity	Service	Hospitality			Commitment to Students	Gratitude	Lifelong Learning and Education of the Whole Person

Saint Joseph's College[12]		Justice	Respect		Compassion	Community	Integrity	Excellence	Faith	
Saint Xavier University[13]			Respect	Service	Compassion, Hospitality	Diversity	Integrity	Excellence		Learning for Life
Trocaire College[14]						Community		Academics	Heritage	Careers
University of Saint Joseph[15]			Respect	Compassionate Service	Hospitality	Multicultural / Diversity	Respect/ Integrity		Catholic Identity	Development of the Whole Person
Carlow University[16]	Mercy			Service	Hospitality			Discovery	Sacredness of Creation	
College of Saint Mary[17]			Dignity	Service	Compassion	Inclusivity	Integrity	Excellence		

[1] Vision, Mission, Values, & Philosophy Statement, *Carlow University*, available at www.carlow.edu/Vision_Mission_Values_Philosophy.aspx, accessed 15 January 2020 [2] Our Mission, *College of Saint Mary*, available at www.csm.edu/ours mission, accessed 15 January 2020.
[3] Mercy Core Values, *Georgian Court University*, available at: georgian.edu/mercys cores values/, accessed 15 January 2020.
[4] Core Values, *Gwynedd Mercy University*, available at www.gmercyu.edu/abouts gmercyu/mission, accessed 15 January 2020.
[5] Values, *Maria College*, available at mariacollege.edu/abouts maria/missions value, accessed 15 January 2020.
[6] Our Values, Mercy College of Health Sciences, available at: www.mchs.edu/Abouts Us/Visions Missions ands Values, accessed 15 January 2020.
[7] Values, Mercy College of Ohio, available at mercycollege.edu/about/missions visions values, accessed 15 January 2020.
[8] Our Core Values, *Mercyhurst University*, available at: www.mercyhurst.edu/about/mission, accessed 15 January 2020.
[9] Values Statement, *Misericordia University*, available at: www.misericordia.edu/page.cfm?p=565, accessed 15 January 2020.
[10] Core Values, *Mount Aloysius College*, available at: www.mtaloy.edu/about/missions values/, accessed 15 January 2020.
[11] Our Values, *Mount Mercy University*, available at: www.mtmercy.edu/about/, accessed 15 January 2020.
[12] Core Values, *Saint Joseph's College*, available at: www.sjcme.edu/abouts us/whys sjc/historys missions cores valuess identity/, accessed 15 January 2020.
[13] The University's Core Values, *Saint Xavier University*, available at: www.sxu.edu/about/values.asp, accessed 15 January 2020.
[14] Trocaire's Four Key Values, *Trocaire College*, available at: trocaire.edu/abouts trocaire/history/, accessed 15 January 2020.
[15] Core Values, University of Saint Joseph, available at: www.usj.edu/abouts us/usjs history/missions cores values/, accessed 15 January 2020.
[16] Vision, Mission, Values, & Philosophy Statement, *Carlow University*, available at www.carlow.edu/Vision_Mission_Values_Philosophy.aspx, accessed 15 January 2020.
[17] Our Mission, *College of Saint Mary*, available at www.csm.edu/ours mission, accessed 15 January 2020.

The most common values articulated across CMHE schools today are compassion and hospitality, with the value of service following as a close second.

Common Focus Areas for Exploring Characteristics and Values of a Mercy College or University

Mary-Paula Cancienne, R.S.M., Ph.D. and Moya Dittmeier, Ph.D.

Few would argue today that Catholic higher education is at a crossroads—and has been for several decades. The key questions at this crossroads are those of remaining true to the foundations for which Catholic colleges and universities were established while recognizing current shifts in religious thinking and practices. Those of us in Mercy higher education cherish the abiding value that the charism of the Sisters of Mercy brings to our work. Indeed, on every Mercy campus, there is vibrant attention to what we now identify as common focus areas for the mission of Mercy. These common focus areas invite articulation of "ordinary values" that express the spirit and the intent with which we expect our colleges and universities to operate—and to further discover their way into the heart of *Mercy* a way that engages the intellectual tradition of Catholicism within a broad framework of a Mercy Way.

Indeed, on every Mercy campus, there is vibrant attention to what we now identify as common focus areas for the mission of Mercy.

Each college and university names the values and virtues that they need to be about as Mercy, cognizant of the broader history, story, and charism as represented by these focus areas. The following article is a tool for reflection and dialogue. After the introduction, you may wish to read only one focus section at a time.

