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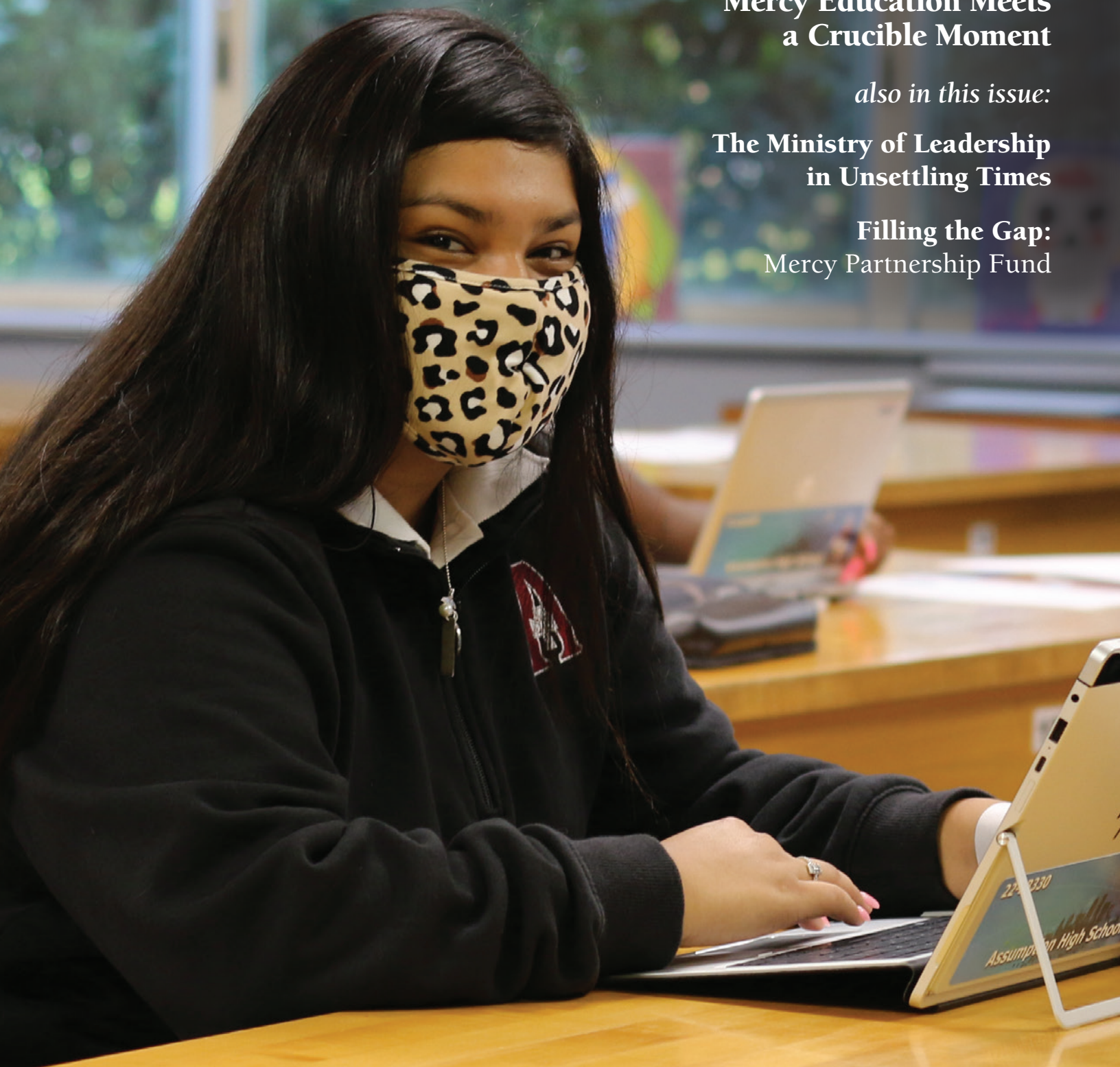
# *viva!mercy*

## **Mercy Education Meets a Crucible Moment**

*also in this issue:*

**The Ministry of Leadership  
in Unsettling Times**

**Filling the Gap:  
Mercy Partnership Fund**



# Filling the Gap: Mercy Partnership Fund

By Sarah B. Smith



A pollinator field in Washington, D.C., is part of a Catholic Climate Covenant project. It will eventually feature more than 650,000 flowering plants.

