

Some Common Characteristics of a Catholic Mercy College / University -- Ordinary Characteristics in the Fullest Sense

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* includes and is not limited to:

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.

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. An 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 in terms of the beauty and upkeep of its properties, creates ways to enhance its inviting, learning atmosphere, and operates attentive to the needs of the planet and the local eco-system ever mindful that it is a teaching institution.

6. A Call for VISION – A *Mercy Way* sends forth students who have as their purpose to make a difference in their families and communities having achieved a Mercy education. In the best tradition of Catholic, it works collaboratively today in hope of a more compassionate and fuller tomorrow in service of the common good. It takes increasing advantage of opportunities to network within CMHE in order to deepen Mercy identity, and to share and optimize educational experiences. It plans prudently and creatively today, with vision for the future, with an eye on the next great need. With utmost integrity of purpose, word, and deed it holds itself to the highest standards and consciously works to correct its own misdeeds, ultimately increasing its reputation for quality education with a conscience. As an intellectual community that is animated by the spirit of Mercy, it accepts the call and responsibility to contribute to the circle of Mercy, a local and global presence, through academic study, critique, ongoing development, and expression of the meaning and lived experience of the spirit and charism of Mercy.