



## Mercy Way

for these times...  
and the future

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**Covenant 2022**

**CONFERENCE *for* MERCY  
HIGHER EDUCATION**

# Covenant

# Mercy Higher Education Covenant

*Agreed to by [Name of College/University], the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and the Conference for Mercy Higher Education.*

## **Preamble**

The *Constitutions* of the Sisters of Mercy regarding institutional sponsorship contextualize the spirit of this Covenant:

"As Sisters of Mercy we sponsor institutions  
to address our enduring concerns  
and to witness to Christ's mission.  
Within these institutions,  
we, together with our co-workers and those we serve,  
endeavor to model mercy and justice  
and to promote systemic change  
according to these ideals."

—Constitutions 5

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas have promised to carry out their mission and witness to Christ's mission in their sponsored colleges and universities. The elected leaders of these treasured institutions join with the Sisters in that mission, which is of immense value to the Sisters of Mercy and to the Church. A mutual recognition of that value and an ownership of that mission are the foundations of a covenant relationship.

*Ex corde Ecclesiae, an apostolic constitution on Catholic Higher Education issued by Saint John Paul II, notes the following essential characteristics of the Catholic university:*

*Since the objective of a Catholic University is to assure in an institutional manner a Christian presence in the university world confronting the great problems of society and culture, every Catholic University, as Catholic, must have the following essential characteristics:*

- 1. a Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such;*
- 2. a continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research;*

3. *fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the Church;*
4. *an institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life.*

—*Ex corde Ecclesiae*, Part One: Identity and Mission

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. It is in this spirit of shared commitment that this Covenant is made. A covenant describes the intentions, aspirations and assurances that enliven and inform the relationship between the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and the Mercy colleges and universities, with the Conference for Mercy Higher Education acting on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy.

It is in this same spirit of dedication to the enduring concerns and to Christ's mission of education that the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas enter into a formal statement of support, engagement and accountability (hereafter the "Covenant") with each Mercy college/university. This Covenant is created in concert with the Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE) and the colleges and universities in CMHE to sustain this covenantal partnership and to build on a relationship of mutual respect and collaboration between the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and the institutions they have founded, staffed, and continue to support and sponsor.

This Covenant reflects a desire to strengthen a shared vision and mission of [Name of College/University] as an institution standing firmly in the spirit and ethos of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and the rich heritage of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. A Mercy-sponsored college/university has the obligation to keep the Mercy heritage and Catholic identity of the institution robust and credible among conflicting worldviews, and to engage with peer CMHE institutions on the means to do so.

While this Covenant seeks to clarify the relationship between the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and [Name of College/University] as a Catholic institution of higher education, it is also a covenant of mutual trust and understanding among the member institutions. This Covenant calls forth a spirit of willingness to participate in collaborative and creative activities across the network of Mercy colleges and universities, all in service to a further deepening of the Mercy mission in American Catholic higher education.

## **Mutual Commitment**

This Covenant names mutual accountabilities for the Conference for Mercy Higher Education, acting on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, for the [College/University] Board of Trustees, particularly the Chair of the Board, and for the [College/University] President; this Covenant defines each role in terms of responsibilities and functions of [Name of College/University].

A renewal of this Covenant by the President of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, by the Chair of the [College/University] Board, by the President of [College/University], and by the Executive Director and the Chair of the Board of the Conference for Mercy Higher Education will occur in concert with the *Mission Self-study and Peer Review* conducted by CMHE and the periodic follow-up to that decennial review. The intent of this renewal is to strengthen mutual bonds, promote communication, and to enable a sustainable future for the Mercy mission within Catholic higher education. We – each and all– commit to a process of reflection, informed discernment and values-driven decision-making.

## **Mutual Accountabilities to Sustain the Commitment**

As a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, and charged with ensuring the on-going attention to and further development of the Catholic and Mercy identity of its institutions, the **Conference for Mercy Higher Education** will:

- ❖ Support the on-going conversation about the role of the Mercy mission and critical concerns of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas in the educational mission of the institution via a resource-rich website, annual meetings, specific programs, cohort gatherings, and other forms of communication.
- ❖ Develop, foster and support, in concert with the mission officers, board orientation and formation multi-year programs that focus on the institution's educational mission through the lens of Mercy in higher education.
- ❖ Develop a program for the formation of lay persons for future positions on the institutional board.
- ❖ Ensure regular communications via biennial conversations with the Board Chairs and Presidents of the member institutions relative to issues of Catholic identity and the Mercy mission in higher education. The recommendations of the *Mission Self-study* and the *Visiting Team's Report* will inform these discussions.
- ❖ Schedule the institutional *Mission Self-study and Peer Team Review* on an eight to ten-year basis and schedule the five-year follow-up report following the full mission peer review.

- ❖ Participate in significant moments in the life of the colleges/universities, namely, presidential inaugurations, celebrations of Mercy Heritage, celebrations of Mercy Day/Week.
- ❖ Identify a CMHE representative to serve in the presidential search process for each institution.
- ❖ Design with the Institute Leadership Team a “missioning” of each president-elect as s/he begins a leadership role in the Mercy higher education.

