

Conference XXXV – 2016 – “The Heart of Mercy: Peace”

Mercy Secondary Education Conference XXXV was held in Detroit (Farmington Hills, MI) October 14-15, 2016 - planned by the Mercy Secondary Education Conference Committee, and hosted by Mercy High School, Farmington Hills, MI. This special anniversary conference was held at the site of the first MSEA conference.

Two hundred thirty-five Mercy educators gathered, representing schools and educational ministries in Argentina, Belize, Guam, Honduras, Jamaica, the Philippines and the United States. Moreover, given the special anniversary year, the founding members of MSEA and over 25 former MSEA or MSEC board members and former Mercy educators and leaders attended.

Committee members for the conference were: Karen Calta, Assistant Directress - Mount Saint Mary Academy, Watching, NJ; Amy Elstone – Principal, Mercy Academy, Louisville, KY; Whitney Faires – Assistant Principal, Mount St. Mary Catholic High School, Oklahoma City, OK; Colleen Gribbin – Principal, St. Mary Academy Bay View, Providence, RI; Lisa Griffith, RSM – Mercy Education System Project Director, Savannah, GA; Nancy Kelly, RSM – Executive Assistant to the President, Notre Dame High School, Elmira, NY; Alison Kline-Kator - Religious Studies teacher, Mercy High School, Farmington Hills, MI; Mary McCarthy, RSM, President - Mercy High School, Middletown, CT; Holly McCoy – Assistant Principal for Student Life, Mercy High School, Omaha, NE; and Corinne Raven, RSM - Director, Network for Mercy Education.

Whitney Faires spoke on behalf of the committee welcoming all to the conference and sharing gratitude for all who had worked tirelessly for the conference.

Sister Deborah Troillett, RSM, member of the Institute Leadership Team, welcomed all on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy. Sister Anne Marie Miller from the West Midwest Community Leadership Team offered words of welcome, and President Cheryl Kreger and Principal Carolyn Witte welcomed all in the name of Mercy High School.

Following Morning Prayer offered by representatives of Mercy High School, the Anniversary Celebration began with honoring the founders of the Mercy Secondary Education Association whose vision thirty-five years ago has been continued. Sisters Helen Marie Burns, Carol Wheeler, Cathleen Cahill, Mary McCarthy, Lourdes Sheehan, and Nancy Thompson were recognized.

The celebration continued as Mary McCarthy, RSM, recalled the invitation of Helen Marie Burns, RSM, to an initial gathering and the very humble beginnings of gatherings. Helen Marie offered beautiful reflective remarks concluding, “I trust our past and our present, and, thus, I have great hope for our future – my hope is always an education which ‘reawakens us to new life...instills courage...and fosters hope.’ Our legacy demands no more, and no less!”

Helen Marie further offered remarks prepared by Carol Wheeler, RSM, first MSEA president, who was unable to attend. Carol remarked that the beginnings recognized the power of Mercy education, and in her concluding comments, called on all not to fear the future, but to know that Mercy is an extraordinary blessing.

All gathered further heard the words of Margaret Dempsey, RSM, Carolyn Jaworski, and Michael Johnson, Mercy educational leaders, who responded to the questions, “What gave you joy?” and “What are your hopes for the future?” Each spoke from a perspective of the importance of Mercy education to those in need, to young women and men and to future leaders.

Corinne Raven, RSM, expressed gratitude to Mary McCarthy, RSM, for her leadership as a founder and service on the current conference committee, and also invited all gathered to recognize current and past members of MSEA and MSEC boards and committees. She further acknowledged the members of the Mercy Elementary Education Network who joined in this conference five years ago and continue their annual attendance.

The anniversary celebration component concluded with a video of pictures from the past thirty-five years. Memories abounded. Gratitude to Mercy school, Mount St. Mary Catholic High School, Oklahoma City, for their creative work in compiling the video.

Following the anniversary celebration, the conference heard the first of two keynote presentations. Karen Calta introduced Sister Patricia McCarthy, CND, for “Learning Mercy, Teaching Mercy, Living Mercy.” Sister Patricia offered a beautiful address combining scripture, personal reflection, story-telling and a call to reflection on what is at the heart of Mercy. Sister Patricia continued her input in the afternoon session offering further scriptural context and reflection on the call shared by all. Her challenge that the first five minutes of every day be given to the Lord will be long remembered.

Friday concluded with Nancy Kelly, RSM, facilitating door prizes brought by Mercy schools. Gifts were again shared on Saturday.

Saturday morning, Amy Elstone welcomed all and introduced representatives of Mercy High School for Morning Prayer. Following prayer, Amy introduced Holly McCoy and representatives of Mercy High School, Omaha, NE, who invited all to save the date for Conference XXXVI.

Holly further announced that the current committee agreed to serve for the 2017 conference. In addition to planning the conference, this committee will serve as a resource for helping shape dialogue about leadership for the desired continuance of the conference into the future with the formation of the new system.

Colleen Gribbin then introduced Sister Richard Mary Burke, RSM, who presented an inspiring address, “We Can Never Say It Is Enough” (from Catherine McAuley). Offering a reflection on Friday’s talks and activities, Sister Richard Mary shared the focus of her input: “To take a Long, Loving Look at our Past, to reflect together on our Present, to dialogue with one another regarding possible strategies for our Future.” In inviting all to reflect on the messages of historical key addresses, she then considered the context for moving into the future, citing the corporal and spiritual works of Mercy and the 8th announced by Pope Francis, *Care for Our Common Home*. Facilitating an afternoon session for sharing best practices and strategies for the future, Sister Richard Mary then led all in a ritual prayer of affirmation.

Following directions from Alison Kline-Kator for travel Saturday afternoon, conference participants experienced the hospitality of Mercy High School for Eucharistic liturgy, tours, dinner and a performance. The performance by singers, dancers, mimes, and musicians all combined for a very delightful and enjoyable presentation. Sister Lisa Griffith, in the name of all gathered, expressed appreciation.

Save the Date: Mercy High School, Omaha, NE - All are invited to gather for Mercy Secondary Education Conference XXXVI, October 13-14, 2017.