

2025-2026

NEW LEADER ORIENTATION PROGRAM



Mercy Education
Educación de la Misericordia

WELCOME

Mercy Education's *New Leader Orientation Program* is a virtual, two-year program for new school administrators and board chairs, offering training and discussion on topics critical to leaders of Mercy Catholic schools.

This brochure details offerings for the 2025-2026 academic year. Most sessions are offered twice; you may choose the time slot that works best for your schedule when you register. You will receive connection instructions and any supporting materials once you register.

For questions and registration information, please contact [Susan Smith](#), Associate Director for Mercy Education.

[Register Here](#)

Leadership Advice from Catherine McAuley

Don't let crosses vex or tease; try to meet all with peace and ease.
Notice the faults of every day – but often in a playful way.
And when you seriously complain, let it be known to give you pain.
Attend one thing at a time: you've fifteen hours from 6 to 9.
Be mild and sweet in all your ways; now and again bestow some praise.
Avoid all solemn declaration, all serious, close investigation.
Turn what you can into a jest, and with few words dismiss the rest.
Keep Patience ever at your side: you'll need it for a constant guide.
Show fond affection every day, and above all, devoutly pray
that God may bless the charge He's given,
and make of you their guide to Heaven.

*Letter from M. Catherine McAuley to
M. Elizabeth Moore, early December 1838*



Session 1: Mary J. Foley



Strategic Planning – Your School’s Bridge from Mission to Vision

Date/Time: Thursday, October 23, 2025, 11 am or 6 pm ET

“Strategic planning isn’t important; strategic planning is.”

Your school’s strategic planning process can result in a succinct and powerful guide for growth, improvement, decision making, resource development and accountability. Or, it can be endless hours of meetings and an enormous document that sits on a shelf. This informative and engaging webinar will describe a process that maximizes impact without undo wear and tear on the participants. Practical steps, with options for each element of the process, will be presented to allow you to select the best approach for your school so that you can move quickly from planning to action.

Meet our Presenter!

A consultant for Christian Brothers Services, Mary is a zealous supporter of Catholic education who attended from grade school to grad school. She is also a proud Mercy girl with 40+ years of experience in the not-for-profit world and offers a wealth of strategic leadership skills and insights to the educational and religious arenas. Mary has worked with hundreds of not-for-profits, internally as a director of development, at the board level, and through a wide variety of consulting engagements. *Mary thinks bios like this are dull and tedious and hopes no one will read it aloud to the program participants!*



Session 2: Donna A. Tschoepe



It's What You Don't Know That You Don't Know About Human Resources

Date/Time: Tuesday, December 9, 2025, 11 am or 6 pm

One always thinks anyone can manage HR but that couldn't be further from the truth. Sure, anyone can hire, or can they? Benefits are a snap...but finding the most cost-efficient ones for both the school and the employee is the challenge. But the biggest challenge is employee relations, or keeping the school out of litigation. Too many settlements are made without an HR person at the table. This presentation will help schools understand how having an HR person not only saves money for the school but keeps employees happy and satisfied, keeps turnover low and keeps schools out of litigation. HR people keep up with Employment law and court rulings that shade the letter of the law. Donna will share best practices of the Human Resources profession to help many better understand its value.

Meet our Presenter!

Donna A. Tschoepe is a Human Resources strategic and tactical global Human Resources leader who excels as a personal coach and mentor with a solid reputation for building high performing teams. She has over 40 years of Human Resources experience, recently as HR Specialist for Gwynedd Mercy Academy High school and Elementary School. Prior to this she was an HR Director of two other non-profit organizations and Global SVP HR for several for-profit companies. Donna has a B.S. in Psychology from St. Joseph's University and is certified in Myers Briggs, Civil Treatment for DEI, and Lominger's VOICES and Career Architect. She has served on two non-profit boards, Women Organized Against Rape (WOAR) and Norris Square Neighborhood Project.