Catherine McAuley and a Mercy Way

The foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, saw, felt, and understood the suffering she witnessed around her, particularly as it weighed heavy upon poor women and children. She responded by using all of her talents and resources to alleviate social ills in ways that could make a difference then and in the years ahead. Gifted with creative ideas, a social and religiously informed conscience, and a generous heart, she knew the importance of practicality in responding to those needs. Never working alone, however, she invited others into those efforts, as in the building and opening of a house of Mercy on Baggot Street in Dublin, Ireland. Over the decades these efforts rippled forth around the world through the presence and actions of Mercy communities in the form of Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy.

Catherine's deep love of God and the Catholic Christian tradition, her devotedness to a corporate and private prayer life, her commitment to community, and her genuine desire for learning, helped to support and guide her in her vocation. As such, she humbly modeled for those around her a Mercy way of life which included empowering and trusting others to go forth and do likewise; that is, respond to needs of your time and place with your gifts and talents in a way that speaks of the mercy of God.

Reflection upon the history of Mercy and its charism leads us to realize that a *Mercy Way* is flexible, always open to values and virtues that respond to the needs of the time in a particular place. As such, all are called to live discerningly, naming and describing reality honestly, justly, and mercifully. Key to a *Mercy Way,* in terms of education, are reflection upon actual experiences, along with research and analysis, and the practice of modeling. While certain values, virtues, and approaches are not exclusive to Mercy, the following are some of the common and challenging characteristics that we often recognize

across the Mercy tradition and which seem to be alive today in Mercy Higher Education and which we aim to model in all that we do.

A *Mercy Way* Characterized by these focus areas:

1. A Focus on MISSION. Its primary mission is education excellence and it claims this mission and its identity as a Catholic Mercy institution of higher education, preparing students for their future. It understands Catholicism as a living sacramental tradition, that is to say, it encourages us to see deeply into reality with wonder and meaning, directing us toward hope in the future. At its best, it offers to society a rich lens through which to engage life and interpret experiences with its Catholic Intellectual Tradition, Catholic Social Teaching, Catholic humanism, and its wealth of spiritualities, which hold to a Creator who is good and merciful, a transcendent and immanent reality. As a sponsored work of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and through the Conference for Mercy Higher Education, it embraces the charism of the Sisters of Mercy with special attention to Mercy Critical Concerns. This relationship is described, ritualized, and effected through a Covenant. This spirit of Mercy inspires the academic community's commitment to excellence in teaching, research, and service. Leadership holds as central a clear and direct expression of its mission, and sets hiring, tenure and advancement practices that align with this mission. Leadership is responsible to see that all members of the campus community are steeped in mission, that they understand how it bears upon their particular duties, and that they take ownership for promoting its mission and identity. Leadership, in collaboration with CMHE, attends vigorously to mission orientation and ongoing mission development for its board members, administration, faculty, staff, students, and alumni, and guarantees that courses, programs, and materials in its curricula and extracurricular activities are shaped in light of mission such that mission pervades and animates its culture and identity.

2. A Focus on COLLABORATION. A *Mercy Way* values and seeks to exercise the delicate art of collaboration, never perfectly, but strives always to improve. Through this practice and a valuing and commitment to diversity, creativity and decision-making are enhanced, participation invites ownership and identity as a member of the college/university community, and the community itself grows in its vitality through its attentiveness to the quality of its relationships.

It is an environment that builds bridges across differences through higher education, using its tools of research, study, dialogue, and experiential learning, attentive to practice respectful engagement.

3. A Focus on HOSPITALITY. A *Mercy Way* practices hospitality, which enlivens the community and welcomes all people. The gospel stories of Jesus, as well as the life of Mercy foundress, Catherine McAuley, inspire the school community to be actively hospitable, with a simple sense of lively joy. Appreciative of western liberal arts and a pluralistic, global environment, there is an openness to explore ideas both ancient and new, with an eye to intersectionality and interculturality. The community practices hospitality in the spirit of Mercy and works to further develop practices of hospitality in contemporary situations, such that human dignity is mutually recognized in every person. It is an environment that builds bridges across differences through higher education, using its tools of research, study, dialogue, and experiential learning, attentive to practice respectful

engagement. Questions, challenges, and conflicts are not dismissed. The pursuit of truth and knowledge is careful and methodical, and discerned in the light of mercy.