Founded in 1995, Mercy Partnership Fund became part of Mercy Investment Services in 2010. Now in its 25th year, the fund is committed to sharing its financial resources with mission-focused organizations and has grown significantly, deploying \$100 million in 25 years and reaching people in 65 countries around the world. Each investment—in 60 organizations in the United States and internationally—aligns with one or more of the Mercy Critical Concerns. Part of Mercy Investment Services’ 10 percent commitment to impact investing, Mercy Partnership Fund focuses on positive social impact, not financial returns. The following are a few examples of the impact of the fund’s investments around the world.

## Encouraging Clean Energy Initiatives

With a loan from Mercy Partnership Fund, Catholic Climate Covenant’s Catholic Energies program is assisting Catholic organizations across the United States to develop, install and fund renewable energy projects on their properties. The program, developed in response to Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, has already completed 10 projects, including installing more than 10,000 solar panels that have generated 3.7 megawatts of energy.

A recently completed Catholic Energies solar project on land owned by Catholic Charities in Washington, D.C., is expected to reduce carbon dioxide emissions per year by approximately 3.5 million pounds or provide carbon sequestration equivalent to 25,000 trees. In addition to the solar array, the site includes a pollinator field that will feature more than 650,000 flowering plants when it develops fully.

“I hope the impact of this project is that other Catholic agencies and institutions will see that energy efficiency and renewable energy work are the right thing to do by God’s creation and help their financial bottom line, enabling utility cost savings to be used to support their core mission,” says Dan Misleh, Catholic Climate Covenant’s executive director.



This Catholic Energies solar project in Washington, D.C., is part of an effort to show Catholic agencies that renewable energy can help their mission and their bottom line.

A client (far left) who received assistance from the Center for Women in Transition in St. Louis stands with Sister Sharon Schmitz, founder of Sharon House, and another program supporter.



## Supporting Women through Restorative Justice

The Sisters of Mercy were among the founders of the Center for Women in Transition, a nonprofit organization in St. Louis, Missouri, that assists women caught up in the criminal justice system in making a successful transition back to their families and communities. When center staff found the perfect building to expand the supportive housing program, they reached out to Mercy Partnership Fund to help provide the financing. The home, named Sharon House in honor of Sister Sharon Schmitz, one of the organization’s founders, provides a long-term residence for as many as 24 women.

“What going to Sharon House means to me is a chance to be independent again with a little structure, which for a recovering addict and alcoholic is very important,” says Beverly, one of the home’s first residents. “The positive environment, neighborhood, sober living and the sense of safety and security is so what I need and look forward to. For me, it is a wonderful, better way of life and support.”



Afghan refugee Muska Haseeb came to the United States 12 years ago and, with the help of loans from the Center for Economic Opportunity, has since started her own fashion business. She has also begun studies to become a doctor of obstetrics and gynecology.

## Increasing Financial Accessibility for Immigrants

The International Rescue Committee's Center for Economic Opportunity promotes economic mobility for low-income refugees and immigrant families by offering small-dollar consumer and business financing combined with financial education and access to economic development programs. Mercy Partnership Fund is one of the organization's early investors that is making expansion of its lending to key areas across the United States possible.

"Our borrowers have a hard time finding affordable financing elsewhere, often due to lack of credit or because they are new to the U.S. In turn, financial exclusion makes climbing the economic ladder that much harder," says Kasra Movahedi, director of the Center for Economic Opportunity. "Our loans fill this gap." Loans and programs are supporting immigrants and refugees from Afghanistan, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Iran, Iraq and Syria, among other countries.

