

# KEEPING THE FAITH UNDER THE BIG TOP

**W**ith our circus illustrations for this issue, we bring a bit of levity, and maybe some pertinent symbolism, to challenging times for Catholic health care — and for all who work in health care in the United States.



**PAMELA  
SCHAEFFER**

As we were putting the issue together in January, I had a chance to experience the circus and reflect on the symbolism up close. A delightful local small-tent affair named Circus Flora (after an orphaned elephant) performed with our fine St. Louis Symphony Orchestra on stage at Powell Hall, the symphony's home. It had been a long time since I'd attended a circus, and it's hard to say who was more enthralled, me or the three children I had in tow.

Granted, the circus provides a very different kind of service from health care. From the audience's perspective, a circus is pure, sometimes breathtaking, entertainment, an enjoyable escape from the real world. From the perspective of the performers though, similarities to providers of health care abound. Whether it's a circus, hospital or long-term care facility, a successful outcome demands well-honed skills derived from years of training, focus and discipline. Further, the circus acts that cause us to hold our breath — the trapeze and high-wire acts — like health care in this era of reform, call for courage, even daring — a willingness to take strategic risks.

Think, for instance, about the wire-walkers at the recent event in St. Louis. They were members of that remarkable family of dare-devils, the Wallendas — a metaphor of sorts for Catholic health care, with their long tradition of grooming and training new performers through seven generations. Think not only of the enormous skill and concentration required to walk and ride a bicycle on a high wire, sometimes as part of a human pyramid, but also of

the collaboration and trust that, as in health care, make it possible. When the Wallendas perform their amazing feats with no safety net below, nothing is guaranteed.

In another similarity to Catholic health care, one of the family members, Tino Wallenda, notes that many circus performers are deeply religious. He includes himself; he is the author of *Walking the Straight and Narrow; Lessons in Faith from the High Wire* (Bridge-Logos, Gainesville, Fla., 2005). In an interview published Jan. 10, 2011, at YourObserver.com, a Sarasota, Fla.-based online news site, Wallenda said, "My faith is very much a part of me and hopefully it shows. It's a great encouragement to me and I realize the talents and abilities I have are a gift from God." We assume many of our dedicated and talented readers will relate.

We assume too that many of you will be unsurprised to learn the prognosticator on our cover spotted more questions than answers when she gazed into her crystal ball to see what's ahead for health care. (Be sure, though, to peer at the articles in our strategy section for ideas you might apply.) Like the authors brave enough to tackle articles related to the theme of this issue, Mme. Prognosticator finds the future a bit murky. We hope you enjoy her portrait and the rest of this issue's whimsical, circus-themed illustrations, the work of Paris-born artist Jean-Manuel Duvivier.

We are confident that leaders of Catholic health care will have what it takes to perform, to ensure that the healing mission of Jesus will be carried on through many more generations. It means meeting the challenges despite the risks; finding and developing new, mission-focused talent; applying intelligence and discipline; and, above all, keeping the faith.

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