

CONFERENCE *for* MERCY HIGHER EDUCATION

Mercy Roundtable 2025

Theme: Immigration

June 9-11, 2025

Saint Xavier University – Chicago, Illinois

Monday, June 9, 2025

10 a.m. – 3 p.m. Registration & Check-in – Morris Hall

3:30 p.m. Welcome from Dr. Keith Elder, President, Saint Xavier University
Prayer, Introductions – The Board Room (4th Floor), Warde Academic Center

4:30 p.m. Keynote Presentation: Journeying Together
Through many years of walking with immigrants, many lessons learned to be shared. As Sisters of Mercy, we have lived our charism of hospitality and critical concern of solidarity with immigrants, accompanying the families on their journeys.

About our keynote presenters:

Rita Specht, RSM

I have been a Sister of Mercy for 65 years. I received my BA from Saint Xavier University, majoring in Spanish, an M.Ed. from the University of Illinois and Master of Theological Studies from Washington Theological Union in Silver Spring, Maryland. I have been privileged to serve in many ministries throughout my life. My first assignments were in teaching, first in elementary school and then Mercy high school where I taught Spanish and served as part of the Administrative Team. After completing Clinical Pastoral Education, I was Chaplain and then Director of Pastoral Care at Mercy Hospital in Aurora, Illinois. For 13 years I served as a Pastoral Associate at St. Kevin and Our Lady of Mount Carmel parishes in Chicago and St. Thomas the Apostle parish in Crystal Lake, Illinois. I worked in Formation Ministry for the Community for 7 years. In El Paso, Texas, I ministered as a Hospice Chaplain and then as a Chaplain in an Immigration Detention Center. Upon returning to Chicago, I continued ministry with Immigrants by serving at Kenosha and Kankakee County Jails. Currently I am a mentor for an Immigrant family and do volunteer ministry at OSF Little Company Hospital as well as at Mercy Circle.

Pat Murphy, RSM and JoAnn Persch, RSM

Sisters Pat and JoAnn have both been educators and administrators. In the mid 1980's they opened a Catholic public sanctuary with other religious communities of women. They began Su Casa Catholic Worker Community in 1990. The home was for Central American Refugees seeking political asylum as survivors of torture. After 7 years living and ministering at Su Casa, they helped build a program at Casa Notre Dame for women in recovery from addiction and their children. When they began to pray at the Broadview ICE deportation center the impact of that reality led them to found the Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants, an organization they began in 2007. The organization did work in four detention centers, a deportation center, the immigration court, the Post-Detention Accompaniment program. They opened two houses for immigrants released from detention and awaiting court dates, and were invited to do pastoral work with the children in the Casas del Ninos. When the buses started coming in August of 2022, Pat and JoAnn were invited to be on two committees to strategize about the Catholic and human response to the reality of the influx. Asked to find housing and support for one family, then 2 and so on until they formed Catherine's Caring Cause which now houses 16 families. Catherine's Caring Cause incorporated and is a 501(c)(3). Sisters Pat and JoAnn both received BA degrees from Saint Xavier, MA degrees from Loyola University, and honorary doctorates from Gwynedd Mercy University.

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5:30 p.m.

Dinner – The Board Room

Session I: Support for Immigrant Families

7 p.m.

Jorge Arevalo, M.B.A.; Kathleen Carlson, Ph.D.; and Imelda Macias, Ed.D., Saint Xavier University

Bridging Data and Belonging: Supporting Immigrant Students Through Risk Assessment and Community Engagement

This session explores how Saint Xavier University supports immigrant students through a data-driven risk assessment system and holistic family engagement. With 65% of first-time freshmen speaking a language other than English at home, SXU leverages predictive analytics and community outreach to enhance retention and belonging. Presenters will discuss immigrant student risk profiles, success behaviors, and institutional strategies that integrate data with advocacy to promote student success and social mobility in Catholic higher education.

8:15 p.m.

Optional Social – Location TBD (outside, weather permitting)

Tuesday, June 10, 2025

7:30 a.m.

Table Top Breakfast Discussions – The Board Room

8:30 a.m.

Welcome & Prayer – The Board Room

Session II: Immersion Experiences

8:45 a.m.

Gail Presbey, University of Detroit Mercy

The Work of the Sisters of Mercy on Immigration

Based on attending two Border Immersion experiences with the Sisters of Mercy, seeing their programs such as Arise Adelante, and meeting Betty Campbell and other Sisters, I will describe the philosophy and actions of the Sisters of Mercy addressing the key social concern of immigration.

9:45 a.m.

Dr. Steven Bridge & Camilla Bridge, Saint Joseph's College of Maine

Saint Joseph's College's International Service Trip Program: Addressing the Contributing Factors to Immigration at their Source

In some respects, those who are able to immigrate to the United States are the fortunate ones. Often, they leave behind communities that struggle with poor economies, food insecurity, broken infrastructure, educational barriers, inadequate health care, and violence. Through our International Service Trips, Saint Joseph's College has found innovative ways to respond to the systemic challenges and acute needs of these communities. This presentation will showcase two such initiatives – one in Haiti, one in Guatemala.

10:45 a.m.

Break

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Session III: Intersection of Immigration and Racism

11:00 a.m.