Muska Haseeb, an Afghan refugee, fled her home with her mother and brother 12 years ago because of domestic violence. After six years of being displaced in Pakistan, Muska and her family came to the United States. "Today, our long journey paid off. I am studying to be an OB-GYN and have started my own fashion business," says Muska. "My mother, too, is studying fashion design. And my brother plans to open a smoothie stand soon. My family is working hard to become productive citizens in the country that graciously welcomed us." Muska received two loans from the Center for Economic Opportunity to expand her fashion business, which has helped her build a new life and support her dreams.

## The Impact of Community Investing

Mercy Partnership Fund's impact is extensive, reaching people and communities around the world. In 2019, investments supported affordable housing, financial inclusion, education, business, cooperative and nonprofit financing, community facilities, health care and healthy food, as well as environmental sustainability and sustainable agriculture initiatives.

### Highlights included:

▶ **69%** of capital deployed in the United States was in low- to moderate-income communities

▶ **50** states in the U.S. with investments

▶ **65** countries with investments

▶ **22** investees support environmental sustainability and sustainable agriculture

▶ **15 million** clean energy or energy access products and services

▶ **101,151** megawatts generated from clean energy or energy access products and services

▶ **58%** of businesses, cooperatives and nonprofits supported were women-owned/led

▶ **68%** of businesses, cooperatives and nonprofits supported were owned/led by people of color or indigenous individuals

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## Expanding Education Access in Disadvantaged Communities

Hope Enterprise Corporation (HOPE) is dedicated to strengthening communities, building assets and improving lives in the Mississippi Delta and other economically distressed parts of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee. “HOPE champions those on the edges of the economy, working in small towns and inner-city neighborhoods to remove obstacles that limit one’s ability to prosper,” says CEO Bill Bynum. “We are committed to a Deep South that works for all, regardless of race, gender, birthplace or station in life.”

Loans from Mercy and other social investors help HOPE support a myriad of projects, such as the expansion of Memphis Merit Academy, a school located in one of Memphis, Tennessee’s, most disadvantaged neighborhoods, where 65 percent of children under the age of 5 live in poverty. “Merit isn’t just closing the gap. We go beyond the gap,” says Alexia Hudson, a Merit kindergarten teacher. “We aren’t just giving our students a seat at the table. We are building the table.”



Teachers at Memphis Merit Academy in Tennessee are committed to increasing learning opportunities for their students, many of whom live in poverty.



Rosa Suspes is learning new agriculture techniques—and generating more income—thanks to ECLOF Colombia’s organic hydroponics program.

## Fostering Success for Women Entrepreneurs

ECLOF International (begun in Switzerland in 1946 as the Ecumenical Church Loan Fund) is a nonprofit global micro-finance network with a mission to promote social justice and human dignity. A loan from Mercy is helping its members provide financial and nonfinancial services to microentrepreneurs and smallholder farmers in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In Colombia, ECLOF is providing loans and training to help farmers adopt organic methods, including hydroponic techniques. This affords smallholders an opportunity to improve their yields and generate additional income to support their families while caring for the environment. Rosa Suspes, a client of ECLOF for the past three years, participates in ECLOF Colombia’s organic hydroponics program. With help from the network’s training courses, she hopes to increase her production and generate additional income for her family.

In the South Indian town of Kanchipuram, ECLOF’s financial support and advice have enabled women artisans in self-help groups—such as Mrs. Alamelu, who developed a pottery business and used the income to finance the education of her two sons—to grow their businesses. ■

Visit [mercyinvestmentservices.org](http://mercyinvestmentservices.org) to learn more about these and other investees.



Sarah B. Smith is the director of Mercy Partnership Fund. She previously served for eight years as founding president and chief executive officer of Mercy Loan Fund (formerly Catherine McAuley Housing Foundation) and serves as the chair of the governing council of Mercy Focus on Haiti. She can be reached at [ssmith@mercyinvestments.org](mailto:ssmith@mercyinvestments.org).