As the sponsored institution desires to continue its Catholic identity in the Mercy tradition, the **[College/University] Board** will:

- ❖ Integrate the Catholic identity and distinct Mercy mission of the institution within Board discussions and decision-making.
- ❖ Perform the fiduciary responsibilities entrusted to the institutional board.
- ❖ Recruit, hire, evaluate and support a president who understands and actively supports the university mission as a distinct and separately incorporated entity, but also one that shares in the mission of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.
- ❖ Ensure through the work of the appropriate board committees that the process of recruitment, election, orientation and ongoing education of trustees promotes understanding and respect for the religious identity and mission of the institution and the authority and responsibility that the Sisters of Mercy have to ensure this identity.
- ❖ Elect a board chair who is or who is willing to become deeply grounded in the mission and identity of [Name of College/University].
- ❖ Ensure the institution’s participation in the Mission Self-study and Peer Team Visit and receive the CMHE Visiting Team Report on the agreed-upon cycle of institutional reviews.
- ❖ Participate in on-going programs designed by CMHE and the institutional mission officer to educate the Board on issues related to the Catholic, Mercy identity of the institution.

As the appointed leader of the sponsored ministry, the **[College/University] President** will:

- ❖ Affirm the Catholic, Mercy identity and mission of the institution as a key priority, in both word and deeds.
- ❖ Refer to the *CMHE Statement on the Catholic Identity and Mercy Mission* of member institutions as well as *Ex corde Ecclesiae* when developing new plans, programs, and policies.
- ❖ Provide opportunities for the campus community—students, faculty, staff and board members—to develop an awareness of the Mercy tradition and the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy. These opportunities are often expressed through celebrations of Mercy Day, through prayer and service opportunities as well as in on-boarding and on-going orientations.
- ❖ Promote and encourage the integration of mission and identity, as appropriate, in the institution’s curriculum, programs, policies and practices through the allocation of appropriate resources.
- ❖ Ensure opportunities on campus for worship, spiritual reflection and a display of religious symbols that reflect the institution’s Catholic, Mercy identity and encourage a culture of faith for all.
- ❖ Maintain communication with the Conference for Mercy Higher Education related to significant issues of Catholic identity and the Mercy mission. CMHE will request a biennial communication and follow-up in reference to the Mission Review findings and recommendations.
- ❖ Foster the relationship between the College/University and local Church authorities, especially with the local ordinary, by keeping these authorities informed about speakers, events, and key moments in the institution’s academic and spiritual life.
- ❖ Participate as an active member of the Conference for Mercy Higher Education, particularly through the Mercy Presidents Council.

## **Implementation**

1. The [College/University] Board Chair, the [College/University] President and the CMHE Executive Director will convey the significance of this Covenant to their respective members at their annual board meetings.
2. The President of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (or her designate), the Board Chair of [College/University], the President of [College/University], the Executive Director for CMHE and the Chair of the CMHE Board will meet biennially to discuss this Covenant and to share perspectives on the sponsorship relationship and [College/University]'s Catholic identity and Mercy mission. This meeting may take place in person, at the biennial leadership program, or by some other electronic means of communication and discussion.
3. The Covenant will be signed as new presidents assume their leadership roles and as the Mission Peer Reviews and follow-up reports are presented and discussed between the Institution and the CMHE Board of Directors.
4. Should additional conversations concerning the depth and breadth of the Catholic identity and Mercy mission at [Name of College/University] be required at any time, the Executive Director will notify the College/University President and Board Chair in writing as to the specific concern(s) that indicate a failure to meet the accountabilities of the Covenant and request a conversation and, if necessary, subsequent follow-up report(s) to be shared with the CMHE Board of Directors and the Institute Leadership Team. If these subsequent conversations and reports do not satisfy all parties, the unresolved issue(s) will be brought before the Institute Leadership Team, with a recommendation for specific action to be taken by the Institute Leadership Team. All efforts will be made to continue the institution as a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Mercy, but it is recognized that on-going sponsorship in Mercy requires attention to and the fulfillment of the accountabilities named in this Covenant.
5. Additional processes and reference materials are provided in the Supporting Documents below.



## **Covenant Signature Page**

Having read the above Covenant between [College/University] and the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, to be facilitated by the Conference for Mercy Higher Education, we, the signers below, affirm the importance of the Sisters of Mercy in exerting influence in their sponsored ministries of higher education, consistent with their call and commitment. We further affirm that the leaders of our Mercy colleges and universities are convinced and fully supportive of the value of the institution's Catholic, Mercy identity. These leaders are indeed partners in the Mercy charism in higher education. Together, we affirm this Covenant as a spiritual and moral guide to deepen a critical relationship that has endured over decades.

