



Office of the President

March 21, 2020

Dear Mercy students, parents, and guardians,

We have successfully concluded the third quarter of our academic year, and fully made our transition to *Mercy Online*. This has been a time of great change for all of us, and we appreciate your patience, grace and good humor. We celebrate all we have accomplished this week, and also rejoice in having the three-day weekend to take a much-needed brain break for all. We are grateful for the overwhelmingly positive feedback we have received surrounding the speedy launch of *Mercy Online*.

Online Learning for the Fourth Quarter

In our new reality, we have been engaging with experts around the world who have been managing the effects of this pandemic longer than we have in Maryland. Below are key principles around effective online instruction they have shared with us:

- Teaching and learning depend upon relationships, so online teachers must focus as much on developing and keeping relationships as they do on delivery of content (teachers need to keep their students connected, engaged, and supported);
- Teachers are curators of content, determining and teaching what is essential in the discipline;
- Clear and consistent communication is critical to success.

While families have reported to us that the structure and routine for their daughters has been a strength of *Mercy Online*, they have also expressed concerns about the long hours our girls are spending in front of their devices. This past week, our Mercy Girls have been online for six or seven classes during the day, followed by homework—often on devices—at night. We are deeply concerned about students spending eight or more hours online. Our teachers, too, are also reporting many, many hours online. At the same time, teachers and students alike report needing longer breaks between classes as they pivot between classes and various instructional modes.

To address these concerns and to support effective instruction and the wellness of our students and faculty, our Academic Council, led by Ms. Blakeslee, has thoughtfully crafted ***Mercy Online 2.0***. **This new schedule will begin Monday, March 23.** Each day will, of course, begin with check-in, prayer, and announcements, and will conclude with Magic Time. There will be four online synchronous instructional periods per day, separated by 15-minute breaks. Students will also have 30-45 minutes of asynchronous schoolwork that, as much as possible, will be off-screen work. This is key to fulfilling the 120 hours of instruction required annually. Students will also have a 45-minute break to prepare and eat

lunch. More information about our *Mercy Online 2.0* is available on our *Mercy Online* web page.

Should you have any questions about *Mercy Online 2.0*, please be in touch with your daughter's adviser or Ms. Blakeslee. Like Catherine McAuley in her service to women and girls in 19th century Dublin, we must adapt to our new reality and adjust as needed based on the lived experiences of our Mercy Girls and their dedicated teachers.

Building Community Online

During this difficult time, we are heartened to see our Mercy Girls continuing to connect with and support each other. We were moved to see the cast of *Little Women the Musical* come together on Teams to sing through the score of the show on Thursday night, to honor the previously scheduled Opening Night. Magnificent!

We are also launching a social media campaign entitled "Mercy Mondays" to foster a sense of connectedness throughout the Mercy community. Whether a student, parent, alumna, future Mercy Girl, or friend of Mercy, wear your gear and share your spirit with the hash tag **#MercyMondays** on Facebook and Instagram starting this Monday.

We miss the everyday energy and activity of our campus life. We especially miss the wonderful presence of our Mercy Girls! These days, however, call for necessary precautions and practices that will keep all of us healthy and safe. We know we will get through this together, and we very much appreciate your continued prayers and support.

We are all walking in the footsteps of Catherine McAuley and her trailblazing Sisters of Mercy. *Catherine McAuley, pray for us.*

Sincerely,

Mary Beth Lennon '85
President

Jeanne Blakeslee
Principal

Mary Ella Franz Marion '76
Dean of Students
Chair, COVID-19 Task Force