Dr. Carol Etlen, Ed.D. and Dr. Marilyn Pendelton, Ed.D., Gwynedd Mercy University

Immigration, Racism, and the Challenges Faced by School Leaders

This session will focus on the challenges faced by School Leaders regarding immigration and racism. The importance of fostering a growth mindset in teachers and staff to develop actionable solutions to these challenges. Strategies to minimize prejudice and bias, increase cultural humility and equity, and best practice teaching strategies will be discussed. This session is for k12 and Higher Ed educators and school leaders.

12 p.m.

Table Top Lunch Discussions – The Board Room

1:30 p.m.

E. Prasad Venugopal and Wala’a Bazoun, University of Detroit Mercy

“They’re poisoning the blood of our country”: Teaching the Racial Science Behind Anti-Immigrant Sentiments and Policies

This presentation discusses the long and dangerous history of racial science and its connection with contemporary anti-immigrant sentiments and laws. Our purpose is to connect the Mercy Critical Concern for Immigration with that of the evils of Racism to better understand the persistence of anti-immigration ideology in American society through the lens of the sciences. We also reflect on the epistemic violence inherent in the scientific and technological tools used in the enforcement of immigration laws. Example assignments used in a core curricular course to engage and educate students in these critical interdisciplinary conversations will be presented.

Session IV: Immigration & Community Engagement

2:30 p.m.

Alice Edwards, Ph.D., Mercyhurst University

A Mercy University in a Welcoming City: Living our commitments in uncertain times

University support for the Sisters of Mercy’s critical concern for immigration is expressed in reflective academic community engagement with New Americans, as well as in the university curriculum, a primary indicator of our values. This session will present three initiatives that reflect Mercyhurst’s commitment to this critical concern. The discussion will explore how these activities are grounded in reciprocal relationships with our New American partners, how they affect our students’ learning, and how we can respond as Mercy communities to the anti-immigrant sentiment and policy.

3:30 p.m.

Break

3:45 p.m.

Zepure Samawi PhD, MSN, BSN, RN, ANEF; Fulbright Scholar Professor of Nursing, Saint Xavier University

Nursing Students as Leaders Promoting Health of Communities: Learning about Mercy Critical Concerns

SXU nursing students are required to have a community clinical immersion experience to promote the health of communities. In this, the students learn the implications of the Critical Concerns. This presentation will set the groundwork for discussion about how numerous factors impact immigrants’ health and quality of life, provide outcomes of the students’ learning, and the benefits gained by the community members.

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Session VI: Barriers Immigrants Face

4:45 p.m.

Monica M. Saltarelli, Trocaire College

"Remember the Ladies:" Recognizing Gendered Gaps in Refugee Resettlement

Over the years with my work with refugees and new immigrants, I have noticed a pattern of concern with the women that are new to the American culture. They have had more difficulty with adjustment on many levels. Overcoming personal hurdles with their new culture here in the United States has been most challenging on them as well as their children. The immigration system and the current political climate in the United States clearly causes serious disadvantages towards women. Through research as well engaging in personal interviews of new immigrant women, I hope to illustrate that the tragic reality is that women of all ages are overlooked and left behind.

5:45 p.m.

Dr. Tamara Cella, Georgian Court University

Exploring the Impact of Migration on Literacy Development

This roundtable will explore how we can better support the language and literacy development of first generation migrant families. We will discuss the unique challenges faced by migrant families as they balance heritage language retention with English language acquisition.

7:00 p.m.

Dinner – The Board Room

8:15 p.m.

Optional Outdoor Social (weather permitting)

Wednesday, June 11, 2025

7:30 a.m.

Breakfast – Board Room

Session V: Integrating Immigration into the Curriculum

8:30 a.m.

Margaret Rakus, Ed.D. and Jessica Richmond, Gwynedd Mercy University

Integrating mission and critical concerns

Active Learning & Serving Mission Through the Digital Communication capstone course students research, produce and publish critical concern content. We share pedagogical frameworks, process and results of exploring immigration, women and environment. Immigration and Intersectionality An Antiracism GMercyU Service course explores immigration systems, gender inequality and nonviolence. Mercy Teas engage in immigration, racist rhetoric and nonviolence. We offer an intersectional perspective and resources including modules, library materials, and service trips.

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9:30 a.m. Break

9:45 a.m.

Jinsook Kim, Ph.D., Georgian Court University

Mercy and Design

This presentation explores how design serves as a medium for Mercy by engaging students in creative projects addressing Immigration and Women—two of Mercy’s Critical Concerns. Showcasing posters, videos, and collages from Georgian Court University’s Critical Concerns Week, it highlights pedagogical strategies and creative methodologies that foster empathy, social responsibility, and leadership through design, inspiring advocacy and meaningful dialogue.

10:45 a.m. Concluding Discussion

12:00 p.m. Prayer & Departure

Resources:

Breaking Boundaries: A Mercy Response to People on the Move –

<https://a.storyblok.com/f/45074/x/7dfc95e741/breaking-boundaries-a-mercy-response-to-people-on-the-move.pdf>

Catherine’s Caring Cause – <https://catherinecareschicago.org/>

Mercy Global Action at the United Nations – <https://www.mercyworld.org/justice/un-advocacy/>

Mercy Justice Team Action Alerts – <https://sistersofmercy.org/mercy-for-justice/action-alerts/>