### **[College/University] Leaders:**

\_\_\_\_\_

President

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Board Chair

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

### **Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas:**

\_\_\_\_\_

President

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

### **Conference for Mercy Higher Education:**

\_\_\_\_\_

Executive Director

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Board Chair

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## Supporting Documents

“Conference for Mercy Higher Education: Mission Integration Core Areas” (Fall 2018):  
Printed by the Graphic Arts Department of the College of Saint Mary, Omaha, NE.  
<http://mercyhighered.org/mission-integration-core-areas/>

*CMHE Statement on the Catholic Identity and Mercy Mission of Its Colleges and Universities.* Approved April 2010. <http://mercyhighered.org/our-mission/>

Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.  
<https://www.sistersofmercy.org/files/documents/resources/Justice/CriticalConcerns-1Pger-FINAL.pdf>

“Ex corde Ecclesiae—Essential Characteristics of a Catholic University”  
[http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apc\\_15081990\\_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html)

The Mission Integration Core Areas in Mercy Colleges and Universities:  
<http://mercyhighered.org/mission-integration-core-areas/>

MK Dittmeier, “Sponsorship, the Sisters of Mercy and Mercy Higher Education,” January 28, 2017, Washington, DC.  
[https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.138/dpk.3b7.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Covenant\\_SupportingDoc\\_MDittmier\\_Sponsorship\\_Sisters-of-Mercy\\_Mercy-Higher-Ed\\_-2017-copy.pdf](https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.138/dpk.3b7.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Covenant_SupportingDoc_MDittmier_Sponsorship_Sisters-of-Mercy_Mercy-Higher-Ed_-2017-copy.pdf)

“Some Characteristics of Mercy Higher Education.” Fall 2019, Conference for Mercy Higher Education. <https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.138/dpk.3b7.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Gen-Characteristics-Mercy-CU-2.8.pdf>

“The CMHE Mission Self-study and Peer Review” Cycle Two (drafted December 2020).  
<https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.138/dpk.3b7.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2nd-Self-study-Peer-Review-Process-Dec-2020.pdf>

“The Colleges and Universities in the Conference for Mercy Higher Education: A Map,” JM Dittmeier, October 2018. <http://mercyhighered.org/mercy-colleges-and-universities/>

See other documents and resources at <https://mercyhighered.org/mercy-way/>

## **Implementation Plan and Process for Mutual Accountabilities**

### **Active Participation in CMHE Meetings and Programs**

It is expected that this College/University will support the work of CMHE through participation in the annual “cohort meetings,” namely, the Mission Officers, the Campus Ministers, the Chief Academic Officers and the Presidents, in addition to other cohorts as these groups organize and identify needs. The Conference also hosts a biennial leadership program to which all Presidents and local board officers (Chairs and Vice-Chairs) are invited in order to deepen the relationship.

The Conference also offers a biennial program of scholarship and sharing around a central idea of Mercy higher education (such as The DC Mercy Roundtable) and an annual program for students centered on a critical concerns of the Sisters of Mercy (such as the DC Mercy Advocacy Program or the UN Mercy Advocacy Program).

### **Annual Tabulation of Debt**

The Conference for Mercy Higher Education will annually collect debt information to tally the aggregate debt total of the colleges and universities of CMHE. The purpose of this annual debt collection is to be sure that the debt ceiling of \$500 million, granted via an indult by the Vatican, is not reached. This collection will take place in February each year. The CMHE Director will notify the Institute Leadership Team of the debt total and advise the Team if the aggregate debt appears to be approaching the limit.

### **Appointment of CMHE Representative to the Presidential Search**

The Conference for Mercy Higher Education will work in concert with the Chair of each Presidential Search Committee to appoint a representative to the Presidential Search Committee. It is expected that this representative will speak for the Mercy charism and the interests of the sponsor as the process of identifying the new President unfolds and it is further expected that this representative will apprise the CMHE Executive Director of the process and selection of candidates as the work advances. This presence and process are essential for the Institute Leadership’s “missioning” of the new President.

### **Mission Peer Review Visits: Second Round**

The second round of Mission Peer Review Self-study and Team Visits is scheduled to begin in the 2022-2023 academic year. In the year before the scheduled Team Visit, the Executive Director will contact both the President and the Mission Officer to outline the Self-study and the expectations for the Team Visit and Review. CMHE covers all costs related to the team’s three-day visit.

### **Missioning of the President**

The Institute Leaders wish to “mission” the new President of a Mercy college or university during the inauguration ceremony for the new leader. The Conference for Mercy Higher Education will work in concert with the Inauguration Committee and with the Institute Leadership Team to develop a missioning ceremony that reflects the unique spirit and culture of the institution. The presentation of the Catherine McAuley medal and an affirmation of the new President as the leader of a key ministry in Mercy will be essential components of this missioning ceremony.

### **Separation Agreement**

In the event that the *Covenant of Mercy Higher Education* is no longer a mutually agreed upon or desirable relationship for the sponsors or the institution, a separation agreement outlining the process for an institution to remove its affiliation with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, and thereby its membership in the Conference for Mercy Higher Education will be formalized.

Artwork pictured on front cover:  
“Refraction of Hope,” 2022  
Artist: Meagan Masti

CMHE is most grateful to Meagan Masti, of Maria College,  
for sharing her talents with us for this celebration.