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Barb Frazee, former international editor for Catholic News Service, gestures after winning the 2023 St. Francis de Sales Award during the Catholic Media Conference in Baltimore June 9. (OSV News photo/Bob Roller)

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Barb Frazee, former international editor for Catholic News Service, is the recipient of the 2023 St. Francis de Sales Award from the Catholic Media Association.

The award -- named for the patron saint of writers and journalists -- recognizes "outstanding contributions to Catholic journalism" and is the highest honor given by the CMA.

The announcement was made June 9 during the annual Catholic Media Conference in Baltimore June 6-9.

Frazee was one of three finalists for this year's St. Francis de Sales Award, often nicknamed "the Franny."

The other two finalists were Vito Formica, executive director of news content and development at DeSales Media Group in the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York, and Patrick Downes, editor of Hawaii Catholic Herald, newspaper of the Diocese of Honolulu.

In accepting the award, Frazee thanked her former CNS colleagues, "including those in Rome, who are still standing," referring to the Dec. 31 closure of the Washington and New York offices of CNS. The closure was announced May 4, 2022, by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as part of a reorganization of its communications department.

CNS Rome remains open and continues to report on Vatican and related international events.

"I worked with some of the best in the business, including six or seven Franny winners. Thanks to my husband who, throughout nearly 40 years, did not complain about long hours, long commutes or occasional foreign trips," Frazee said.

CNS staffers who have won the award in the past include Tony Spence, former editor-in-chief (2010), and Cindy Wooden, CNS Rome bureau chief (2021).

Fraze was quick to give credit for winning the St. Francis de Sales Award to the numerous "stringers," news correspondents not on regular staff, whom she worked with since she first joined the CNS staff in 1983 as assistant international editor. By 1995, Frazee had become CNS' international editor.

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"This award, she said, "is really for the stringers, who told the stories of ordinary Catholics living their faith in extraordinary ways: Paul Jeffrey, who travels to places like South Sudan and Darfur, or who finds catechists taking supplies from Thailand to refugees hiding on the border of Myanmar."

"Judith Sudilovsky, who knows practically every shopkeeper in Bethlehem from talking to them about how ongoing conflict has affected them," she continued. "Barbara Fraser, who way-back-when covered the CELAM (the Latin American bishops' conference) meeting in Aparecida, Brazil. When Cardinal (Jorge) Bergoglio was elected pope, she realized the Aparecida document's drafter was going to take the great continental mission global."

Fraze also highlighted Doreen Abi Raad, "who chronicled the trials of Lebanese people after the port blasts -- including talking to the nuns at the nearby hospital after the explosions."

David Agren "talked to refugees traveling up through Mexico and along the southern U.S. border and found out why they were risking their lives to leave their countries," she said. "James Martone, who used to find stories when he traveled for the World Bank. In Albania, he found a Franciscan chronicling the bones of 20th-century martyrs."

"I can't name them all," said Frazee, who is now a freelance reporter herself. "But I thank them all, and I would encourage you to keep telling these stories."

She praised the work of diocesan news outlets, including The Georgia Bulletin, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, that recently had a story "about high schoolers supporting a fellow student with cancer."

She also highlighted a story in the Florida Catholic "about the man who had been on death row since 1976 as courts refused to consider DNA evidence he believed helped prove his innocence." The Florida Catholic serves the Archdiocese of Miami and the dioceses of Orlando, Palm Beach and Venice.

Fraze shared "one last thought" with the audience at the "Franny" award luncheon: "You reporters who get the glory -- don't forget to thank your editors!"

On June 8, the CMA presented its 2023 Cardinal John P. Foley Award to Katie Rutter, a video producer, editor, writer, videographer and journalist based in Minnesota. She is co-founder and producer of Hundredfold Video (formerly Thing in a Pot Productions) and specializes in Catholic/Christian media.

The Foley award recognizes demonstrated excellence and innovation in Catholic storytelling in the preceding year, with work presented on various media platforms, including -- but not limited to -- video, podcasts, photo spreads, blogs or a multimedia melding of platforms. It is one of the highest honors given by the CMA.