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Carol Zimmerman

Carol Zimmermann, news editor of the National Catholic Reporter, smiles after she was presented with the 2025 St. Francis de Sales Award June 27, 2025, during the Catholic Media Conference in Phoenix. (OSV News/Bob Roller)

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Phoenix — June 28, 2025

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Carol Zimmermann, news editor of the National Catholic Reporter, received the 2025 St. Francis de Sales Award from the Catholic Media Association at a lunch on the final day of its annual conference June 24-27 in Phoenix.

It is the highest award CMA presents to an individual for "outstanding contributions to Catholic journalism."

"Thank you so much. Wow! I'm honored to receive this and very humbled," said Zimmermann, who joined the NCR staff as news editor in August 2024. Before that she was at Catholic News Service for 30 years, from 1992 to 2022, when the [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops closed CNS's offices in Washington and New York](#).

Prior to NCR, Zimmermann was senior national correspondent for The Tablet newspaper, the news outlet of the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York. Zimmerman served two years as CMA's secretary and now is East Coast representative.

CMA members nominated 11 people for the St. Francis de Sales Award. A committee of the five most recent recipients selected three finalists. CMA members voted, selecting a first place and second place candidate. The candidate with the most first place votes is the winner.

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In accepting the award, Zimmermann paid tribute to the other nominees for this year's "Franny," as it's often called: Laura Ieraci, editor of ONE magazine, the official publication of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association; and Joe Towalski, former communications director of the Diocese of St. Cloud, Minnesota, who was longtime editor of the diocesan publication, now called The Central Minnesota Catholic magazine. Towalski is the diocese's chancellor and chief of staff.

"Laura and Joe you are doing, and have done, amazing work in Catholic media — and truthfully all of us here, in the trenches every day — deserve some kind of recognition. Maybe we could make smaller statues one year for all of us," Zimmermann said.

"I think for all of us this really is collaborative work," she added, "so I'd like to give a quick shout out to various Catholic outlets where I worked, am working, with amazing people — from the Catholic Standard newspaper in Washington, where I met my husband, Mark, to the CNS Washington bureau ... The Tablet in Brooklyn and my new base at NCR — all great crews."

The Catholic Standard is the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Washington. Zimmermann's husband is the editor.

'St. Francis de Sales spoke of "keeping in time with the times" and that's what we're about.'

—Carol Zimmerman

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She has "loved this work from the start," she said. "I love it mainly because the Catholic beat is so broad, but also because faith impacts people's lives in so many different ways and we're there to tell about it."

"On any given day you can be talking to someone who clung to their rosary in a bathtub during a tornado, a chaplain on death row, a senator speaking out for immigrants, or a cloistered sister making Communion wafers — I've done all those, (but) not in same day."

Zimmermann said she got into Catholic journalism, because she "liked the intersection of faith and journalism."

"But if I had to really go back, I'd say I got the bug in seventh grade at my Catholic school in Delaware where I absolutely loved — in a nerdy way — diagramming sentences. I realized then that words had a right place; they had to fit and go together. I still feel that!"

"On a broad scale, that's what we're all doing — making abstract ideas of faith fit into short or long-form stories, videos and podcasts," she said.

In many ways, "we're the modern-day Gospel writers — even though writing wasn't their primary line of work," Zimmermann said. "Matthew was a tax collector; Luke, a doctor; John, a fisherman; and Mark, well apparently he was an interpreter of Peter's, or at least his friend. He networked. That's what AI told me anyway!" she joked.

"The point is they hadn't been to J school or learned crisis communication skills but writing is what they are remembered for," she said. "In slightly different accounts, each of them told about the impact Jesus had on this earth and how it changed people and moved them to respond — which is what our work is about, just theirs was way less complicated."

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Zimmermann said that while Matthew, Mark, Luke and John "had to write by hand on papyrus ... couldn't call people to verify quotes or get advance notice of big events/miracles coming," they "also didn't have to come up with ad campaigns, run press conferences, do social media or newsletters, and they certainly didn't have to

worry about search engine optimization."

The challenge then and now "remains the same: communicating what faith looks like in the modern world," Zimmermann said.

"We in the Catholic media certainly face challenges, as does media in general. For us, we see it almost each year at this conference, when we hear that another diocesan newspaper is closing," she said, noting that "this year is no exception," with the final issue of the Clarion Herald, archdiocesan newspaper of New Orleans, scheduled for June 28.

Zimmermann acknowledged Peter Finney, longtime editor of the Clarion Herald, "who is here with us." She said Finney "posted a video on social media this week while the paper's final issue was on its press run behind him. He spoke about the power of the written word and how the paper — in its 62 years — had united the local Catholic community."

"That's tough," she said. "That paper, like many diocesan papers that have similarly closed, and even ... the closure of Catholic News Service a few years ago — leaves a hole."

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"St. Francis de Sales spoke of 'keeping in time with the times' and that's what we're about," Zimmerman said, "and in these times it also involves telling how people of faith — church leaders and laypeople — are acting on their faith, speaking up and caring for the immigrants, the poor and those who are marginalized."

"Our faith is at work in these times," she concluded, "and our readers — Catholic and non-Catholic — should know about it. We need to continue to figure out how to keep doing this ministry, and to, again in the words of St. Francis de Sales: 'Be who you are and be that well!' "