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NCR's person of the year for 2010

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Daughter of Charity Sr. Carol Keehan

An *NCR* Editorial

NCR has never named a person of the year, and we might not again in the future. However, as we sent our last print issue to press in the waning days of 2010, we felt the need to single out one American Catholic who showed extraordinary leadership and courage this last year.

In the spring of 2010, as the national debate on health care reform seemed deadlocked, Sr. Carol Keehan, the Daughter of Charity who is president and CEO of the Catholic Health Association, led her organization to endorse the legislation and thus helped pass it through Congress. The move put health care coverage within the reach of an additional 32 million Americans.

In a video message delivered to the Catholic Health Association convention in June, President Obama praised Keehan: ?Your work, your passion, your commitment helped make the difference, and you did so in a way that protects your long-standing beliefs and the beliefs of so many others across the country.?

Catholic bishops and conservative commentators were not pleased. The bishops had not endorsed the legislation, and they expected all Catholics to follow their lead. They called the health association?s position ?a wound to Catholic unity.? The bishops held a closed-door meeting in June to discussion the association.

Through the summer and fall, the association and Keehan were the butt of scathing attacks by conservative commentators. Relations between association leadership and the bishops were said to be strained. Numerous people told *NCR* the Catholic Health Association was keeping its head down and waiting for its relationship with the bishops to heal.

And then, last month, Phoenix Bishop Thomas Olmsted withdrew the ?Catholic? designation from St. Joseph?s Hospital and Medical Center [2] because he said the hospital wouldn?t accept his full authority about a medical case that he had deemed to be an abortion. The hospital had said it was acting to save a life.

As *NCR* tried to report on St. Joseph?s losing its Catholic status, we sought comments from ecclesial authorities and canon lawyers. Despite copious commentary produced over several months from ethicists and moral theologians who reasoned the hospital had acted compassionately and morally, no one had much to say for the record on this latest development, beyond acknowledging Olmsted?s right to do what he thinks best in his own

diocese. No one, that is, except the Catholic Health Association, led by Keehan, who supported the hospital [3].

As Catholics, we agree on essentials, but can, and often do, disagree on the application of essential beliefs, as in the St. Joseph?s Hospital case. When we disagree, we do it respectfully, as the Catholic Health Association has done. Sometimes it takes special courage, as in the health care legislation and the St. Joseph?s Hospital situations.

We also can?t help but note that with the Vatican in the midst of two investigations of U.S. women religious, many people have counseled the women to keep a low profile. In this atmosphere, Keehan, a woman religious, continues to take courageous stands.

And that?s why Sr. Carol Keehan is *NCR*?s person of the year for 2010.

Editor's Note: Because of the high volume of comments we've received for this editorial, we are temporarily turning them off so we can moderate. Please remember: Comments should be charitable and appropriate. Personal attacks on writers, fellow commenters, and public figures are not allowed.

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