Session 3: Dr. Anne Knapke



Steward Leadership in Mercy Education: Advancing Catholic School Mission in an Era of Lay Leadership

Date/Time: Thursday, January 22, 2026, 11 am or 6 pm ET

Catholic schools continue to face significant challenges as they transition from religious to lay leadership, especially in preserving mission integrity, Catholic identity, and long-term sustainability. Insights from Mercy schools and Mercy Education will illustrate how first-generation lay leaders embody Mercy charism, practice relational and participatory leadership, and align strategic and financial decisions with mission values. Steward leadership emerges as a framework that advances both tradition and innovation, embedding mission in governance, promoting ethical decision-making, and strengthening school culture. Leadership formation and mission-driven planning will play a vital role in sustaining Catholic schools for generations to come.

Meet our Presenter!

Dr. Anne Knapke serves as Head of School at Gwynedd-Mercy Academy Elementary in Ambler, Pennsylvania, a PreK-8 community of 391 students and 63 faculty and staff. She is honored to serve as the first lay leader since the academy's founding in 1861. Now in her tenth year, she completed her doctoral studies on steward leadership and the evolving role of lay leaders in Catholic education through a phenomenological lens of Mercy Education. Previously, she was Principal of St. Pius X Catholic School in Greensboro, North Carolina, where she began her vocation in Catholic education. Guided by Mercy charism, she leads with fidelity, integrity, and a mission-driven spirit.

Session 4: Jeff Filcik



“WWCD” – What Would Catherine Do?” **A Conversation on Best Practices for Board Leadership**

Date/Time: Thursday, March 5, 2026, 6 pm ET

Identifying and applying best practices for a Board of Directors is a laudable, and lofty, goal. But what are best practices anyway? This session will provide a discussion grounded in the presenter’s personal experience as both a Board Chair and Board member. What worked well and what did not? How can Board members apply, and live out, the Mercy charism in a practical sense? How is the relationship between the Board Chair and the Head of School best fostered? What are effective ways for a Board to evaluate the Head of School? What does authentic Board support of students, faculty, and administration look like in practice? What are the polestars a Board should look to for direction? What can be learned from Catherine McAuley’s ideas on leadership? While there may be no single “right” answers to these questions, some practices may prove more effective than others in achieving desired goals. This session will invite participants into a thoughtful exchange of experiences and insights.

Meet our Presenter!

Jeff Filcik, a proud Mercy husband and father, is currently serving in his seventh year on the Board of the Academy of Our Lady of Mercy in Louisville, Kentucky. He was Board Chair for the past two years and now chairs the Advancement Committee. Jeff was raised in Cincinnati and has called Louisville home since 1989. He and his wife, Karen (Mercy '75), have been married for 43 years; they have three children and four grandchildren. A retired attorney and high school teacher, Jeff enjoys reading, cycling, roller-blading, traveling, and working with stained glass. He joined the Church in 1996, loves being Catholic, and is grateful for the impact the Sisters of Mercy have had on his life.



Session 5: Dr. Mario Brunetta



Mercy Catholic Education is Transformational Education

Date/Time: Wednesday, April 15, 2026, 11 am or 6 pm

We will explore how a Mercy Education is not merely transactional, but transformational for the students we teach and form. Using the notion of Catholic "sensibilities," we consider the key elements of the rich tradition of Catholic Social Teaching through the lens of the charism and leadership direction of the Sisters of Mercy and how these impact leadership in our schools.

Meet our Presenter!

Dr. Mario Brunetta is Vice President for Mission Integration at the headquarters of Trinity Health, the one of the largest Catholic health care systems in the US. Mario has also served as an Ecclesiastical Judge and canon law consultant for various dioceses and Catholic religious orders in the US since 2003. He is an experienced mission leader, accomplished educator and effective and dynamic communicator with extensive practical experience in administration, canon law, theology and pastoral care. His academic credentials include a doctorate in Canon Law, an MA in Religious Studies, a Masters of Divinity, and an MA in Public Health.





Mercy
Education
Educación de
la Misericordia

Courageous Action. Selfless Spirit.™
Acción valiente. Espíritu altruista.™

MISSION STATEMENT

Mercy Education System of the Americas unites and supports Catholic schools embracing the charism of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Rooted in the Gospel and inspired by Catherine McAuley, Mercy Education nurtures educational communities to develop highly competent, deeply compassionate leaders ready to serve a vulnerable world.

mercyedu.org

