

## Prophetic Witness

Whether we are proclaiming our beliefs or involved in the intimacy of care giving, giving prophetic witness carries risk – perhaps that is part of the reason prophetic witness inspires such hope.

However we give it and whatever the risks, prophetic witness ultimately is a work of the heart. Prophetic witness flows from a heart possessing the same compassion as our God, and bearing witness to it in the same way as did the prophets of old. Our identity is that of a health care ministry that has no favourites; but is not unduly partial to all those whose future is at risk. We are a ministry that does not need to defend itself, and so can listen to another's complaint and be moved by their grief; a ministry that is characterized by an attentiveness that notices people and events around us; a ministry that willingly challenges convention on the one hand and is unwilling to fear what others may think of us on the other.

We give prophetic witness when we defend the rights of the unborn and call for just access to health care for all, and when we build hospitals and medical facilities that are environmentally friendly. We give prophetic witness when we admit medical error, apologize and ask forgiveness; we give prophetic witness when, instead of discharging a stroke patient home alone, we pay the costs of sending him back to his family in Mexico – and when we stand up to the criticism that in doing so we are wasting resources on illegals.

We give prophetic witness through our programs to ensure all children are immunized, as well as when we support and demand health care reform at the state, provincial and federal levels; we give prophetic witness when we establish clinics to provide sexual abuse evaluations for children, from newborns to teenagers, and when we establish programs for former gang members to have their offensive tattoos removed so they

can more easily reintegrate into society. We give prophetic witness when we are open to controversial responses to some of the poorest among us, such as heroin maintenance programs for those who cannot stay clean on their own and for whom methadone is not an option. We give prophetic witness when we make quilts available to patients and families at the end of life, and commit ourselves to make sure no one dies alone, and when someone from housekeeping pushes the cleaning cart to the side, takes the hand of a confused elderly woman and brings her first to the correct elevator and then to the correct floor so she can find her husband's room. We give prophetic witness in so many ways – you can name them better than I. Sometimes we suffer as a result, sometimes we win praise – sometimes we get both, at the same time, for doing the same thing – but always giving hope when we do.

When we minister in these ways, proclaiming our values and giving care, we retain our unique identity as Catholic health care providers in this pluralistic world. When we minister in these ways, we give prophetic witness to our God's compassion, and the poor of this world, whoever they are and whatever the risks to their future, have a reason to hope.

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*An excerpt from the Keynote Address of  
Rev. John Tuohey  
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