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Editorial courage

by Heidi Schlumpf

NCR Today

I just learned that an article I wrote for another publication received an award from the Associated Church Press (ACP) for "Editorial Courage."

It is one the most prestigious awards, in my opinion, that the interdenominational religious press association confers because it recognizes the risks that church publications take when they speak the truth and do real journalism.

The *National Catholic Reporter* does not currently belong to the ACP, but if we did, I venture that we would win the award for "Editorial Courage" every year.

The independence NCR has, thanks to our subscribers and supporters, allows us to practice real, independent journalism about the church every day. As someone who has worked for both a diocesan newspaper (where I got in trouble with the chancery) and a publication owned by a religious congregation (where I got in trouble with the Vatican), I can't stress enough how important that editorial freedom is.

And here's a secret: Even some conservative and traditional Catholics rely on NCR to get the real story about what's going on in the church, especially about things like the sex abuse scandal, which church communications officials tend to spin. Not only do online comments reveal a diversity of viewpoints, but I know first-hand that archdiocesan employees sometimes fight over the office copy of the NCR.

So if you haven't already donated to our webathon, please consider supporting the "Editorial Courage" you can find here every day at ncronline.org.

By the way, my award-winning article was part of a series in *U.S. Catholic* magazine about the Vatican investigation into U.S. women religious. My article, "Character Witnesses," showed massive support for the women from the magazine's readers, and was paired with results of a survey of U.S. nuns themselves ("Entered into Evidence" by Heather Grennan Gary) and an essay by Sandra Schneiders, "The Sisters of Mercy Aren't McDonald's" that argued that religious congregations are not franchises of the Vatican.

Also winning a first-place award for "Best Seasonal Article" was a reflection, also in *U.S. Catholic*, on the Stations of the Cross for cancer patients written by the late Janine Denomme. You can read the list of all the ACP award winners, including Commonweal and other Catholic publications, here.

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