4. A Focus on COMPASSION into ACTION. A *Mercy Way* supports academic rigor informed by a contemplative mind and heart, moving the value and virtue of compassion into action through its teaching, research and service. Contemporary questions of ethics and justice, particularly those issues designated as Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy, while attentive to justice issues that are particular to its own location, infuse this work. Emphasis on relationality is paramount. Courses that train students to study, think, appreciate and question, and argue in the area of ethics, followed by courses in applied ethics in major disciplines are valued and supported. It sets as its goal to shape moral and creative leaders for tomorrow. Recalling Catherine McAuley's commitment to marginalized women, it works diligently to provide access to advanced education, with supports necessary for success, to women and others who are disadvantaged. Regarding the school's management practices and policies, these are clearly stated and strive for fairness. Compensation and benefits are equitable and just, and each person is appreciated for their contribution to the common project.

5. A Focus on HOLISTIC Approaches. A *Mercy Way*, within the context of the Catholic tradition, attends to the whole person in the context of the human community and the wider community of Earth. A holistic approach to education aims for healthy growth and development of mind, body, emotions, spirit, and community. Particular to the spiritual dimension, as a Catholic Mercy academic institution, its environment and its ceremonies present symbols and rituals that speak to the depth of these religious treasures in ways that are creative and inviting of all people, people of other traditions, those who are atheist, agnostic, or with no religious tradition. As a campus community, efforts are made to provide space for non-Christian religious gatherings and to further encourage inter-religious understanding, appreciation, and events. The campus community takes ownership of maintaining the beauty and upkeep of its properties. It creates ways to enhance an atmosphere of invitation and learning. It operates with attention to the needs of the planet and the local eco-system.

A *Mercy Way* graduates students who understand that the purpose of their education is to make a difference in their families and communities.

6. A Call for VISION. A *Mercy Way* graduates students who understand that the purpose of their education is to make a difference in their families and communities. In the best tradition of Catholic, this vision prompts students today to work for a more compassionate and fuller tomorrow in service of the common good. A *Mercy Way* encourages faculty and staff to network within CMHE in order to deepen their institution's Mercy identity, and to share their educational resources across the network. A *Mercy Way* plans prudently and creatively today, with vision for the future, with an eye on the next great need. With integrity of purpose, word, and deed it holds itself to the highest standards and consciously works to correct its own misdeeds, maintaining its reputation for offering a quality education with a conscience. This intellectual community, animated by the spirit of Catherine McAuley, dedicates itself through academic study and service to express what it means to educate in the spirit and charism of Mercy. ◆

Discussion Questions

As you read the following authors, consider these questions for your reflection and dialogue. Questions are in the order of how the articles are presented.

Baker

1. The tradition of hospitality is common to many traditions, secular and religious. Does the world in which we live need Mercy to go more deeply into this aspect of our tradition? If so, how might we do this as a system of higher education, and as individual entities? Policies? Practices? Culture? And in a 21st century world?

2. In Baker's first and second paragraph, he claims that what the charism of Mercy embodies in its institutions of higher learning concerns engagement with the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. He then proceeds to name four examples that get "embodied" in Mercy. Is it necessary or helpful to actually name and draw connections to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition?

3. Facts matter. Awe matters. How can we better integrate attentiveness to each of these, along with a healthy sense of humility in light of both?

Cancienne

1. How would you describe the "landscape" today regarding people's relationship with religion, spirituality (lived experience)? Where are we deriving our theological/philosophical/spiritual insights, ideas, and practices? What are we reading, viewing, sharing? Have politics and events impacted our worldview? How so?

2. Cancienne suggests a Tent of Learning as a metaphor for our sponsored works of higher education. Describe your experience of our campuses. How might your experience and insights relate to a Tent of Learning?

3. What is the treasure that Catholic holds? What is the treasure that Mercy holds? How are these embedded in our educational experiences?

4. How could we focus our educational offerings such that the best of Catholic and Mercy deepens this experience? (Not in a proselytizing way, but with depth of thought in the 21st century.)

Muldoon

1. How might viewing a relationship through the lens of "covenant," instead of a "contract" lens, shift how you live that relationship? Consider as a professor/employer during difficult times.

2. What are the ongoing implications for professors and students, students and students, board members and presidents, presidents and faculty, staff in terms of a covenantal lens?

3. What are the implications and invitations in terms of relationships and collaboration among our member colleges and universities? Now and going into the future?

Davis

1. In light of the Davis article, how would you describe Mercy higher education's "precious mandate"?

2. What do you think Davis means by "transformation"? Can you offer a synonym for a process that calls you to your next step in terms of living more authentically the call to be a human person, now, and within the broader human and non-human community?

3. In your environment, how do you, in your role, enable "transformation" in those around you? What exactly does this look like on an ongoing basis? How does your institution corporately do so in regard to its own community?

4. In light of the Davis and Muldoon articles, is it possible to view your/our relationship with Earth through a "covenantal" lens?

