

***Sponsorship, the Sisters of Mercy, and Mercy Higher Education  
Presentation to the Mercy Presidents Council, Saturday, January 28, 2017  
Washington, DC***

In her keynote for the CMHE Mission Leadership program held in Baltimore in October 2016, Sister Pat McDemott, President of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, offered an overview of sponsorship and a rationale for why the Sisters of Mercy continue their sponsored ministries in Catholic higher education. Five key quotes are below. (For the full text and context, please see “CMHE Presentation—October 2, 2016.”)

**Quote #1:**

***“When Catherine McAuley opened the first House of Mercy in Dublin in 1827, she was concerned about helping women in need...she had no idea that her effort would extend over decades and develop into future institutions and systems of institutions...similarly, when women religious began institutions in this country for education, health care and social services, they were focused on responding to need.”***

**Development of Mercy Higher Education, 1895-present**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>First Class Began</b>	<b>Year of Charter</b>	<b>Status</b>
Mt. St. Agnes	Baltimore, MD	1895	1890	Merged (LU)
Georgian Court	Lakewood, NJ	1908	1905	UG, G
St. Joseph's	Standish, ME	1912	1915	UG, G
St. Xavier	Chicago, IL	1915	1847	UG, G
College of St. Mary	Omaha, NE	1923	1888	UG, G
Misericordia	Dallas, PA	1924	1924	UG, G
Trinity	Burlington, VT	1925	1925	Closed
Mercyhurst	Erie, PA	1926	1928	UG, G
Mt. Mercy	Cedar Rapids, IA	1928	1931	UG, G
Carlow	Pittsburgh, PA	1929	1933	UG, G
St. Joseph	West Hartford, CT	1932	1925	UG, G
Mt. St. Mary	Hookset, NH	1934	1934	Closed
Sacred Heart	Belmont, NC	1934	1904	Closed
Edgecliff	Cincinnati, OH	1935	1925	Closed
Mt. Aloysius	Cresson, PA	1939	1939	UG, G
Mercy College	Detroit, MI	1941	1941	Merged (UD)
Salve Regina	Newport, RI	1947	1934	UG, G
Gwynedd Mercy	Gwynedd Valley, PA	1948	1948	UG, G
Mercy College	Dobbs Ferry, NY	1950	1952	Relinquished
Russell College	Burlingame, CA	1950s	1950s	Closed
McAuley Junior College	Rochester, NY	1950s	1950s	Closed
Mercy Junior Col.	St. Louis, MO	1950s	1950s	Closed
Our Lady of Mercy	Auburn, CA	1950s	1950s	Closed
Trocaire	Buffalo, NY	1958	1958	UG
Maria	Albany, NY	1959	1958	UG
Castle College	Windham, NH	1963	1963	Closed
Marian Court	Swampscott, MA	1964	1981	Closed
Mercy College of Ohio	Toledo, OH	1993	1995	UG

## Sponsorship and the Sisters of Mercy

Mercy College of Health Sciences	Des Moines, IA	1899 1995 accredited	1899	UG
----------------------------------	----------------	-------------------------	------	----

-- source: Jeremy Daigler RSM, *Through the Windows: A History of the Work of Higher Education among the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas*, University of Scranton Press, 2001. (Updates to Daigler's research are noted in blue.)

**1955:** Sigma Phi Sigma established—a national honor society for students in Mercy higher education (established through the work of Mary Mercy Gellenbeck RSM, Detroit)

### Quote #2:

***"In the 1960s, substantial change occurred from various perspectives...women religious were invited to renew their life by returning to their fundamental documents and renewing their specific charism to be more responsive to the world.... Another important emphasis in these Church documents (those of Vatican II) was the way we understood ourselves as a church—the people of God. In this respect, the role of laypersons was validated and encouraged in a church that had been for centuries totally priest and bishop-centered..."***

**1973:** Gathering of 28 presidents, deans and faculty to formalize an educational structure within Mercy higher education—became an incubator for what became known as "The Mercy Higher Education Colloquium" (MHEC). Three goals:

*"To foster an awareness of our commitment to higher education through engaging in honest, critical and supportive dialogue; to evaluate the quality of our Christian presence in higher education in light of the Mercy Covenant; and to facilitate sharing of our resources in higher education."*

--Josetta Butler RSM, 1980 meeting

**1979:** Presidents began meeting on a regular basis in concert with the MHEC; The MHEC Leadership Award was established (1979-2000)

**1981:** "Council of Presidents" became "The Association of Mercy Colleges"

**1986:** The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology (MAST) was established

**1991:** The Frances Warde Medal in Mercy Higher Education was created (awarded to a Mercy college or university whose programs, policies or practices incorporate into the life of the institution the spirit and values of the Sisters of Mercy (1994-present))

### Quote #3:

***"Related conversations were happening about the governance of Catholic institutions in the late 1980s and the word sponsorship became the familiar way to express the relationship of a work of mercy...a ministry...and institution with its founders on behalf of the Catholic Church."***

***At the heart of the word, sponsorship is the etymology of the word sponsor: to sponsor is a pledge, a commitment, an assurance. These two dynamics—assuring the Catholic identity of the ministry and assuring responsibility for the future viability of each particular institution have been the subject***

***matter of many a conference, gathering and meeting of the last 25 years among Sisters of Mercy and our lay colleagues.”***

