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NCR wins general excellence award, first-place prizes at media conference

NCR Staff | Jun. 25, 2012

INDIANAPOLIS -- The *National Catholic Reporter* has won the Catholic Press Association's award for general excellence for the 13th consecutive year in the annual contest sponsored by the Catholic Press Association of the United States and Canada.

In awarding *NCR* first place for general excellence, the judges said: "Outstanding news selection presented in a creative design. ... The content reflects the fresh reporting approach and strong skills of reporters like Zoe Ryan and Jerry Filteau. Thoughtful analysis brings the reader additional perspectives of experts."

NCR columnists, both print and online, also won several first-place accolades at the 2012 Catholic Press Association awards ceremony, held Friday at the annual Catholic Media Conference. The awards were for writing, photography and design that appeared online or in print in 2011.

Columnist Heidi Shlumpf [1] was awarded first place for general commentary, and the judges lauded her for "[finding] in her everyday experiences lessons of faith," with the judges calling her columns "beautifully written stories with clearly expressed moral lessons."

Sr. Rose Pacatte [2] won first place for culture, arts and leisure, with the judges noting Pacatte knows how to tell a story and "invites readers into considering how art as a reflection of life can teach about the most profound spiritual realities gracing our world."

Upon awarding her first place for spiritual life columns, the judges said Melissa Musick Nussbaum [3]'s "sacramental awareness and sensitivity is evidenced in the captivating stories and well-crafted questions she pens."

Online, columnist Michael Sean Winters took first place for best individual blog for "Distinctly Catholic," [4] and Phyllis Zagano took second place for "Just Catholic." [5]

The judges said Winters' columns contain "impressive research," saying he "seeks wide-ranging topics and engages in meaningful and thought-provoking commentary," and called Zagano a "powerful voice for woman's perspective."

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez [6] received 3rd place for best scripture column for her contributions to *NCR*'s Scripted for Life column. *NCR* senior correspondent John L. Allen Jr. received an honorable mention in the best individual blog category for his long-running weekly online column, "All Things Catholic." [7]

Other first-place awards went to *NCR* for best editorial section and best individual editorial for an editorial [8], "Theologians, bishops called to dialogue, trust," that appeared in print in the June 24, 2011, issue.

"The writing is elegant and engaging," the judges said of the editorial. "The topic, though maybe appearing

esoteric at first, is fresh and relevant. The ideas are big, but expressed simply. The call for reconciliation between theologians and bishops is persuasive."

Thomas C. Fox, then *NCR*'s editor and now its publisher, and staff writer Joshua J. McElwee won first place for investigative reporting for their series of stories following the U.S. bishops' critique of the work of Fordham University theologian, St. Jospeh Sr. Elizabeth Johnson.

McElwee also won second-place honors in investigative reporting for his reporting on the arrest of Kansas City, Mo., priest Fr. Shawn Ratigan on child pornography charges and the subsequent indictment of Kansas City Bishop Robert Finn for failing to report suspected child abuse.

A team of *NCR* reporters (Jerry Filteau, Joshua J. McElwee, Tom Roberts, John L. Allen Jr., Dan Morris-Young and Zoe Ryan) took first place in the category for best analysis/background/roundup news writing for a series of reports on Phoenix Bishop Thomas Olmsted's withdrawal of the Catholic designation from a local hospital. This award is also known as the Gerard E. Sherry Award.

NCR editor at large Tom Roberts' book *The Emerging Catholic Church*, published by Orbis, took first place in the category for first-time authors and second place in the category Popular Presentation of the Catholic Faith. The first-place winner in that category was *Why Stay Catholic* (Loyola Press) by Michael Leach, who edits *NCR* 's spiritual column, "Soul Seeing." [9]

Zagano?s book *Women & Catholicism: Gender, Communion, and Authority* (Palgrave Macmillan) took second place in the Gender Issues category. First place in that category went to Sr. Sandra M. Schneiders? book *Prophets In Their Own Country* (Orbis), which began as a series of articles in *NCR*.

Benedictine Sr. Joan Chistter?s book *The Monastery of the Heart* (Bluebridge) took second place for Best Spirituality Hardcover and first place for Best Book by Small Publisher. Her book *Happiness* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing) received an honorable mention in the Best Spirituality Hardcover category.

Other awards were:

- Best coverage of immigration: first place for a pair of stories,"Staking their lives: A haven for the injured" [10] by Barbara Fraser and "Economists project remittance increase" [11] by Alice Popovici. The judges' comments said these articles "put a face on the immigration crisis" and copies "should be put in every pew in every church."
- Best personality profile: second place for "A prophetic, transforming priest" [12] by Joshua J. McElwee
- Best chart or information graphics: second place for "A Lasallian Cross Country journey," by Toni-Ann Ortiz
- Best editorial: third place for the Nov. 26 editorial, "Timely note reflects Catholic vision" [13]
- Two honorable mentions for best feature story: "A Safer World" [14] by Joshua J. McElwee and "New faces of consecrated life in Latin America" [15] by Barbara Fraser

Judging for the contest was done by the faculty, staff and associates of the journalism faculties of Jesuit-run Spring Hill College in Mobile, Ala., and Marquette University in Milwaukee.

Correction/Editor's Note: An earlier version of this story reported that NCR received an honorable mention in the category for best coverage of the New Roman Missal. That is not correct. Receiving the honorable mention was Marnie McAllister of the Louisville, Ky., diocesan paper *The Record* for her story for "**Deaf Community prepares for missal** [16]." The fault is mine, and I regret the error.
--Dennis Coday

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