Hennessy

1. Hennessy considers what has been lost when she writes: "The recovery of character education in higher education points to the consequences of minimizing moral education in the curriculum: a loss of the ability to think deeply and critically about social and personal issues."
Would you agree or disagree? Explain with examples.

2. Hennessy writes: "Simply put: a pedagogy of transformation is an interdisciplinary project that takes place across the curriculum. Not simply: encouraging faculty across the disciplines to assume this task of moral education in their own courses." [In fact, she ops for curricular and co-curricular collaboration.] What about her "Not simply" comment?

3. Hennessy claims: "Educating character involves sustained exposure to moral concepts and the ongoing development of one's moral perspective, and critical moral reasoning-needs that are best met through an integrated program of character education that supports the moral education across the disciplines and over the course of the four years." If you agree with Hennessey, how can we move more consciously toward a sustained and integrated focus? What is the goal?

Reed-Bouley & Mattson

1. Where and how have you experienced what you consider to be degrading and beyond-extreme political, social commentary or opinions? What are the silent dangers of "Trumpism," even into the future? How do we contribute to this?

2. How can a Mercy sponsored institution better model learning and dialogue when our culture can be dismissive of reading, research, and informed thoughtful exchange?

3. What would three particular classes in your discipline look like, online or in person, if they focused on the following: human dignity; common good; and a fundamental option for the poor?

Vento

1. Why be of "service"? What does it mean to be a "servant"? In ancient times a servant was typically a slave of some description. How do we acknowledge this, yet persevere to understand the power and depth of this call? (See Matthew 23:1-12)

2. What would it mean to grow not just in terms of acts of service (service hours), but as a person, and as a learning community?

3. How can we be attentive to ways in which we objectify people and nature? What are some red flags that can alert us to objectification?

Ladrigan-Whelpley

1. What do you experience on our Mercy campuses/online that makes us Mercy and that you absolutely hope we continue to foster, in ever deepening ways?

2. During "these times," what do you think we all need to be mindful of in terms of virtues and values as Mercy?

3. Attentive to our similarities and differences, how do you describe what makes us Mercy?

Cancienne & Dittmeier

1. Recognizing the creative tension of inclusiveness and definition, this short document synthesizes and describes six broad Focus Areas from our Mercy charism, Mercy history, stories, writings, mission statements, shared insights, and particular values and virtues aspired to across our institutions. It is meant to be used as a reflective tool and then for dialogue, giving wide berth, as well as concentration. Reading perhaps only one section at a time, ask questions. -- In light of this, which Focus Area do you think you and your institution continue to be about in a way that further fosters knowledge and maturity as a Mercy person/institution. Name and describe particular virtues and values. Explain.

2. Which Focus Area seems most challenging at this time, and going forward?

3. What do you hope Mercy and Mercy Higher Education will look like in twenty years?

Contributors

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Mary-Paula Cancienne, R.S.M., Ph.D. (Conference of Mercy Higher Education) is a Sister of Mercy. She presently serves the Conference for Mercy Higher Education as its Associate Director for Mission Support and Integration. She received her Ph.D. from Duquesne University. Previous to her position with CMHE she was chair of the Religious Studies, Theology, and Philosophy Department at Georgian Court University. Her areas of research and study include Mercy spirituality in today's pluralism, contemporary environmental, social, and political challenges, and theological aesthetics in dialogue with how we understand our experiences and vision the future. Along with theology, Mary-Paula has advanced degrees in art, psychology, and spirituality, and is a trained spiritual director and supervisor. Her practice includes *writing* contemporary icons.

Moya K. Dittmeier, Ed.D. (Conference of Mercy Higher Education) has focused on Catholic education at secondary and college levels throughout her career. Moya has served as Executive Director of the Conference for Mercy Higher Education for twelve years. Working with an eleven-member Board and the Mercy Presidents Council, she develops programs, policies, and practices and builds relationships to sustain and enhance the Catholic identity and Mercy ethos of the 17 U.S. colleges and universities founded by the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Moya's earlier work in education includes leadership as Vice President for Planning at Holy Family University (Pennsylvania) and teaching positions in literature, rhetoric and composition at both the secondary and college levels.

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Theresa Ladrigan-Whelpley, Ph.D. (Salve Regina) serves as Vice President for Mission Integration at Salve Regina University in Rhode Island, and currently chairs the Mission Officers Council of the Conference for Mercy Higher Education. She previously served for twelve years at Santa Clara University in California as Director of the Bannan Institute in the Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education and co-chaired the Mission and Identity Conference of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. Ladrigan-Whelpley received her Ph.D. in Christian spirituality from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, her M.Div. from Candler School of Theology at Emory University, and B.S.H. in biology, with honors from Villanova University.

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