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A Generous Bequest Gives Four Students an Experience to Treasure

Thanks to a generous bequest from the family of Dr. Richard Sheehan, four Mount Mercy students had the opportunity to attend the annual leadership conference sponsored by for the students who attend the schools sponsored by the Regional Sisters of Mercy. The four day conference was held June 25 to 28 in Philadelphia. Representing Mount Mercy Academy at the conference were seniors Emily Lewandowski (East Aurora) and Megan Michalski (Buffalo), junior Megan Cycon (West Seneca) and sophomore Olivia Larson (Orchard Park).

The conference is designed to allow students to learn more about leadership and collaboration as well as incorporate faith and prayer. Participants had the opportunity to meet with students from other Mercy schools, learn about leadership styles, and listen to dynamic speakers. Every year the Mercy schools work to support a specific Mercy Rising project, this year the Mercy schools will be helping to raise money for the reconstruction of a school on the border of Nigeria and Cameroon that was destroyed by Boko Haram. Mrs. Mary Sheehan, Dr. Sheehan's widow believes that this project would have pleased Dr. Sheehan due to his personal passion and history of performing mission work.

All four of the students wanted to attend the conference for various reasons, but especially to improve their leadership skills. Lewandowski commented "I wanted to attend the conference to learn more about the Circle of Mercy, to improve my leadership skills, and to serve as a positive representative for Mount Mercy. I hoped to gain some ideas for future service opportunities and activities." Larson added "I wanted to attend the conference because I felt it was a good way to increase my involvement in our school and to learn what leadership looks like in the eyes of others. I also hoped it would open up new leadership opportunities for me and would give me good insight and important qualities to bring back to Mercy as sophomore class president." "I wanted be make a difference at Mercy, and really live up to the expectation of a true Mercy girl. The leadership conference seemed like a great way to start accomplishing that goal." Michalski remarked.

All four of the students expected that they would improve their leadership skills and meet many new people. They also took the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator which helped them to learn about their leadership styles. Cycon said "We were taught the values of different personality traits and leadership techniques. I also learned how to work with those who may have different ideas of being a leader which will be helpful in my future career, whatever that may be." "I gained so much knowledge and world view from the conference. The influential speakers were amazing and definitely made me look at some aspects of service, leadership and life in a new light," Lewandowski stated.

The conference had many guest speakers, including women who had graduated from Mercy schools. These successful women spoke about their journeys and how they followed Catherine McAuley throughout their careers. This year the students heard from Colleen King, a graduate of a Mercy school who worked in the Obama White House and for the United Nations. Sister Dierdre Mullan, a Regional Sister of Mercy, spoke about the Global Vision of Mercy. The leadership conference also emphasized the importance of compassion, kindness and awareness toward all people.

Michalski learned that there are many components to leadership. "I learned how to use my leadership skills at the conference. Although I enjoy talking with others and voicing my opinion, I really never felt comfortable talking in front of the whole school. At the conference I learned that leadership can be expressed through creativity, determination and hard work," Michalski noted.

Larson also learned important information about what being a leader entails. "An important thing I learned at the conference was the value of different types of personalities. Realizing that people have different personalities and strengths is really important in being a good leader. Seeing things from another's point of view and thinking about how other people would go about something makes a huge

difference. If you limit yourself to doing things the way you would personally like to do them, it is hard to involve others and work with them effectively,” Larson said.

The four conference attendees are looking forward to implementing what they learned while raising funds for the Mercy Rising Project. “The major aspect of what we learned that we are incorporating this year is the Mercy Girls Rising service project. This is a service project in which Mercy schools across the nation fundraise for throughout the school year. All the money raised is then compiled at the conference when the schools present the checks with the amount of money raised. We have been working hard over the summer to prepare our school to fundraise for this project and we have many ideas,” Lewandowski, the student government president commented. All four of the students believe that they have learned many valuable skills and lessons from the conference. Cycon stated “The leadership conference also emphasized the importance of compassion, kindness and awareness towards all people.”

Larson also feels that she benefitted from the experience. “I am very thankful the Sheehan family funded this opportunity as I was very proud to represent my school. I learned ways to be a successful leader and grew as a student of Mercy which I could not have done without the generosity of the Sheehan Family,” Larson remarked.

Michalski has a new found appreciation for her school and her leadership skills. Michalski said, “The conference was much more than I expected it to be. It ended up was being an experience that I will always cherish. We had the opportunity to fully understand how we are all capable of being the influential women of Mercy that Catherine McAuley envisioned us to be. Because of the leadership conference, I was able to see my own potential as a leader. It was the opportunity of a lifetime, and because of that opportunity, I am able to call myself a true woman of Mercy, and for that, I will forever be thankful to the Sheehan Family.”

“I was inspired and truly blown away by the conference. My biggest take away was how large the Circle of Mercy truly is. I feel that many Mount Mercy girls (including myself before attending the conference) are unaware of the community of Mercy schools which we are a part of. I developed an enormous amount of pride and gratitude to be a part of the Mercy community. I would like to thank the Sheehan Family who funded our trip from the bottom of my heart. Without them, it would not have been possible for us to go. I really do believe that our experience at the conference will have long lasting effects on not only us as people, but on Mount Mercy Academy as a whole,” Lewandowski concluded.

Mount Mercy Academy

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