**1991:** Founding of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

**Quote #4:**

***“Sisters of Mercy, in all of our ministries that are identified “Catholic,” need to be deliberate about how we hold responsibility for the mission and Catholic identity of each of our colleges and universities. We do this in two ways: First, we have what we call “reserved powers”—specific actions that we reserve to ourselves for decision making and setting direction.***

***The second way we hold responsibility for the mission and Catholic identity of our colleges and universities is facilitated through the work of the Conference for Mercy Higher Education. CMHE acts on our behalf and, from our perspective, is the public and consistent face of the Sisters of Mercy to our universities and colleges.”***

**2002:** Conference for Mercy Higher Education established (*Bylaws* approved in 2004). Institutions affiliated with the Conference in the same ways in which they had interacted with their local communities, resulting in varied reserved powers and corresponding “Tier One” and “Tier Two” levels of membership in CMHE. The Canonical Sponsors Council, comprised of one Sister of Mercy from each geographic region, formed the second tier of the CMHE Board and reserved certain final approvals as their responsibility, including the appointment of presidents and approval of major borrowing.

**2014:** To streamline the work of CMHE, the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy has delegated the sponsorship function and related responsibilities originally reserved to the Canonical Sponsors Council to the CMHE Board (11 members). The CMHE Board’s primary goals are to ascertain the strength of the Catholic identity and Mercy mission at each institution in addition to acting on the reserved powers as needed and required. The Board meets annually with the Presidents Council and the Executive Director provides reports as requested or required by the Institute Leadership Team. Two members of the Mercy Presidents Council serve as *ex officio* CMHE Board members.

**2014:** **Journey of Oneness** announced—a movement to a single leadership team for the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy. (“union and charity”)

**2016:** The CMHE Board approves a new strategic plan that focuses on clarifying issues related to sponsorship and the obligations that the Sisters of Mercy have with respect to their role as on-going religious sponsors of Mercy colleges and universities.

Three strategic planning task forces were identified: the Accountability, the Mission, and the Financial Responsibility task forces; the work of each task force was amplified and gained greater urgency as issues related to the precipitous closing of Marian Court College surfaced. The Accountability Task Force focused on the elements of sponsorship

and the development of a covenant agreement between Mercy colleges and universities and the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas via CMHE.

**Quote #5:**

***“As a leadership team, we talk about our responsibility for the mission and Catholic identity of our colleges and universities; we are very clear and thoughtful that we sponsor these particular works of mercy in the name of our Church, on behalf of our Church...the relationship of the Sisters of Mercy is not just about us and the partnership we have with you, our trusted colleagues. This relationship exists in a larger context which includes our responsibility to the Church for these works of mercy, our colleges and universities.”***

**2017:** Presentation of the elements of a covenant agreement to the Presidents Council at the annual Mercy Presidents Council meeting in Washington, DC

“As Sisters of Mercy we sponsor institutions  
To address our enduring concerns  
And to witness to Christ’s mission.  
Within these institutions we,  
Together with our co-workers,  
And those we serve,  
Endeavor to model mercy and justice  
And to promote systemic change  
According to these ideals.”

--*Constitutions 5*

**2018:** Presentation offered by Sister Marie Michele Donnelly, RSM and subsequent discussion about the Theology and Purpose of Covenant at the Mercy Leadership Program in Baltimore, MD

**2018-20:** Consultations and drafting of the Covenants with the approved changes in the language of the institutions’ bylaws to reflect changes. CMHE’s bylaws were revised in June 2019 also to reflect certain clarifications and changes:  
Final drafts and bylaws language vetted and approved by the Institute Leadership, the CMHE Board of Directors and the Presidents Council in fall 2019 and early winter 2020.

**2021:** Planned signing of the Covenant by the Presidents, Board Chairs, Institute Leadership, and CMHE to take place in Washington, DC in February 2021.

--**Dr. Moya K. Dittmeier**  
**CMHE Executive Director**  
**January 28, 2017**  
**Updated April 2020**

### **Common Acronyms referenced in the work and ministries of the Sisters of Mercy**

CICLSAL:	Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life/ Societies of Apostolic Life
CLT:	Community Leadership Team. Leadership team of one of the six Communities
CMHE:	Conference for Mercy Higher Education
IJT:	Institute Justice Team. Justice team at the Institute Office that is central to the XJT, the extended Justice Team comprised of justice coordinators from the six local communities.
ILC:	Institute Leadership Conference. Group comprised of the Institute Leadership Team and the (former) Community Leadership Teams
ILT:	Institute Leadership Team. The five leaders of the Institute
MESA:	Mercy Education System of the Americas. Newly formed organization that provides a sponsorship structure for Mercy elementary and secondary education
MIA:	Mercy International Association
MIC:	Mercy International Centre, Baggot Street, Dublin
MIS:	Mercy Investment Services
RSM:	Religious Sister of Mercy
SMA:	Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
USCCB:	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Official organization of Catholic bishops in the United States

### **Definitions**

**Canonical:** According to or ordered by canon law (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2006).

**Sponsorship:** The canonical responsibility the sponsor has for the ministry, which includes both 'ecclesiastical property' and the faithful oversight and administration of the works....sponsorship generally, refers to the formal, canonical responsibility; sponsoring refers to the evolving application and model development. Grant & Vandenberg, *Partners in the Between Time* (2004), 4-5.

**Sponsor:** Party who is responsible in the eyes of the Church for the works...most commonly the Public Juridic Person in canon law. (Grant & Vandenberg, 4.)

**Public Juridic Person:** Canonical equivalent to a civil corporation.